

Minutes of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
of the **Test Valley Borough Council**
held in The Annexe, Crosfield Hall, Romsey
on Wednesday 2 December 2015 at 5.30 pm

Attendance:

Councillor C Lynn (Chairman)	(P)	Councillor A Finlay (Vice Chairman)	(P)
Councillor N Adams-King	(P)	Councillor D Baverstock	(P)
Councillor S Cosier	(A)	Councillor J Cockaday	(P)
Councillor B Few Brown	(P)	Councillor D Drew	(P)
Councillor I Jeffrey	(P)	Councillor K Hamilton	(P)
Councillor J Neal	(A)	Councillor J Lovell	(A)
Councillor T Preston	(P)	Councillor B Page	(P)
Councillor K Tilling	(P)	Councillor J Ray	(-)
		Vacancy	

Also in attendance:

Councillor I Andersen
Councillor S Hawke
Councillor P Giddings

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Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

203 **OSCOM Corporate Priority Review (2011-15): A Competitive Local Economy**

Consideration was given to a report of the OSCOM Lead member for the Economic Corporate Priority, Councillor Karen Hamilton.

The report represented the second and final stage of the corporate priority review: A Competitive Local Economy. It reflected on the effectiveness of two key activities, (the Business Incentive Grant and the Andover Skills Training Fund) and compared the Council's economic development service with that of 20 similar Councils.

Members were asked to include in their consideration the issues raised in the round table discussion on 9 September 2015 in making their recommendation to Cabinet for further consideration.

- Support for rural businesses and the three new LEADER Programmes which was about to commence in Test Valley.
- Support for (Romsey) town centre retail businesses.

- Need for a tourism strategy which reflects one of the key themes emerging from Romsey Future.
- Encouragement for local businesses to trade with each other.
- Broadband – working with providers and Hampshire County Council.

Members raised a number of questions including;

- The Council had done particularly well over the last few years in the Federation of Small Businesses (Wessex Region) council awards eg on helping flood-affected businesses and the Andover Skills Training.
- Eligible businesses could apply for the Business Incentive Grant and these were scrutinized. Business plans are discussed but there is no stipulation on how they should use the funding.
- Ward Members could play a powerful role in offering help and support for new businesses.
- An economic assessment is being carried out to form a basis to move forward with the economic strategy.

Members felt that there were a few areas which they would like to be explored further;

- One of the biggest challenges was working with larger businesses and getting them involved in the Test Valley Awards and working with schools. Businesses need to talk more to schools about their future opportunities in the workplace. An important part of economic development was to work with young people in education and training. The Council were working with the Construction Industry Training Board
- S106 funding was being used to help provide apprentices in construction. However the S106 skills funding is dependent on eligible sites coming forward.
- The value of the Business Incentive Grant has inevitably fallen since it was first introduced through inflation, however the success of the scheme and individual businesses was a good indication that there should be more investment in the scheme.

Councillor Hamilton thanked the Economic Development Officer and the Policy Manager for all their hard work and support during the review.

Recommended to Cabinet

- 1. To consider the inclusion of the ideas derived through the OSCOM review, including those raised at the round table discussion and additional forms of Member Communications, and that these ideas are taken forward through the formulation of the economic development strategy.**
- 2. To work closer with schools and employers.**
- 3. To review the training fund to achieve a more sustainable way of funding apprentices.**

4. To review the Business Incentive Fund budget and the amount of individual grants.

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Review of Council Tax Support

Consideration was given to a report by the Lead Member for the Council Tax Support Review Panel, Councillor Dorothy Baverstock.

The Panel was set up to review the current scheme and make recommendations for options to consult on changes to the scheme for 2017/18 in light of the welfare reforms and in particular the introduction of Universal Credit.

Following the review two announcements were made which would have an impact on the Council Tax Support Scheme and these had not been considered by the Panel.

- The rollout schedule for Universal Credit (UC) had shifted and UC would not be rolled out to working age couples and families in Test Valley during 2016 as previously advised. The latest information indicates that the new UC Digital solution will start to be rolled out from April 2016 taking 26 months to complete. Once UC Digital is available in Test Valley the Council will no longer process any new claims from working age claimants for Housing Benefit. The rollout for UC Digital will commence for 30-35 areas during 2016, these areas are due to be confirmed at the end of this year. Detailed timescales for the migration of existing claimants onto UC are not known but this is expected to be completed by 2020/2021.
- In his Autumn Statement the Chancellor reiterated his intention to achieve £12b savings in the welfare budget over the course of this Parliament. The tax credit changes announced in the Summer Budget will not now go ahead. This however, will only apply to the proposals on increasing the taper and reducing the thresholds. As a result the tax credits income threshold (the point at which the taper starts to be applied) will remain at £6,420 from April 2016 the tax credits taper will remain at 41% of gross income.

Following these announcements the Committee considered the recommendation of the Panel to continue with the current level of support for 2017/18 and review in 12 months time once more claims for Universal Credit were in payment and the impact of the April 2016 Housing Benefit and Tax Credit changes were known.

Councillor Baverstock thanked the Acting Head of Revenues (Benefits & Customer Services) and her colleagues for all the hard work and support they had shown to the Panel and for Members support and input into the review.

Resolved

- 1. That the information and comments made by officers and members in the report be noted.**

- 2. That the current level of support for 2017/18 continue and review in 12 months time once more claims for Universal Credit were in payment and the impact of the April 2016 Housing Benefit and Tax Credit changes were known**

205 **Programme of Work for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Members were consulted on a date for a further training session on questioning third parties and agreed that this would be held on Wednesday 3 February (time and venue to be agreed).

A date for the Awayday was discussed and Members would be consulted on a number of dates in July.

The Chairman asked Members whether they would be happy to cancel the meeting scheduled for 22 December 2015 as there were no items scheduled. Upon being put to the vote the decision was to cancel the meeting.

The Committee considered and updated the Work Programme as follows:

- Round table discussion to be held prior to the meeting in January to discuss public participation and how OSCOM should convey it to the public and how any such event is managed.
- The Animal Welfare Pilot Project to be moved from January to February meeting.
- Hampshire Hospitals Foundation Trust to be invited in to talk about the Andover War Memorial Hospital in February. This to be publicised and residents encouraged to attend. Residents would be invited to submit questions prior to the meeting.
- An overview of the Housing and Environmental Health Portfolio to be added to the March meeting.
- The West Hants CCG to be invited to discuss the Critical Care Unit at Dummer in June.
- Presentation by the Police and Crime Commissioner to be added in July.
- An update on the Council Tax Support scheme to be added to the December Meeting.
- A presentation from the Communications Team to be added at a date to be agreed.
- An item on tourism to be added at a date to be agreed.

Resolved:

- 1. That the future work programme, as amended, be approved.**
- 2. That the meeting scheduled for 22 December 2015 be cancelled.**

(Meeting terminated at 7.25pm)