

Cabinet
Wednesday 29 November 2023

Comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
at its meeting on Monday 27 November 2023
OSC/315

1. Cabinet Agenda Item 7 – 2023-2024 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 2

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report [FIN/635](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant, the following comments were made:

- Explanation provided on the latest revenue and capital budget.
- Acknowledgement that the interest rate projections would be kept under regular review during the year and acknowledged the risk of being heavily reliant on investments when interest rates begin to fall.
- Clarification sought and obtained on the costings on various elements for the new town hall.
- Confirmation that project Jupiter referred to the works at Metcalf Way Depot.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

2. Cabinet Agenda Item 8 – Budget Strategy 2024/25 – 2026/2027

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report [FIN/636](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant, the following comments were made:

- Recognition that Ashdown House may remain vacant for a period from 2024 and this would allow the building to be refurbished and a new tenant to be sought. Similarly, it would be important for the Ask building to be renovated and re-let as soon as practicable.
- Explanation provided of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) review having identified a saving of £778k in 2023/24 being due to technical adjustments also identified future year savings by taking a payment holiday and switching the calculation to an annuity basis. The methodology being prudent due to the debt relating to the appropriation of garages from the HRA to the General fund.
- It was questioned whether the average increase in the fees and charges forecast of 3.5% was too lenient, in comparison with fees and charges having to be increased by a minimum of 7% (where feasible). It was queried whether fees and charges could potentially be increased higher than 7%, however, it then was noted that there was a balance to be made between covering the cost of the service whilst also remaining competitive. Further explanation was provided, that the forecasting model was a tool that did not distinguish between fees that could be increased and for example fees that were set by statute or rents.
- Recognition that additional cost pressure were predicted to impact the budget, resulting in a net overspend of £2.516m in the current year, some of these related to homelessness, pay award, town hall rates and inflation.
- It was commented that whilst there had recently been changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the overall impact was yet unknown, and whilst it would help private tenants to stay in their tented accommodation, it was confirmed that the LHA related to the recovery of Housing Benefit remained frozen and would not improve the budget position going forward, which remained unsustainable. However temporary accommodation was identified on the corporate risk register and would be constantly monitored and continued to be reported in future monitoring reports.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

3. Cabinet Agenda Item 9 – Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023-2024

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report [FIN/637](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant, the following comments were made:

- Acknowledgement that the ethical investment policy was considered prior to every investment undertaking.
- Confirmation sought on the investment performance (Bail-in Exposure) and officers would look into the possibility of providing equivalent figures in pounds sterling. It was thought that it would be beneficial that a "*Bail-In*" definition be provided within the report.
- Explanation was sought on the investment limits across detailed holdings and portfolios.
- Recognition that the new strategy would be approved by Full Council in February 2024 (having been considered at OSC and Cabinet).
- Confirmation that the Council's treasury advisor was Arlingclose Limited, and the Council would have to make a decision to diverge from the advice provided. It was important that in accordance with the Treasury Management Code that the Council's investments priorities were security of capital, liquidity, yield and ethical investment policy.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

4. Cabinet Agenda Item 10 – Crawley Station Gateway - Phase 1

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report [PES/443](#) of the Head of Economy and Planning.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Economy and Planning the following comments were made:

- Acknowledgement that the delivery of the detailed designs of the scheme would be delivered as part of the Crawley Growth programme.
- Clarification was obtained regarding various elements of the concept design including connectivity improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, together with route access and pick up/drop off areas.
- Recognition that the Council would be working closely with partners and stakeholders to provide a greatly improved cycle and pedestrian access between Crawley railway station, bus station, County Mall and The Martlets. Delivering an enhanced bus station would also result in improved bus and traffic flow around Friary Way, including a dedicated left hand turn for buses from Friary Way onto Station Way.
- Confirmation provided regarding the £7.4m funding to deliver the scheme ("Phase 1") which was in anticipation of a renewed bid to be led by WSCC to Department for Transport in the future for "Phase 2" Station Way highway/bus lane infrastructure upgrades. It was noted that other sites under development along Station Way/Haslett Avenue had already taken account of the scheme within the development.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

5. Cabinet Agenda Item 11 – Western Boulevard Scheme – Crawley Growth Programme

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report [PES/442](#) of the Head of Economy and Planning.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Economy and Planning the following comments were made:

- Recognition that the scheme was set to deliver significant improvements to bus connectivity in the town centre alongside better sustainable transport facilities. It would widen The Boulevard/The Broadway junction, giving priority to buses turning in and out of the junction as well as improve cycle facilities in the area by continuing the segregated cycle tracks on The Boulevard completing the link from the Eastern Gateway to the existing cycle infrastructure on the High Street.
- Clarification was obtained regarding various punctuated cycle lanes within the scheme, together with the exit closures and carriageway improvements.
- Acknowledgement that funding would be required in order for the scheme to be fully completed along The Boulevard.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

6. Cabinet Agenda Item 14 – Crawley Innovation Centre - Additional Towns Fund Monies

Exempt Paragraph 3 –

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report PES/449 of the Head of Economy and Planning.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Economy and Planning the following comments were made:

- Confirmation provided of the processes which had taken place throughout the project were highlighted.
- Clarification sought and obtained on the financial aspects contained within the report.
- Acknowledgement that the Innovation Centre still enabled the Council to deliver on opportunities, whilst protecting, consolidating and enhancing economic diversity.
- Whilst there was support for the proposal which was poised to play a key and interesting role in delivering on future needs within the town, concern was raised regarding the reallocation of £2m of Crawley Towns Fund monies from the Town Centre to Manor Royal cycle route project and this should be noted for the future.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

Councillor Ayling
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission
27 November 2023