



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 18th March, 2021

BUDGET SCRUTINY

25th January 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

Present:

Councillors Bramley, Cairns, Fenty, Green, Harness, Hasthorpe, James, Parkinson, Patrick, Rodwell, Rudd, Silvester, Watson and Woodward

Officers in Attendance:

- Rob Walsh (Joint Chief Executive)
- Joanne Hewson (Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for People, Health and Care)
- Sharon Wroot (Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources) (Section 151 Officer)
- Clive Tritton (Strategic Regeneration Advisor)
- Helen Isaacs (Assistant Chief Executive)
- Bev Compton (Director of Adult Social Services)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets (Monitoring Officer))
- Stephen Pintus (Director of Public Health)
- Mark Nearney (Assistant Director Housing, Highways and Transport)
- Lisa Arthey (Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help)
- Joanne Robinson (Assistant Director Policy, Strategy and Resources)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Assistant Director Environment)
- Spencer Hunt (Assistant Director Safer and Partnerships)
- Zoe Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council)
- Councillor Shreeve (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets)
- Councillor S Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport)
- Councillor Lindley (Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Skills)
- Councillor Cracknell (Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care)

SPBS.1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED – That Councillor Harness be appointed as the Chair for this meeting.

COUNCILLOR HARNESS IN THE CHAIR

SPBS.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rodwell declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in item SPBS.3 as an employee of Navigo, should there be any discussion of services provided by Navigo.

SPBS.3 DRAFT FINANCE AND COMMISSIONING PLAN 2021/22 – 2023/24 POST LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL SETTLEMENT

Members received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets outlining how the Council planned to deliver its agreed financial strategy over the coming three year period.

Ms Wroot introduced the report and members were then invited to ask any questions on the draft budget, mid-term financial plan and the draft business and commissioning plan by area.

Councillor Harness queried why there was £2m in the reserves for COVID-19. Ms Wroot explained the recommendation to create a reserve of £2m was to be used to mitigate likely, yet unknown expenditure in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic as the situation continued.

Councillor Patrick referred to the council tax support scheme and the option to move to a 50% minimum contribution for those people in receipt of council tax support that was deferred but not rejected. He asked for reassurance that the 50% council tax support scheme would not be ruled out. Councillor Shreeve explained that he could not give certainty at this time.

Councillor Wheatley queried the mitigation for the 60 units of extra care facilities at Davenport Drive off Winchester Avenue and was this being held up by the playing field strategy. Ms Compton confirmed that the scheme was now progressing to the planning application stage subject to a couple of outstanding issues in the early design concept and she confirmed the land was released for the scheme.

Councillor Wheatley referred to the single handed care project and queried how the council would obtain agreement from the Care Quality Commission for this service. Ms Compton explained that this project was led by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) who were working with occupational health to provide training to the care at home teams so they could work with equipment, single handed and safely. Ms Compton reassured members that the council did not pass on all the cost to the

service user for double handed care. Councillor Wheatley knew how difficult it was to provide single handed care and the need to free up capacity. She referred to the CQC with regard to the use of equipment and that they would not allow single handed care unless specific equipment was used. She highlighted the need for additional funding in the disabled facilities grant to install the equipment needed. Ms Compton confirmed that the council had received generous allocations for the disabled facilities grants and this scheme would allow officers to utilise the funding to support the equipment required.

Adult Services

Councillor Harness asked how the overspend in the adult social care budget was being addressed with the current financial pressures. Ms Compton confirmed that officers were picking up the schemes where savings could be made by working jointly with children's services to look at bringing young adults back into area and also at longer term solutions in borough to get value for money out of care. Ms Compton further advised officers were looking at the high end care packages by providing a mix of support including equipment to reduce these costs.

Councillor Patrick referred to the savings proposals around Navigo and the Floral Hall case worker vacant post. He felt that this post was needed especially with the increase in mental health resulting from COVID. Ms Compton explained that officers were working with all providers and engaged with Navigo to explore different delivery options. Councillor Patrick asked if it was cost driven and would the council like to deliver the services. Ms Compton highlighted the financial constraints on the authority and had encouraged providers to look at lower cost ways of delivering the same support.

Councillor Watson referred to the review that would be commissioned to look at how we made best use of resources to enable people to access support to meet their social needs as an alternative to day-centre based activity. He felt that with the COVID restrictions, going forward these services would be vital to stop social isolation and that some residents would be feeling isolated during lockdown and meeting up doing social activities should be encouraged when the restrictions were lifted. Ms Compton agreed that social isolation had been a concern and she explained there was a fundamental review and nothing had been predetermined. She confirmed that service users and providers would be consulted with going forward. Ms Compton thought it was an opportunity for smaller voluntary groups locally, and a review of centre based offers to see if we could offer better services for the users.

Councillor Patrick highlighted the review of respite care charges and how respite was vital for families with loved ones with complex health needs. He queried how much extra money would the council be charging for respite care. Ms Compton explained that a review of respite charging was overdue and more detailed work was needed. She referred to the review of fees for residential care which had been successful and

explain that with respite care, officers had to go back to basics and understand who was accessing the services against the model for respite charging, before considering carefully the amount to subsidise the service. Ms Compton confirmed that as part of the budget process officers were asked for approval to review respite charges and she reassured members that a full consultation would be taken with service users and scrutiny in the conclusions made during the review.

Children and Family Services

Councillor Patrick asked about the plan to reduce the number of children in care and what had fundamentally changed. Ms Hewson confirmed the early help model had been reformed which resulted in lower numbers of children coming through the system, a more intense programme of support for those children at the child protection stage and there was a review of the number of children whose circumstances had changed and were identified as being able to reunified with family and no longer needed to be in care.

Councillor Rodwell asked for reassurance that the reduction in the numbers of children in care would not lead to an increase in abuse and neglect, that support was still given and that it was safe for these children to return to live with family members. Subsequently Councillor James asked for reassurance that any cases that were closed were done so in a safe and correct manor. Ms Hewson explained at length the process and that it was the court's decision based on the evidence presented whether it was appropriate to reunify a child with their family. She confirmed that support was given to families and an improvement plan and risk strategy developed to help the families so that the children did not return into care.

Councillor Patrick referred to the reduction in anti social behaviour and queried if the numbers of anti-social behaviour (ASB) had therefore decreased. Mr Hunt explained that there had been a change to the way ASB was recorded as well as a reduction in cases over the past five years. He confirmed that the new ASB strategy was going Cabinet in February 2021 and included how the service was being improved and that there would be a faster response to ASB calls.

Councillor Patrick highlighted the co-location of children's community services to reduce the number of locality buildings and rationalise family hubs and queried the rationale. Ms Hewson explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic when the centres were closed it was an opportunity to work in different ways whilst continuing to provide services and support families.

Councillor Patrick was disappointed that the service changes to children's services had not been to scrutiny and queried why that was. Ms Hewson explained that for a property to close the council had to apply to the Secretary of State, however, engagement was needed and she confirmed that scrutiny would be involved in looking at the other

options at the next stage of the process. Ms Hewson highlighted that these proposals were part of last year's budget proposals.

Councillor Green queried the decision behind bringing children in care back into area and would they get a reduced offer in service compared to what they had. Ms Hewson confirmed it was about looking at ways of delivering services in a different way to meet the needs of the children locally.

Several members raised concerns over why another new additional needs access pathway for children and young people was being considered despite the length of time the current one took to implement. The members were concerned for the children and the parents during this time. Ms Hewson explained that the pilot for the new pathway was due to start before lockdown in March 2020 and it was difficult to carry this out with the lockdown restrictions. She reassured members that officers would continue to engage with the service users throughout the process.

Public Health and Leisure

There were no questions raised by members.

Economy and Growth

Councillor Patrick referred to the savings proposals and in particular the introduction of charging for a skip license on the public highway. He was concerned that this cost could impact on community groups undertaking alleyway clearances. Mr Nearney confirmed at this stage it was just a proposal and community activity would be taken into consideration.

The review of rough sleepers funding was queried by Councillor Patrick. Mr Nearney explained the council had secured funding and that this was not a reduction in service, the grant replaced those council funds and secured cold weather provisions.

Councillor Patrick was concerned about the removal of the subsidy for the Europarc bus service and questioned if members were being asked, as part of the budget process to remove the subsidy from the mid-term financial plan. Mr Tritton was confident that the best bid was submitted to the Local Enterprise Partnership and was confident the bridge would be supported. He did appreciate there would be an element of risk and officers would need to relook at the subsidy if the bid was not successful.

The review of phone and ride services was queried by Councillor Patrick and whether the £150k reduction in service meant the removal of the service as a whole. Mr Nearney explained it was for the full service and that there was a contract in place until July 2021 but in the meantime, officers would be reviewing alternatives.

Environment

Regarding the review of recycling bring too sites, Councillor Patrick raised concerns that a reduction would lead to fly tipping and how could officers demonstrate the logic. Ms Borgstrom explained the best way to tackle recycling was with an effective kerbside bin collection scheme and research had shown that people's preference was kerbside recycling. She confirmed that where bring too sites had been removed, there had not be an issue with long term fly tipping. Councillor Patrick queried if there would be added pressure on the kerbside capacity as a result. Ms Borgstrom explained that officers were keeping a close eye on the volumes of recycling and replacing the bring too sites was good practice. Other local authority areas had successfully managed without bring too sites with less than our current recycling capacity.

Councillor Green was concerned about the loss of the clothing bins if the bring too sites were removed because this was not an option as part of the current kerbside recycling. Ms Borgstrom confirmed that the council did not have clothes banks at bring too sites and that they were organised by charities. She confirmed the Community Recycling Centres (CRC) would still offer clothes recycling.

A further question on recycling was asked by Councillor Watson who sought reassurance that those residents who were still using the triple box system and did not have the means of getting to the CRCs themselves would be offered the facility of recycling their excess waste. Ms Borgstrom confirmed officers were looking at the option of mini recycling centres where there were a number of residents with the triple boxes and the aim was to find local solutions rather than borough wide ones.

Corporate and Democratic Core

There were no questions raised by members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the minutes of this meeting be included as part of the response to the consultation on the proposals.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 3.45 p.m.