

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 12 JANUARY 2023

Present: Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Andy Canning (Vice-Chairman), Jon Andrews, Barry Goringe (attended remotely), Mark Roberts, David Shortell, David Tooke and Bill Trite

Apologies: Cllrs Rod Adkins and Piers Brown

Also present: Cllr Belinda Bawden, Cllr Laura Beddow, Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Simon Christopher, Cllr Tony Ferrari, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Brian Heatley, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Gary Suttle, Cllr Gill Taylor, Cllr David Walsh and Cllr Peter Wharf

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

Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Heather Lappin (Head of Strategic Finance), Hannah Brown (Service Manager (Finance)), Paul Ackrill (Service Manager (Finance)), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Customer and Cultural Services), Anna Eastgate (Corporate Director - Place Services), Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Climate and Ecological Sustainability), Peter Hopkins (Corporate Director - Assets and Property), Deborah Smart (Corporate Director – Transformation, Innovation and Digital), Dawn Adams (Service Manager for Commercial and Procurement), James Ailward (Head of ICT Operations), Mike Garrity (Head of Planning), Elizabeth Murray (Strategic Parking Project Manager), Jack Wiltshire (Head of Highways) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

50. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

51. Public Participation

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

52. Questions from Councillors

A question was received from Councillor B Bawden. A copy of the question and response provided are included at Appendix 1 to the minutes.

53. **Budget Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

The committee was invited to consider the budget proposals for 2023/24 prior to consideration at Cabinet on 23 January 2023 and Full Council on 14 February 2023. The report gave a summary of progress to date on the budget strategy and process and provided the opportunity for the scrutiny committees to review further, budget assumptions and actions being proposed to deliver a balanced and sustainable budget for 2023/24.

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to consider the implications of the proposals on behalf of residents of Dorset and to provide constructive challenge to decision makers before a final decision was made. It was noted that the comments made by the committee would be reported to Cabinet on 23 January 2023 and taken into consideration as part of the budget setting process.

Portfolio holders and officers provided a short introduction to their budget areas as relevant and in addition, the Executive Director for Corporate Development provided an overview of Central Finance and Capital issues.

Further to the discussion held, the Chairman provided a summary of the key points raised during the discussion in relation to each area covered by the committee and noted that the points below would be submitted to Cabinet as part of the budget setting process:

Place Directorate – Highways, Travel and Environment

- It was noted that Dorset Travel was facing cost pressures of circa £2.5m in the current year and particular reference was made to SEND transport, which was facing significant cost increases, well above the rate of inflation. Concern was expressed about cost increases in this area and the impact on the budget. Recognition of the links to work with Children's and Adult Services to reduce costs for travel for the council
- A comment was made that it was difficult to justify increases to charges for car parking until improvements to car parks were rolled out, due to public expectation as to the service they should be getting.

At this point in the meeting, the committee had a ten-minute adjournment and returned at 11.43am.

Place Directorate – Economic Growth, Assets and Regeneration

- The committee were content with the strategic approach being taken in the area of Economic Growth, Assets and Regeneration but flagged a concern around whether there were sufficient staffing levels to deliver the council's aspirations in this area.

Place Directorate – Natural Environment and Ecology

- In order to provide transparency around the council's costs for climate change work, consideration should be given to how costs in this area and investments received from external sources, could be presented outside of the budget book
- The committee wished to flag up the potential risks around decisions on the council's vehicle fleet – purchase versus lease of vehicles and fuel type (electric versus hydrogen).

At this point in the meeting, it was proposed by J Andrews seconded by D Shortell and agreed by the committee, that the meeting continue beyond the 3-hour limit as set out in the Constitution.

Place Directorate – Planning

- The committee flagged a concern around the national issue of a shortage of planning officers and the risk that this could potentially present to the council.

Place Directorate – Culture, Community and Customer Services (and budget generally)

- Reference was made to the detail of savings associated with other smaller council programmes - consideration to be given to the level of detail provided in future budget reports, across all budget areas, and in particular with regard to smaller service/budget areas.

At this point in the meeting, the committee had a ten-minute adjournment and returned at 2.22pm.

Corporate Development Directorate

- The committee were content with the budget information and proposals in this area.

Central Finance and Capital

- The committee support the making of representations to the Government to secure an earlier date for receipt of the Financial Settlement (October)
- A 3 to 5 year Financial Settlement should be sought from the Government
- Support for continued communications between portfolio holders and directorates to continue to foster a 'one-team' approach
- The committee accepted the inflation rate assumptions made within the budget report
- The Government to be asked to apply a formula approach to funding, which has an understanding of the issues pertinent to the council and how these affected the council's finances

- The committee suggest that cross party working groups be established as part of the budget setting process, to allow opportunity for informed consideration of budget proposals, to feed into the member budget informal sessions.

The Chairman thanked officers and portfolio holders for their work on the budget and the committee and other councillors present for their contribution to the meeting.

54. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

55. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Agenda item 4 – Questions from councillors

Question from Cllr Belinda Bawden

Could the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment please explain why the budget for the Lyme Regis Harbour includes an assumption on income from PWC permits (jet skis) when every user group on the Harbour Users' Consultative Committee, except the licence applicant, is in total opposition to any proposed trial on safety and environmental grounds?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Thank you for your question, Councillor Bawden. There has been no application for a licence to operate jet skis from Lyme Regis Harbour. There have been discussions at the Lyme Regis harbour consultative group about whether a limited number of permits could be provided through the Powerboat Club with tight restrictions on the activity and the option to remove permits if necessary. The group have been presented examples of where this, and water safety issues have been managed successfully at Weymouth Harbour and Studland. However, this is an ongoing discussion, and one that ultimately the Harbours Advisory Committee with input from the Harbour Consultative Group will have to consider.

I understand that there was reference made to PWC permits in the budget monitoring report at the last Harbour Advisory Committee. This report relates to all Dorset Council Harbours and the reference to Personal Watercraft was linked to Weymouth only as no such permits exist for Bridport and Lyme Regis Harbours.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 3.30 pm

Chairman

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