

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

## **Voting Members**

Cllr M.D. Smith (Chairman)  
Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford (Vice-Chairman)  
Cllr K. Dibble (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr A. Adeola  
Cllr Gaynor Austin  
Cllr L. Jeffers  
Cllr Mara Makunura  
Cllr Marina Munro  
Cllr Sophie Porter  
Cllr S. Trussler

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Prabesh KC.

## **19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th October, 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

## **20. COUNCIL TAX WORKING GROUP - UPDATE**

Executive Director, Ian Harrison, provided a presentation on the work of the Council Tax Support Group (CTSG).

The Committee were apprised of the current scheme, which was managed locally, to help residents pay their Council Tax bill. It was noted that 4,778 households were currently in receipt of support for 2022/23, this figure included 2,821 households of working age and 1,957 households of pension age. The Committee were advised that the elected Member Group, would recommend to the Cabinet, at its meeting on 8th December, 2022, that the scheme remain the same for 2023/24, whilst mirroring the welfare benefits uplift. It was also noted that, a recommendation for a full review of the scheme during 2023/24, would be made. The review would look specifically at simplifying the scheme, ensuring the most vulnerable were protected and to ensure the cost, to the Council, was sustainable. Other local authority schemes would be considered during the review process.

The Committee reviewed the collection rates for Council Tax over the past four years for residents within the support scheme and those that were not in receipt of support. Collection rate percentages for those within the scheme averaged between 93-94%, and, over all the collection rate achieved each year had been in the region of 96-97%. In relation to arrears, it was noted that the majority (1,726), in receipt of

support, owed between £0-£200, 369 owed between £200-£500 and 200 owed between £500-£3,000.

Other funds available to support residents through the Cost of Living crisis were noted, these included:

- Discretionary Housing Payments - a cash limited fund, provided by the Government, to support people who required additional help with housing costs, not covered by Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. To date £90,203 had been awarded to 249 recipients.
- Exceptional Hardship Payments – a fund agreed by the CTSG to provide additional support to those in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS) who were experiencing financial hardship, the fund currently sat at £5,495, following awards made to the value of £16,505. It was advised that a recommendation would be made to the Cabinet, at its meeting on 8th December, 2022, that an additional £20,000 be added to the fund for 2022/23 from the earmarked reserve for Council Tax Hardship.
- Council Tax Energy Rebates – a Government package to help households with rising energy bills, aimed at houses in the Council Tax Band A-D. It was noted that 32,677 households in the Borough had received £150. In addition, 2,625 payments had been made from a locally managed, Discretionary Energy Rebate fund, totalling £134,550.
- Household Support Fund – a fund provided by Hampshire County Council (HCC) with specific instructions on who should receive support and in what form. Support had been provided to those in receipt of CTS and Pension Credit in the form of food vouchers, totalling £300,000 and an additional £42,000 had been provided for those in housing crisis, such as rent arrears and threat of eviction. Further funding was expected in late December, 2022, for a similar exercise.

In addition to the recommendations already set out above, it was noted that the CTSG would also recommend to the Cabinet, that the Council continue to work with partners in the locality to ensure sustainable solutions existed to assist with cost of living measures.

The Committee discussed the presentation and a request was made to share information on CTS arrears in the different bands (A-D).

The Chairman thanked Mr Harrison for his presentation.

## **21. SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - UPDATE**

The Committee welcomed Emma Lamb, Community and Partnerships Manager, who was in attendance to provide an update on the Council's Supporting Communities Strategy and Action Plan.

It was noted that the Strategy and Action Plan was partner led, and helped to tackle inequalities and deprivation across the Borough. The Committee noted the four priorities, Economic Hardship, Young People, Physical and Mental Health and Connecting Communities. It was advised that a refresh of the strategy would be undertaken in January 2023 to take account of the impacts of the cost of living crisis.

The Committee reviewed some of the funding streams, the majority of which were from external sources. It was noted that support from the Council's earmarked reserve had totalled £71,000 to date. It was advised that the aim had been for projects identified, to be data led and community driven and financially independent from the Council.

The geographical location of the various different schemes within the Supporting Communities Strategy were shared with the Committee. In relation to support concerning cost of living, it was noted that schemes changed frequently and particular attention had been given to ensure information had been kept up to date.

An overview of some of the schemes had been provided, these included;

- Community Grub Hub – a wrap-around service which offered, not only a food bank facility, but also support in a range of areas including mental health provisions and energy and business support. The Grub Hub had been in operation for almost a year and had gained full independence, with support from Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), in October 2022. Some key challenges for 2023 had been identified, these included stock levels of certain items, cost of living impacts, opening hours to target working households and development of a fundraising strategy to ensure financial stability going forward.
- PEBL (Prospect Estate Big Local) – a free health and happiness drop in had been ran through the PEBL scheme. It was noted that 150 health checks had been completed with the Farnborough Primary Care Network (PCN), balance, glide and ride classes had been undertaken with Year R and one children and physical activities and wellbeing walks had been held. Men's health sessions and a Men's Shed had also been established.
- Repair Café – this externally funded facility would be opening on 17th December, 2022 at the West End Centre, Aldershot. The independent organisation had been enabled by the Council with the support of RVS.
- Youth Engagement and Aspirations – The Committee noted that a Forum had been created to engage with young people, a number of students had visited Gulfstream for an aspirational visit, support had been provided at career events at the local secondary schools and a Climate Change competition had been held which had engaged with over 60 students and local company Fluor.

The Committee noted the work on support to residents through the cost of living crisis and the challenges it presented. Help and support information had been collated on one page on the Council's website and other methods of sharing

information were being considered, such as through the Arena magazine and A-Z cards. Partnership work continued with the doctors surgeries, police and other agencies to ensure people in need could be signposted to relevant help. A link to the web page could be found [here](#).

The Committee review what had worked well and the challenges ahead, it was noted that the partnership working had been key to the success of the strategy to date, and the Council would continue to work with its partners to enable projects and access to funding. Challenges included, digital inclusion, funding reductions and health inequalities.

Moving forward, it was noted that a refresh of the strategy would be undertaken to review priorities and data and target the approach accordingly. Work with health partners would increase to help tackle inequalities and an increase in reliance on external funding would be necessary.

The Committee discussed the presentation and expressed concern over the numbers of people requiring support in the Borough. A request was made to provide information, by ward, of the support available and to ensure that Members were kept up to date on what support was available Borough wide.

The Chairman thanked Ms Lamb for her presentation.

## 22. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee **NOTED** the current Work Plan.

A number of issues were raised for consideration by the Committee, these included:

- Fibre internet infrastructure (Toob)
- Highways – condition of the roads across the Borough, in particular potholes
- Management of mould and damp – monitoring the condition of all housing stock across the Borough
- Air pollution
- Partners involved with the Supporting Communities Strategy and Action Plan

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm.

CLLR M.D. SMITH (CHAIRMAN)

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