

OVERVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY FORUM

Thursday, 18th November, 2021

Present:-

Councillor L Collins (Chair)

Councillors	Blakemore	Councillors	Flood
	Borrell		Fordham
	Brittain		T Gilby
	Coy		Kellman
	Dyke		Kelly
			Snowdon

Councillor Amanda Serjeant, Deputy Leader +++

Theresa Channell, Service Director – Finance ++
 Helen Fox, Head of Accountancy & Finance ++
 Charlotte Kearsey, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
 Will Rolls, Climate Change Officer +

+ Attended for Minute No. 29
 ++ Attended for Minute No. 30
 +++ Attended for Minute No.29 and 30

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

No declarations of interest were received.

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caulfield, Catt and Hollingworth.

24 FORWARD PLAN

The Forum considered the Forward Plan.

Councillor Fordham noted that there were no items scheduled on the Forward Plan which Forum could do pre-decision scrutiny on ahead of the

next meeting. It was explained that the Forward Plan could often change and asked for comments to be emailed to the Joint Chair.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

25 SCRUTINY MONITORING

The Forum considered the Scrutiny recommendations implementation monitoring schedule.

Councillor Flood read out a Chesterfield Borough Council press release regarding the Government's HS2 announcement. The Leader had agreed to attend the next Forum meeting, scheduled to take place on 27 January, 2022, to provide a monitoring update.

Councillor Fordham noted the high number of drug and alcohol related deaths in his ward and enquired about the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny. It was noted that a Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place within the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee meeting on 31 March, 2022.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Leader be invited to attend the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum meeting on 27 January, 2022 to provide a monitoring update on HS2.
2. That the Scrutiny monitoring schedule be noted.

26 WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE OVERVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY FORUM

The Work Programme for the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum was considered.

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme be approved.

27 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

There was no update.

28 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum held on 9 September, 2021 were presented.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

29 **DEPUTY LEADER - CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN**

The Climate Change Officer attended to present a report updating the Forum about the progress of the Climate Change Action Plan.

It was reported that significant progress had been made in delivering the climate change action plan since the last report. A number of actions in the plan remained delayed but several others were exceeding the commitments laid out in the original plan. The delays were mostly taking place in the waste category, this was partly due to internal disruption and capacity constraints, but mostly because of expected changes in the regulatory framework for waste which was expected following government consultations.

A further six actions had been added to the action plan to support future climate change action and build capacity within the council to meet the goal of becoming a carbon neutral organisation by 2030. The additional actions were designed to develop a firm foundation for future development by increasing council capacity to identify and take effective climate action. The additional actions include:

- A review of actions to date;
- Development of a programme of Carbon Literacy training for elected members and officers;
- Work to develop a pipeline of potential climate change mitigation projects to take advantage of government support;
- Development of a carbon accounting framework to monitor council emissions and the effectiveness of actions;

- Work to identify clear decarbonisation pathways for council activities estimating milestones for decarbonisation and identifying potential technologies and support for transition to a low carbon Borough.

Of the 45 actions in the Action Plan, a total of 21 were established within the relevant service delivery teams, 19 were expected to be delivered as originally specified and 5 were expected to be delivered but had taken longer than originally envisaged. No items had been removed from the plan or were expected to require significant additional support.

The Covid pandemic had had a substantial impact on the work carried out to date because of the demands that had placed on local government. This had reduced the capacity of many staff across the Council. It had also had a significant impact on the opportunities for engagement with voluntary groups and the private sector.

Members noted that the Council was commissioning a consultant to complete a report regarding carbon neutral and had gone out to tender. Members asked about the timeframes involved and the Climate Change Officer explained that he thought the open tender would go out in early 2022. Members also asked about the budget for the consultants and were informed that £40k had been earmarked due to the size of the report.

Members asked for explanations of acronyms to be included in the Action Plan.

Members enquired whether other Local Authorities, who had refused to acknowledge the climate emergency, were putting every effort into the issue. The Climate Change Officer advised that he had attended a meeting with officers from other Local Authorities and noted that Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC) was far ahead of other councils and many had not put budgets to working to address the climate emergency.

Members enquired when the community sharing and reuse scheme would be open for community groups to be able to put bids in and if there were any bids lined up. The Climate Change Officer advised that the Council was working with Transition Chesterfield for a repair café, outside of the CIL process because of the CIL review taking place. The Deputy Leader noted that community engagement needed to take place to ensure groups across the borough were involved.

Members asked to see the Government's response to the letter sent by CBC after the climate change emergency had been declared and it was agreed that the Democratic and Scrutiny Officer would distribute the response.

Members enquired whether the transition to the new waste service provider had gone well as the action was rated amber. Members were advised that the action was rated amber due to three different Government consultations due to take place which would have a significant impact on waste collection.

Members enquired about whether the action relating to installation of LED lighting in CBC premises would only refer to all premises or only the premises in which the council had direct operational responsibility for. The Deputy Leader was not sure that the Council could force tenants to comply and would look to the Government to do the same as they have with gas boilers. The Climate Change Officer noted that concerns regarding commercial properties would be picked up within the Asset Management Strategy which looks at making the buildings climate ready.

RESOLVED –

That the Climate Change Action Plan report be noted.

30

DEPUTY LEADER - BUDGET UPDATE

The Deputy Leader, Service Director - Finance and Chief Accountant attended to present an update report about Chesterfield Borough Council's (CBC) budget.

The Council approved the original General Fund revenue budget for 2021/22 on 24 February, 2021. The Band 'D' Council Tax was set at £174.89. The forecast budget for 2021/22 was a deficit of £188k, which would be met from the Council's Budget Risk Reserve if savings and efficiencies were not identified during the year.

Indications were that the medium-term outlook would continue to be challenging. The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) forecast approved by Council on 24 February 2021 showed deficits of £12k in 2022/23 rising to £181k in 2025/26, assuming the delivery of planned savings.

New and ongoing cost pressures had emerged, the most significant of which were the increased cost of providing a kerbside recycling service and the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on fees and charges income. At the end of the second quarter the forecast had worsened to a net deficit position of £1,005k. The Council had identified mitigations and management actions which had reduced this forecast deficit to £355k at year end.

The single biggest influence on the updated General Fund revenue position was the loss of income from fees and charges, most significantly from sports centres, venues, and car parking. Estimates of the initial impact of Covid-19 on fees and charges income were reflected in the month two budget monitoring report to Cabinet. These had been revised based on the latest position and assumptions at quarter two resulting in further reductions in income of £1,195k for sports centres, venues, and car parking. Although the Sales, Fees and Charges Compensation Scheme had been extended until 30 June 2021, the scheme only allowed for 75% of lost income to be claimed after applying a 5% deductible charge based on the approved budget for 2020/21.

Further income pressures because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which were not covered by the government's income compensation scheme, were becoming apparent. These included a slower than expected return of tenants to the Council's commercial and industrial properties and lower rent receipts from the Vicar Lane Shopping Centre.

The Council had four months left to recover the potential overspend within 2021/22 and work was ongoing to identify areas where spending could be contained, and income maximised to ensure projected departmental forecasts were managed within existing budgets.

A review of current reserves and provisions was underway to identify any earmarked money which could be repurposed to finance any shortfall that these activities fail to address. However, it was acknowledged that reserves should be used strictly for one-off events and not to meet service pressures or failures to achieve planning savings.

The MTFP approved at Council in February showed a more challenging outlook from 2022/23 onwards with annual forecast deficits peaking in 2023/24 at £292k.

Members asked for clarification about why the Cabinet report was longer than the report provided to Forum and the Joint Chair noted that in the pre-meet she asked the officer to provide an overview and would take the comments on board.

Members noted that the quarter two deficit had reduced to £355k, with three management items and enquired whether this reduction was aspirational or certain and raised concerns whether a balanced position could be achieved by the end of the financial year. The Service Director – Finance confirmed that she was confident that the savings were realistic and was committed to reducing the deficit through regular monitoring.

Members noted the reduced incomes from car parks and enquired whether this was seen as a long or short term trend and were advised that the reduction had been built into the forecast and working forward assumptions were including the scarring costs of Covid-19.

Members asked whether the underwriting of the rent for the Elder Way Co-op building was now being paid and it was confirmed this was being paid. The Deputy Leader explained that it was a very difficult situation because without the agreement the Premier Inn tenancy would not have progressed so the building would have been empty. It was also noted that the Economic Development Team were working very closely with the management company to achieve tenancy agreements.

Members asked whether recharging the HRA was a standard practice and the Service Director – Finance advised that it was because departments in the Council provide services for the HRA.

RESOLVED –

That the Budget Update report be noted