

SCRUTINY

MONDAY, 8 JANUARY 2018

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Ray Ballman, Mark Dempsey, Claire Ellis, Dale Heenan, Nick Martin, Des Moffatt, Kevin Parry, James Robbins, Gary Sumner, Timothy Swinyard, Vera Tomlinson and Chris Watts

Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emma Faramarzi

51. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

52. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman, a local resident, asked a question about timeframes for the Council to continue communication with residents by phone, in view of the increasing use of web based communication. The Chair responded at the meeting.

Mr Worman asked a supplementary question about the potential for changes in contact phone numbers for Council Services and how residents would be informed of the changes. The Head of Customer and Business Services responded at the meeting.

53. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2017, be confirmed and signed.

54. Budget Setting Process 2018/19

The Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services about the Budget setting process for 2018/19.

Members were reminded of their specific responsibility under the Committee's terms of reference, and under the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, to fulfil the Council's Budget Scrutiny Function. The report provided members with the opportunity to better understand the strategic context and framing for the direction of travel of the organisation to deliver the Council's priorities and specific objectives over the next two years. This was within the expected financial context, and the particular processes the Council had adopted to ensure a balanced budget for 2018/19 and achieving a sustainable financial position moving forward.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet and Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation to the meeting.

Councillor Holland introduced the report, providing an update from the Government budget announcement in December 2017. He explained that the announcement included improved funding allocations for (i) the New Homes Bonus, (ii) Better Care and (iii) Flexible Homelessness Support Grant. He also commented on an annual increase in basic council tax of 1.99% had been assumed for the financial period to 2019/20, and that the adult social care precept would be an assumed 3% in 2018/19.

The Cabinet Member responded to the following observations and questions from the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey, Des Moffatt, James Robbins and Chris Watts:

- The adult social care precept and proposals for its inclusion in the Council Tax rate.
- The management of the projected overspend.
- The proposed Increase in council tax for empty homes from 50% to 100% and the benefit to the Council.
- Budget pressures facing the Council over the next two years, particularly in relation to looked after children and adults in need of social care.
- Progress being made with the Swindon Programme to manage the financial challenge facing the Council over the next 30 months.
- The financial context within which the budget proposals have been framed, and the impact on the local economy of continuing austerity and, in particular, the effect of pay increase below the rate of inflation.
- Increasing demands on Council budgets as a consequence of an expanding population.
- The benefits of investigating alternative operational budget models, such as those models being developed and operated by the Councils in Thurrock and Preston.
- The availability of detailed information in relation to the budget proposals for 2018-2020 and the need to ensure that opposition Councillors are invited to attend budget presentations.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation for attending the meeting and for his full and open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues raised in the Presentation.

Resolved – (1) That the Budget Position Update report be noted.
(2) That the Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation provide additional detailed information to members on the budget proposals for 2018-2020.

55. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Digitisation

The Committee was informed that the Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Digitalisation, had been delayed at another meeting and would be unable to be in attendance at the meeting to present his Question and Answer report.

Resolved – (1) That consideration of Councillor Williams' Cabinet Member Question and Answer report be deferred to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, to be determined by the Committee Officer in conjunction with the Chair.

(2) That, subject to the determination referred to in (1) above, the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017/18 be updated accordingly.

56. Work Programme 2017/18

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2017/18 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 19th June 2017 and 17th July 2017 and updated throughout the Municipal Year.

The Chair provided update with regard to the reports expected to be submitted to future meetings of the Committee on (i) the Outsourcing of Services and (ii) Policing in Swindon.

Resolved – That the work programme 2017/18 be noted.

57. Status of Requests for Action and/or Information

The Committee received an updated report advising on the status of outstanding issues and member requests for information.

Resolved – That the report on the status of outstanding issues and member requests for information be noted.