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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
JOINT (ALL) OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall
24 January 2013 (7.30 pm – 9.10 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group Sandra Binion, Jeffrey Brace, Wendy Brice-Thompson, Dennis Bull, Osman Dervish, Roger Evans, Georgina Galpin, Pam Light, Robby Misir, Eric Munday+, Frederick Osborne, Garry Pain, Frederick Thompson, Linda Trew, Keith Wells and Damian White

+ Substituting for Rebecca Bennett

Residents' Group June Alexander, Clarence Barrett+, Nic Dodin, Gillian Ford, Linda Hawthorn, Barbara Matthews, Ray Morgon, Ron Ower and Linda Van den Hende

+ Substituting for John Mylod

Labour Group Keith Darvill+

+ substituting for Paul McGeary

Independent Residents Group Michael Deon Burton and David Durant

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

1 CHAIRMAN OF MEETING

With the agreement of all Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members, the Chair was taken at this special joint meeting by Councillor Sandra Binion.

2 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised all present of action to be taken in the event of emergency evacuation of the Town Hall becoming necessary.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (IF ANY) - RECEIVE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Children & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Margaret Cameron (Co-opted Member – non-voting)

Crime & Disorder Committee:

Councillor Rebecca Bennett (substituted by Councillor Eric Munday)

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor John Mylod (substituted by Councillor Clarence Barrett)

Towns & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Paul McGeary (substituted by Councillor Keith Darvill)

Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Ted Eden

4 DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interests.

5 THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Michael White explained that the budget proposals had been made in the context of continuing austerity measures by central Government. The priority for Havering had been to protect front line services and reviews had therefore been undertaken of the Council's back office functions. A joint agreement with Newham had saved £5-6 million and further savings had been achieved by the introduction of ISS software and a total of 78 restructures across the Council.

The level of Council Tax which was formerly residents' top priority was now only the fourth priority and this showed that Council Tax levels in Havering were under control. The Council's savings plans were currently on track and budgets were being managed sensibly. A further £1.5 million of savings would be needed but it was anticipated that these could be found without any denigration of services, providing budgets were kept under review.

It was expected that the austerity situation would now last until at least 2017 and a further Comprehensive Spending review would have an impact on

Havering from 2015/16. A 1% cut was required in 2013/14 and a 2% saving would have to be achieved in 2014/15. Public sector pay would increase by an average 1%.

Changes impacting on the budgetary position included the localisation of business rates (although the Government would keep 30% of this revenue) a 10% cut in funding as a result of Council Tax localisation and funding of £1.8 million from the New Homes Bonus although the Rate Support Grant had fallen. NHS funding for social care had risen to £3.6 million although the borough's large elderly population had to be taken into account. There was also a ring fenced amount of £8.6 million for the new public health duties transferring to the Council.

In conclusion, the Leader felt it was essential to protect front line services but this could only be done with less money by finding efficiencies. The Administration's strong financial planning had been praised in the recent Peer Review report. It was important to continue to deliver value for money through initiatives such as Shared Services and East London Solutions. A future funding group had been established to help the Council prepare for further budgetary challenges in the future.

The Leader agreed with a Member's suggestion that energy management was a good area for investment and favoured using the Council's pension fund for this if it offered a better return.

Answers to questions raised by Members on specific items of the budget are shown in the appendix to the minutes.

Having received the presentation from the Leader of the Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees noted:

1. The financial position of the Council.
2. That the report was formally consulting them on the proposed Corporate budget adjustments and that this was the opportunity to scrutinise the budget proposals.

Chairman

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APPENDIX: JOINT MEETING OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES, 24
JANUARY 2013, ANSWERS TO MEMBER QUESTIONS ON THE COUNCIL'S
FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Questions were asked by Members on the areas shown below and answers were given by officers or Cabinet Members as follows:

1. Details on Corporate Contingency Fund and service revenue underspends – It was not possible to give any figures on these at this stage.
2. Why Havering remained continued to be in the highest floor damping band – There had been no clarity received on this from central government and it could not be established how these figures had been arrived at.
3. Details of funding received via the Early Years Support Grant – While it had been confirmed what the level of the top slice would be, it was not known what level of funding would come back to the Council. Some information had recently been received re how much adoption funding would come back to the Council but there remained a lack of specific details.
4. How many primary schools were planning to convert to academy status – No other primary schools were planning to convert at this stage.
5. Public health supplementary paper – This would be included in the February Cabinet report.
6. Savings from review of adult social care – The savings proposed took account of any underspend in other areas of adult social care.
7. Main savings areas proposed for adult social care – These were still being worked through and would cover a variety of areas. Savings would however be in back office functions, not front line services.
8. Impact on children's placements – Provision would be made for the rising numbers of cases. Costs could also be reduced by undertaking more work with families in order to reduce the need for placements.
9. Amount of section 106 receipts – This was not known at this stage and details would be supplied to Councillor Hawthorn outside of the meeting.
10. Predicted underspends – The contingency did not include the forecast overall underspend of £1.2 million. Contingency totals would not be declared until closer to the year end. Officers were very pleased with the catering

underspend which would be used to offset against overspends elsewhere. This was a regular surplus but could not be written permanently into the underlying budget as there was a possibility that the service could lose catering contracts in the future. It was felt it may not be productive for the service to take on many further contracts in addition to those it currently held.

11. Underspend on Special Corporate Budget Provision – Some risk factors had not been applied as yet and so there had only been one-off calls on this provision thus far.
12. Shortfall in income from advertising hoardings – Some income was obtained from sites such as those at the top of North Street and roundabouts. The recession had meant it was not viable to introduce any more sites and there had not been any impact on this from the Olympic Games. Details of income from the existing hoardings would be supplied to Councillor Barrett outside of the meeting.
13. Transfer of outside catering company staff into Havering pension scheme – The legal requirements of an outsourced contract meant that any current staff in the Local Government Pension Scheme had to be admitted to the Havering scheme.
14. Details of the New Homes Bonus – All funds received for this would be spent on the local community on services that residents wished to be improved. This was reflected in the budget. The New Homes Bonus was unringfenced and all residents had been consulted on the proposals being taken forward.
15. Commissioning of specialist advisors – Advisors of this kind were not employed by the Council. The advisor working in connection with the New Homes Bonus was aiming to get empty properties back into use as soon as possible. This was a specialist resource to purely undertake this role and had been carried out effectively in other boroughs.
16. Savings in Members Allowances 2014/15 – The Leader felt that a realignment of Cabinet posts and Overview & Scrutiny Committees was required although the position after the 2014 election would be a matter for the Leader at that time. A Cabinet Member dealing solely with children's issues may not be required once the plans for academies and free schools had concluded.
17. Your Council Your Say survey – The main questions in the survey were the same in order to allow for benchmarking. Some new questions could also be added.

18. Use of recession funding grant – This was used to support payment of additional claims for Council Tax and Housing Benefit.
19. Removal of Learning Disability and Health Reform Grant – There were no specific plans to change spending on this area. The current service plan would continue. Services provided would be assessed by social workers and carers' groups would also be consulted. Services to support people with high level needs were also continuing to be planned for.
20. Social Fund Localisation – Scrutiny of this would fall under the Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was hoped that voluntary or community groups would administer a scheme offering help in kind up to a level of £100. This was a very new area and it was hard to know the exact Social Fund amounts at present. As such, a contingency may be needed. A smaller scheme was in existence in Mawneys ward whereby vouchers for a voluntary food bank could be issued to people.
21. Youth Offending Team – This funding had been removed as some services were now administered by the Youth Justice Board.
22. Social Work Improvement Team – This funding, to cover training for staff, had been now been withdrawn by central Government. Training remained a priority for the directorate however.
23. Troubled Families – While this grant had now been withdrawn, some funding would come to the council as payment by results claims were submitted.
24. Culture & Leisure Savings – The predicted income increase from football pitches was due to the opening of more pitches rather than any plans to increase prices. Officers would confirm to Councillor Darvill the position as regards the pitches at the rear of the Albermarle Youth Centre. Income from Hornchurch Country Park was due to payments for cows being allowed to graze in the park. It was not expected that there would be complaints as a result of cow excrement due to the large size of the park. Officers would check re any current income from cows already grazing in the park. The reduction in cleaning costs would not result in dangerous glass etc being left in parks. There would be no impact of the removal of the car allowance for Parks Protection officers as staff would use Council vehicles.
25. Children's Services – Management & Administration Savings – These would result from restructures of the service following a series of reviews over the last six months.

26. Capital Expenditure – A Member welcomed the presentation of details of capital programme expenditure and requested that this format be followed to allow monitoring of savings throughout the year.

27. Corporate Plan Refresh – A Member requested that this be printed in a bigger typeface or in colour.