

Minutes of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
of the **Test Valley Borough Council**  
held in The Annexe, Crosfield Hall, Broadwater Road, Romsey  
on Wednesday 13 April 2016 at 5.30 pm

Attendance:

<b>Councillor C Lynn</b> <b>(Chairman)</b>	(P)	<b>Councillor A Finlay</b> <b>(Vice Chairman)</b>	(A)
Councillor N Adams-King	(A)	Councillor D Baverstock	(P)
Councillor S Cosier	(P)	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	(P)
Councillor T Preston	(P)	Councillor B Page	(P)
Councillor K Tilling	(P)	Councillor J Ray	(-)
		Vacancy	

327

**Minutes**

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2016 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.**

328

**Impact of Restructuring of Fire Service**

A presentation was given by Commander Alexander Thomson who was the Group Manager for Eastleigh and Test Valley. He explained how the final proposals were decided, the journey so far, feedback and key messages from the consultations and savings to be achieved.

He explained that at present there were 72 traditional fire engines across Hampshire which were only required at 30% of incidents. Going forward there would be three types of vehicles, enhanced vehicle, interim vehicle and first response. Savings required by 2020 are £4.1m and it was anticipated that £1m of savings would be achieved in the next year with a further £3.4m by March 2019. The total budget gap was £12m with £4.1m expected from the restructuring and the balance being made up through shared services and operations and Council Tax increase.

In Andover and Romsey the 2 current fire engines would be replaced with one enhanced vehicle and one fast response vehicle, in Stockbridge the current fire engine would be replaced by a fast response vehicle.

There would be no station closures and no compulsory redundancies. There would be a reduction in personnel but they would be better utilised. The fleet would be more relevant with an average response time of under 7 minutes and vehicle availability would increase to 96%.

The following was discussed:

- The restructure was based on all aspects of the Fire and Rescue Service including fire and rescue and health intervention.
- The whole service had been reviewed taking into account the increase in housing which would not raise the risk profile. The Fire and Rescue Service were working closely with the NHS on health prevention which was a factor that could raise the risk profile.
- There were specialist trained teams to assist the police with terror threats.
- The infrastructure would remain and major incidents were taken into account in the proposals. There would be more effective vehicles in stations and first response would be faster with back up from other stations.
- Savings of £223k would be made in Andover, £42k in Romsey and £28k in Stockbridge.
- It was difficult in more affluent areas to find voluntary firefighters.
- Voluntary firefighters have to be within 4 minutes of the Station and businesses were more reluctant to let staff go.
- Hampshire had been planning for the future for quite a while. They were confident that they could make the savings whilst not increasing risk.
- There had been a reduction of fires by 50% over the last 10 years. They would target special high risk groups to discuss fire risk and safety and had 151 priority 1 addresses to contact in Andover over the next 12 months.

The Chairman thanked Commander Alexander Thomson for his interesting and informative presentation.

### 329 **Presentation by the Romsey Town Centre Manager**

A presentation was given by Mark Edgerley, Romsey Town Centre Manager. He explained that his post was funded by Test Valley Borough Council and the Romsey Town Council and that he had pulled in £12.5k for the town.

There were 250 businesses in the town and 500+ across Romsey. There was a good employment rate, range of employment opportunities, low retail vacancy rates, increase in above shop use, good public transport, rapidly increasing housing stock and quality schools. Overall footfall was down by less than 1% from 2014.

He interacted with a number of stakeholders including residents, business leaders, Romsey Town Council Town & Building Committee, Romsey Chamber of Commerce, TVBC Economic Development Manager, Romsey Future Co-ordinating group, Test Valley Business Awards Steering group, various business networks and Romsey Community Groups. He networks and co-ordinates with a number of organisations and stakeholders and works closely with event organisers.

There were a number of projects he was involved with including teenage markets, Arts in Romsey, Romsey Market, Hampshire Farmers Markets, Sunday Decorative Arts Market, Small Business Saturday, Romsey Community Lantern Parade and acts as a local social media champion providing local training and coaching.

Challenges include sustainable vitality, delivering Romsey themes, car parking, welcoming new residents, demand for retail units, traffic management, finding employees, maintaining retail mix and business in development.

The Romsey Town Centre Manager raised the issue of parking problems, outdated and wrong signage and local map upgrade. He would also appreciate closer involvement on communication matters.

The following was discussed:

- Not sure if it would be viable to use land outside of Romsey for a Park and Ride.
- The Romsey Town Centre Manager felt that difficulty with the planning process was a factor in not encouraging major retail chains to come to Romsey.
- More and more businesses were opening on Sundays especially on Farmer's Market days.
- Lots of opportunities for businesses to manage and apply for reductions in their business rates but this needed to be communicated to new businesses.
- Partnership working with the Romsey Futures group is key.

The Corporate Director reminded the Committee that they would have the opportunity to review the Romsey Futures project and raise any issues they have.

The Chairman thanked the Romsey Town Centre Manager for his time and informative presentation.

330

### **Review of Council Tax Support**

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Revenues which provided an update on financial information following the increases in Council Tax from 1 April 2016 and enabled the Committee to review the recommendations to be made to Cabinet.

The Council Tax Support scheme replaced Council Tax Benefit from 1 April 2013 and the Government reduced the funding for this scheme by 10%. The Council had the option of absorbing this burden or making up this shortfall by reducing the level of support for working age claims. There was no discretion to amend the pensioner claims other than allow a higher disregard for war pensions.

In April 2015 Cabinet recommended keeping the existing scheme for 2016/17 but to review the scheme for 2017/18 in light of the welfare reforms and in particular the introduction of Universal Credit.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee appointed a Member Panel to review the current scheme and make recommendations for options to consult on changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18. The findings of the Member Panel were considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2015.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee reviewed the findings of the Member Panel in respect of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18. The Committee requested a further look at the resource implications following any increases in Council Tax from 1 April 2016.

### **Recommended to Cabinet**

**That the current level of support for 2017/18 be continued and reviewed in 12 months time once more claims for Universal Credit are in payment and the impact of the April 2016 Housing Benefit and Tax Credit changes are known.**

331

### **Internal Audit Plan 2016/17**

Consideration was given to a report of the Audit Panel Lead Member which presented the Annual Audit Plan for 2016/17 which had been aligned to current risks and reflected the Council's key priorities and objectives.

At its meeting on 14 March 2016 the Audit Panel considered the Internal Audit Plan in detail and recommended that the Internal Audit Plan for 2016/17 be approved.

### **Resolved:**

**That the views and recommendations of the Audit Panel members at their meeting of 14 March 2016 be endorsed.**

332

### **Overview and Scrutiny Annual Briefing**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman which covered the work of the Committee for the period May 2015 to May 2016. The Committee were asked to agree the Annual Briefing prior to its submission to full Council on 29 June 2016.

### **Resolved**

**That the Annual Briefing of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be approved.**

### 333 **Programme of Work for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Members discussed the issue of scrutising outside bodies earlier in any consultation process and it was suggested that a piece of work needed to be carried out on the Committee being more robust as scrutineers and understanding of the mechanism strategy in order to make better choices on which outside bodies should be scrutinised.

Councillor Drew informed the Committee that his Public Involvement Panel was looking at making recommendations to make the Council more user friendly to the public.

The Committee considered and updated the Work Programme as follows:

- Community Safety Panel Phase 2 Scoping Report – add to May.
- Review of Council Tax Support Scheme – add to a date to be agreed.

#### **Resolved:**

**That the future work programme, as amended, be approved.**

(Meeting terminated at 7.45pm)