

SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE – RESILIENT COUNCIL

Thursday, 25th January, 2024

Present:-

Councillor Dyke (Chair)

Councillors Blakemore
Kellman
Ogle
Twigg

Councillors Hollingworth
McLaren
Snowdon

*Matters dealt with under the Delegation Scheme

20 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS
RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

No declarations of interest were received.

21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ridgway and Wheeldon.

22 **BUDGET STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management gave an overview of the Council's Budget Strategy and Implementation Plan. This included a detailed approach to addressing the £2.5m budget gap was developed and approved by Cabinet in November 2023. The implementation plan was developed in line with the thematic interventions set out in the Budget Strategy:

- Identifying General Efficiencies
- Increasing Income and Establishing Stronger Commercial Operating Principles
- Transforming how we Deliver Services
- Reducing Service Offers / Stop Doing
- Statutory and Non-Statutory Services
- Rightsizing the Organisation
- Asset Rationalisation and Effective Asset Management

The projected shortfalls in the coming financial years were reported as being addressed by the Stage 1 and 2 proposals in the Budget Strategy and Implementation Plan, shown at Appendix 1 of the report.

Members asked how the external auditors viewed the Council's finances. It was reported that CBC is a well-run Council, with no specific concerns, and well within what would be expected for a District Council. The viability of delivering the strategies proposed by 2025 was also questioned. It was reported that the Stage 2 proposals are being developed and decisions being brought forward over the next couple of months. The Service Director Finance and Section 151 Officer had confidence in the delivery of a robust budget that would be monitored closely. Members questioned the quoted figure of £48,000 for leasing out vacant floor space at The Healthy Living Centre. The Service Director – Leisure, Culture and Community Wellbeing explained that there were a number of different areas within the centre, including former midwifery treatment rooms on the first floor, and the figures were based on expressions of interests already received.

Members discussed the difficulty in setting a 4-year financial plan for the Council when funding settlements from Central Government was given yearly. It was noted how the uncertainty in funding streams was adding to the already tight financial pressures.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

23 BUDGET CONVERSATION WORKSHOP

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management introduced the Budget conversation workshop by stating that the Council wishes to keep the conversation going with residents ensuring that they remain involved.

The Service Director – Corporate presented an overview of the Budget Conversation which ran from 17.11.23 to 15.12.23. The budget conversation brochure and examples of publicity were included with the report. It was reported that it was a useful tool for looking at themes within the local authority and asking residents about future ideas. Residents could access the conversation via the website or hard copy and there was

much publicity and media articles advertising it to residents. The budget conversation brochure included info graphics and fonts, colours, sizing etc. chosen to make it as accessible as possible.

It was reported that analysis has been done on the 154 responses, and 940 comments, that were received. This has provided a source of rich information around current and potential future proposals. There was also a specific consultation held about garden waste, using the same publicity, and over 1400 responses were received. Consultations have also been held with stakeholders regarding room hire, and negotiations with Advice Agencies about discretionary grant funding.

The key themes that residents were questioned about were:

- Identifying General Efficiencies
- Increasing Income and Establishing Stronger Commercial Operating Principles
- Transforming how we Deliver Services
- Reducing Service Offers/ Stop Doing
- Statutory and Non-Statutory Services
- Rightsizing the Organisation
- Asset Rationalisation and Effective Asset Management

In the theme of 'Asset Rationalisation and Effective Asset Management' 60% of respondents were in favour of this to meet budgetary constraints. It was noted that it is under this Committee's responsibility to scrutinise the Asset Management Plan so this was of note for members.

Throughout the conversation there had been confusion about what responsibilities CBC have and DCC have. Explaining the difference was key in the budget conversation brochure and publicity.

Members questioned how 154 responses to the budget conversation (1% of the adult population of Chesterfield) could be representative. The Service Director - Corporate explained that this was a budget conversation to consider key themes and ideas rather than a representative consultation regarding specific proposals. Questions were also posed about staff input into the conversation as it was suggested that they would be better placed to know where savings could be made. The Service Director – Corporate responded that the budget conversation was available for staff to access on Aspire. Staff had also been consulted through the VIP process (1:1s and appraisals) to ensure that ideas were constantly flowing through. It was noted that many staff are also residents

of the borough. Where appropriate, specific employee consultations are taking place on formal proposals.

There was discussion around if residents were aware about the difference between statutory and discretionary services. Members were happy to raise this with residents through their street surgeries and when other opportunities arose. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management noted that both members and staff are committed public servants who care about the communities they serve. She noted that there were things that could be done differently regarding the running of services. However, this change could create opportunities to create links across communities. The belief and hope were that ultimately a great service would be provided by a fit for the future Council.

The Chair thanked officers for their detailed reports and the information which was provided.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

24 CULTURAL/ COMMUNITY/ COMMERCIAL SPACES PROPOSALS

The Service Director – Leisure, Culture and Community Wellbeing reported on proposals to suspend operations from Hasland Village Hall, Assembly rooms and the Revolution House, with a projected cost saving of between £10,000 and £50,000. The Council has a role to maintain and manage these properties effectively, but this could be an opportunity for commercial letting and community use. The venues have real community value, and the proposals need to be deliverable through vision, drive and staff embracing the challenge. Community engagement with the users of Hasland Village Hall and Assembly rooms could lead to alternative management arrangements including potential community asset transfer.

Questions were raised by members about the ability of community groups and charities to access funding for projects which may be run out of the aforementioned properties. The Service Director – Leisure, Culture and Community Wellbeing reported that there are various benefits and access to grants including discretion around VAT and Non – Domestic Rates. It was also mentioned that for historical assets, such as the Revolution House, Charitable Trusts could be established.

The Chair thanked the officer for an excellent report. The Cabinet Member for Town centres and Visitor economy noted that in these times of financial uncertainty the easy option would be to simply stop providing the services which are discretionary, however the report received had captured how the Council can look at things differently so that this does not have to be the only option.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

25 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUPS PROGRESS UPDATES

It was noted that progress was being made in regard to a project group focussing on Climate Change. A formal plan would be in place after the on-line briefing on 08.02.24.

26 SCRUTINY MONITORING

This is a standard agenda item for the Committee to consider the scrutiny recommendations implementation monitoring schedule.

Members discussed the planned reports for up-coming meetings.

It was agreed that there would be reports requested about the HRA account, particularly in terms of voids and homelessness, on asset management and the delivery of CCTV operations within the town centre.

An update on the Lighting Strategy that was not signed off would also be requested from the officer responsible.

It was noted that Members requested that full reports be circulated as part of the agenda pack prior to meetings in order for proper scrutiny of the information to be achieved.

RESOLVED –

There was no scrutiny monitoring schedule to be noted.

27 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024. Members were reminded to check this document regularly as dates are changeable. As this Committee can complete pre-

decision scrutiny it is timely to scrutinise areas before they go to Cabinet for decision.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

28 WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE - RESILIENT COUNCIL

The Work Programme for the Scrutiny Select Committee – Resilient Council would be updated and forwarded on to Members the next day.

RESOLVED –

That the action be noted.

29 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting Scrutiny Select Committee - Resilient Council on 9th November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.