

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at:	Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone
Date	Tuesday, 9 November 2021
Present	Councillors Miss Susan Carey, Gary Fuller, Peter Gane, Michelle Keutenius (Chairman), Terence Mullard, Patricia Rolfe, Rebecca Shoob (Vice-Chair) and John Wing
Apologies for Absence	None
Officers Present:	Kate Clark (Case Officer - Committee Services), Cheryl Ireland (Chief Financial Services Officer), Jyotsna Leney (Health, Wellbeing and Partnership Senior Specialist), Sue Lewis (Committee Services Officer), Daisy Madder (Safeguarding Specialist) and Charlotte Spendley (Director of Corporate Services)
Others Present:	None

21. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Rolfe, Gane and Mullard declared DPis as they are directors of Oportunitas Ltd. Dispensations have been applied.

Councillor Rolfe voluntarily declared that she is a member of New Romney Town Council.

Councillor Rebecca Shoob declared an interest as she is a director of Otterpool LLP.

These declarations were made with regard to the Budget 2022/23 item, all members remained in the meeting and took part in discussions.

22. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2021 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

23. **Refresh of the Council's Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy**

The Council is part of the statutory safeguarding role within the wider public sector, with responsibilities to children, young people and vulnerable adults. The children, young people and vulnerable adults safeguarding policy of the Council had been updated. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee were advised that the safeguarding policy is refreshed every two years and that the changes made to the 2019 policy included new legislation and changes to practice that were incorporated in the 2021 policy.

As Councillor Jenny Hollingsbee, Cabinet Member for Communities, Lifeline, Area Officers and Street Homeless, was unable to attend this meeting, Ms Jyotsna Leney, Health Wellbeing and Partnerships Senior Specialist, read out a statement on her behalf.

Ms Leney then presented the report drawing members' attention to the changes within the policy. She also highlighted the Safeguarding page on the Council's intranet and in summing up, advised that this refreshed policy is due to be presented to Cabinet on 24 November.

Members comments included:

- Staff resources – Designated officers (DOs) are the main points of contact for any safeguarding concerns. DOs rota means that there are two officers available each day. Out of hours service is covered by Lifeline. It is hoped that a new Senior DO role will be developed which would co-ordinate DOs. It was noticed that the list of Designated officers in the policy are all female.
- A possible increase in mental health issues since Covid-19 which could mean more pressure in services. Young people and children could be affected especially when looking at returning to school. Safe Haven was mentioned which offers out of hours crisis management.
- Training – important to all and a request that members receive training also. Mandatory E-Learning for all staff with DOs receiving a higher level of training.
- Within the policy, point 6.8 Health – could this be retitled as 'Health Services'?
- Referrals and process – suggestion for a more specific process or flowchart showing how a referral is made from the process start to solution.
- When referring, can information be shared with other LAs and agencies? Where possible consent to share information is sought. Exchange of information is paramount.
- Although safeguarding concerns from the housing prevention team are not included within this policy, information on these referrals can be provided by the Housing Options team.
- Impact of the DA act on housing can be addressed by the housing team.

- County lines – wording to be added into the policy.

Members felt this was a very detailed report and policy refresh and thanked the team for bringing this to the committee.

Proposed by Councillor Peter Gane
Seconded by Michelle Keutenius

RESOLVED:

24. **That report OS/21/08 and refreshed Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy are received and noted.**

(Voting: For 8; Against 0; Abstentions 0)

24. **Budget 2022/23**

A presentation was provided to the group outlining the key steps of the budget setting process. It provided members with opportunities to consider proposals and input into the process as well as discussion on the public consultation. The presentation is attached to these minutes.

The Director of Corporate Services, Mrs Charlotte Spendley, confirmed that the Budget Strategy will be considered at the next meeting of this committee and the detailed budget will be presented for consideration at the sub-committee in January.

Members made the following comments:

- Full cost recovery is essential, however maybe look at some services that are deemed for the 'public good' which are not charged at full cost.
- Share good practice with other local authorities regarding income growth over cutting services.
- Noted that main income generators are Otterpool Park; Oportunitas; and Connect 38.

Members asked for more information on the consultation process as there is a very low level of interest. How can the consultation be further promoted?

The consultation consists of four open questions and is publicised on the Council website and social media. It was suggested that further promotion could be made at libraries, doctor surgeries and parish councils. However, members understood that this subject can be difficult to interpret and appetite for response of budget consultations is low. Further ideas suggested:

- Look at other LAs for promotion comparisons.
- Councillor engagement
- Utilise Zoom for resident engagement and education.

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- Possible production of short videos explaining certain aspects of the budget.
- Timing of consultation, avoid Christmas and New Year.

The Chairman thanked officers for the informative presentation.

Budget Setting 2022/23 Overview

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Key areas

- Overview of Process of Budget Setting
- Formal decisions – Council Tax setting
- Role of Scrutiny in budget setting
- Consultation

Terms of Reference – O&S

- To review and scrutinise the executive's decisions, including prior scrutiny of proposed executive decisions and decisions made by committees and officers.
- To contribute to the development of the Budget and other financial strategies, and review the performance of the executive against the Budget and other financial targets.

Context

- General Fund Gross Annual Revenue Spend £96 million
- General Fund Gross Annual Income £88 million
- Band D Council Tax - £273.72 (excluding Towns and Parishes but including the Special Expense)
- Number of Council Tax Bills sent out – 52,233
- Number Business Rates Bills sent out – 3,966

Context

- HRA (Housing Revenue Account):
 - Gross Annual Revenue Spend - £13 million (before contribution to capital)
 - Gross Annual Income - £15.8 million
- Capital Programme to 2025/26: £148 million
- Budget lines circa 4,000-5,000

General Fund Revenue Budget

Funded by:

- Council Tax – decided by Council but limited by central government
- Business Rates
- Government Grant
- Other income (e.g. Fees and charges, investment income)

Medium Term Financial Strategy

- Key financial planning document
- Financial Perspective to Corporate Plan priorities, key aims & objectives
- Considers the coming four financial years
- Projects cumulative funding gap
- Projects high level anticipated deficit for coming financial year
- Considers external economic and funding picture
- Identifies risks and plans to address the gaps in funding

Spending Review – October

- Central Government outlining their future spending plans for the public sector (2022/23 – 2024/25)
- Key measures announced in the Spending Review for local government included:
 - Council tax thresholds will remain at similar levels to recent years, with the threshold for “core” council tax increases remaining at 1.99% (and the adult social care precept by a further 1%)
 - Local government in England will receive an additional £4.8bn increase in grant funding over the next 3 years (£1.6bn in each year).
 - There were various smaller allocations within the core funding announcement, including £200m for the “cross-government Supporting Families programme”, £37.8m for cyber security, and £34.5m to “strengthen local delivery and transparency”.

There were no announcements about local government funding reforms (Fair Funding Review or business rates changes)

Budget Strategy - *December*

- Aligned to direction & objectives of MTFS
- Outlines path to balanced budget for coming financial year
 - Budget Growth
 - Savings & Efficiencies
 - Emerging Issues e.g. legislation
- Provides a revised deficit position following officer work
- Annual Fees and Charges Review
- Will be considered on 7 December by O&S

Setting the detailed Budget - *January*

- Detailed GF Revenue & HRA Budget considered in January
(HoS attend meeting for deeper dive scrutiny)
- Local Government Finance Settlement
 - Provisional position Pre-Christmas
 - Outcome reported in February
 - Referendum limits, grant funding, reliefs for NNDR etc

Reserves

- Total Reserves £17.8 million (projected March '22)
- Earmarked reserves £14.0 million
- Climate Change (£4.6m), New Homes Bonus (£2m), BR (£1.9m)
- General Reserve - £3.8 million

What is the “right” level of reserves?

- No statutory minimum, Council sets own policy GF £1.5m
- Important for future pressures or cushion for unexpected events
- Maintain working capital requirements
- Long term planning and sustainability, earmark for plans

Council Tax setting - *February*

- Local Government Finance Act 1992
 - Requirement for Council Tax
 - Council Tax base (taxable capacity of the district)
- Legal duty to set balanced budget
- LG Act 2003 CFO must advise the council about the robustness of budget estimates & adequacy of reserves
- Billing

Role of scrutiny & input to budget

- “Contribute to the development of the budget”
- Budget Strategy December 2021
- Targeted approach needed for the detail
- Finance & Performance Sub-committee January 2021
- Group discussions

Consultation

- Questionnaire online for public contributions, promoted on social media channels
- Business Advisory Group
- Joint Parish Council Committee
- Responses
 - 19/20 Budget - no feedback
 - 20/21 Budget – 3 individual pieces of feedback
 - 21/22 Budget – 4 individual pieces of feedback plus one from business community
- Ideas?

Questions?

