

Minutes of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
of the **Test Valley Borough Council**
held in The Annexe, Crosfield Hall, Romsey
on Wednesday 7 December 2016 at 5.30 pm

Attendance:

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

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Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2016 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

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Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017-20

On 14 November 2016 the Budget Panel met to review and consider the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017-20. The Budget Panel Lead Member guided Members through the strategy and annexes highlighting the main points.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) complemented the Council's Corporate Plan and set out a clear framework for financial decision making. It had been produced at a challenging time for the Council's finances. The Council had a balanced budget and reserves were at a safe level – but there was little room for manoeuvre and savings would be required in future to maintain financial stability.

The Council started the financial year projecting a budget gap of £680,000 for 2017/18 rising to £1.76m in 2019/20. The corporate challenge process had identified significant savings and additional income of £557,750, and the proposed use of New Homes Bonus to offset cuts in Government Grant had reduced the current budget gap for next year to £177,600 rising to £1.13m by 2019/20. Work would continue to refine the budget forecast as more details became available and an update would be taken to Cabinet on 18 January 2017.

Given the range of issues set out in the MTFs and discussed at the Budget Panel meeting, the next three year period would be extremely challenging for the Council. However, Test Valley Borough Council had consistently shown that it could manage its overall finances in a robust manner and with limited resources.

Resolved:

That the report of the Budget Panel on the Medium Term Financial Strategy be accepted .

Recommended to Cabinet:

That the strategy be approved.

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Andover Economic Update

Consideration was given to a report of the Economic Development Officer which updated the Committee on the state of Andover's economy. The Economic Development Officer gave a presentation covering new housing and employment developments, population growth, unemployment, the town centre, skills and education.

In 2015 the Committee considered a Corporate Economic Portfolio Review which had resulted in the preparation of a new Test Valley Economic Development Strategy. This report was, therefore, a timely bench-mark for that forthcoming strategy. Andover's economy had grown significantly in recent years and continues to do so. It comprised several distinct elements including: new jobs, the state of the labour market and housing markets, the economic health of the town centre and delivery of infrastructure.

It was noted that a large number of jobs had been created across a range of sectors. There is good partnership working with and between schools, for example the Council provides work place experience to pupils from John Hanson School and would be happy to work with other schools to provide a similar experience for their pupils.

Members requested a similar report on the Romsey Economy and the Economic Development Officer agreed to undertake this.

The Chairman thanked the Economic Development Officer for a very informative and detailed presentation and report.

Resolved:

That the Council's approach to supporting all aspects of Andover's economy is endorsed.

220

Romsey Future Action Plan

Consideration was given to a report of the Deputy Leader which outlined progress made on the development of a delivery plan for Romsey Future.

At its meeting in September 2016 the Committee endorsed the direction of travel of the Romsey Future process. The Committee also asked that the emerging delivery plan be brought back to its December meeting.

Romsey Future was a process, established by the Council and its partners, to create a long term vision for the town. It was providing an ongoing process that brought people together to help influence and shape the town for many years to come.

Councillor Hatley, TVBC's lead on Romsey Future, established a Co-ordinating Group in 2014 to help build up the vision and main strategic aims. Due to the breadth of the delivery plan's scope, the Co-ordinating Group had agreed that its component parts would develop at different rates. The emerging plan was attached as an annex to the report. It was an organic document that would develop and change over time.

The work of Romsey Future had now moved onto its next phase and the delivery plan would now help create a development framework to manage the Romsey Future programme. The development of the delivery plan was somewhat more complex than a single organisational plan due to the extent of the partner and community involvement.

Councillor Hatley reported that there has been a public exhibition on proposals to enhance the market place around the Palmerstone statue in Romsey held in the Town Hall at the end of November. Officers organising these events were congratulated for organising and setting up the exhibition. This had been well attended with around 200 residents attending on the day.

Resolved:

That the progress made in the development of a delivery plan that underpins the Romsey Future vision document be endorsed.

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Council Tax Support

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Revenues which offered the Committee the opportunity to decide whether to commence a review of the Council Tax Support scheme for 2018/19 considering the timetable for the rollout of Universal Credit and the financial impact of the 2016/17 scheme.

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.

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 and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reviewed the findings of the Member Panel in respect of the Council Tax Support scheme for 2017/18 and resolved that the current level of support for 2017/18 continue and reviewed 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.

The Head of Revenues explained to the Committee that nothing had changed since the comprehensive review and if the Committee were minded to carry out a review the work to evaluate any options would need to begin soon in order that all the necessary consultation and approvals could be completed on time.

The Committee consider the options on how it wished to proceed in terms of any review and recommendations to Cabinet in respect of the scheme for 2018/19.

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 2018/19 continue and reviewed in 12 months time once progress against the Universal Credit implementation timetable is known.**

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

The Committee considered and updated the Work Programme as follows:

- Move the round table discussion on the Web Strategy to 24 May 2017.
- Remove the Romsey Future Update (round table discussion) as covered at this meeting.
- Arrange another date for the Police and Crime Commission to attend.
- Add the tender process and criteria to 24 January 2017
- Add Romsey Economy to 22 November 2017.
- Add Council Tax Support Scheme to 20 December 2017.

Resolved:

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

(Meeting terminated at 7.29pm)