

Shadow Dorset Council

SHADOW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 21 JANUARY 2019

Present: Cllrs T Jones (Chairman), S Bartlett, K Brookes, R Bryan, S Christopher, S Gibson, B Goringe and J Tanner

Apologies: Cllrs C Brooks, M Byatt, C Finch, N Lacey-Clarke, R Nowak, J Sewell, J Somper and M Wiggins

Also present: Cllr P Brown, Cllr J Ellis, Cllr T Ferrari and Cllr M Rennie

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Jason Vaughan (Interim Section 151 Officer), Julie Strange (Head of Financial Services), Keith Cheesman (LGR Programme Director), Lee Ellis (Scrutiny Officer), Mark Taylor (Group Manager - Governance and Assurance) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

78. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

79. Public participation

There were no questions or statements from members of the public.

80. Dorset Council Budget 2019/20

The committee received and considered a report of the Lead member for Finance and Interim Section 151 Officer, which provided an update on the finance of Dorset Council and how a balanced budget for 2019/20 had been developed. The Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee was invited to consider any comments that they wished to make on the 2019/20 budget to be forwarded for consideration by the Shadow Executive Committee on 11 February 2019. The 2019/20 budget would be set by the Shadow Council on 20 February 2019.

The Lead Member for Finance, Councillor Ferrari introduced the report and provided an overview of the work that had been undertaken. He noted that a key element of the work had been about bringing together financial efficiencies and was not about reducing services. Transformation was not within the scope of the work that had been undertaken, but the budget ensured a stable position for the new Council to progress this work.

In addition to the report, the Interim Section 151 Officer provided a presentation for the committee which covered:

- The headlines from the budget proposals

- What had been done to make sure that the budget process and proposals were robust
- The risks in the budget
- The future challenges
- What would happen next including the timetable for approval of the budget

Members considered the issues arising from the report and presentation and during discussion the following points were raised:

- In response to a question, members noted the financial impact of the Dorset Waste Partnership not being able to use low quality recycling. It was also noted that fuel costs had been higher in the current financial year and the impact of maintenance costs
- Car parking charges would not be changed for the next financial year
- Where charges were being aligned across the area it was noted that this had been driven by advice from service experts. It was not a common policy to always align charges at the highest level. There was a request for information on new charging structures to be included in the briefing to be provided to members
- The position with Negative RSG was seen as good news within the financial settlement
- Reference was made to work undertaken to harmonise Council Tax across the area of the Dorset Council from day 1 and it was noted that the change in Council Tax level would vary across the different existing council areas depending on the current Council Tax base for each existing council
- In response to a question it was noted that further work would be undertaken on the asset strategy
- LGR implementation costs were an estimate at the current time
- In response to a question it was noted that all councils were bringing in investments and reserves to the new Council. During the work in bringing the budget together there was a focus on the end point. A request was made for the relevant figures from each existing council to be provided to members at the briefing on the budget
- The bringing together of pensions was not part of this work
- In response to a question with regard to vacancies in some areas, it was noted that this was a current risk for all of the councils. This was a risk for the new council and would need to be monitored
- A discussion was held with regard to the position with Dorset schools funding and the impact of schools changing into academies
- In response to a question it was noted that expenditure was a greater risk for the new council than income, and this was reflected in the contingency that had been put in place. A base budget review would be undertaken when managers had been appointed

- An ongoing transformation programme would be undertaken by the new council who would also decide on priorities for transformation moving forward
- A base budget review would be undertaken by the newly appointed directors and managers working with the accountancy team. There would also be involvement from the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) and CIPFA
- There was a request for information to be included in the member budget briefing on bids available from the government
- It was noted that proposals for new 75% Business Rates Pilots in 2019/20 had been approved. Dorset had not been included in the pilot as local government reorganisation was ongoing
- Reference was made to New Homes Bonus which had been built into the budget
- A point was made that the report and presentation had been very useful and that there could be a level of satisfaction that there was a stable budget and that risks had been covered. However, the point was made that the information presented was at a very high level which presented some issues for the committee in undertaking its overview and scrutiny role

The Interim S151 Officer noted that an updated presentation would be provided at the forthcoming budget briefing for all members. The committee had made some requests for additional information and these would be included. A copy of the presentation provided at this meeting would be circulated to members of the committee.

81. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 7.54 pm

Chairman

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