

COUNCIL MEETING – 16 OCTOBER 2018
REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

19 September 2018

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman), Partridge-Underwood (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Allebone, Bell, Carr, Emerson, Francis, Harrington, Henley, L Lawman, Morrall, Scarborough, Simmons and M Waters.

Also present: Mrs L Elliott (Managing Director), Mrs B Gamble (Director), Miss J Thomas (Director/Monitoring Officer), Mrs V Jessop, and Mr A Piper (Assistant Directors), Mr T Furber (Temporary Deputy Section 151 Officer), Mr R Watson (Senior Revenue Officer) and Mrs C A Mundy (Democratic Services Officer).

(Councillor G Lawman attended as an observer.)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Graves.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the council's code of conduct and the council's constitution, no declarations were made.

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 13 JUNE 2018

The minutes of the resources committee, held on 13 June 2018, were received.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the resources committee, held on 13 June 2018, be confirmed and signed.

4. FINANCIAL MONITORING AND POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2018-19

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in respect of the monitoring position for revenue expenditure along with the revenue forecast outturn, estimated at 31 July 2018, as appended to the report.

The revised monitoring position was forecasting an increase in the need to use reserves of £17k, made up from a number of net pressures and efficiencies.

Homelessness costs and associated variations in benefit subsidy at the end of July had been closely reviewed and this indicated that the additional budget allocated for 2018/19, together with the pattern of costs across the year to date, produced a forecast that net expenditure would be approximately in line

with the budget for the year. The situation will continue to be closely monitored.

The chairman welcomed Mr Tony Furber, temporary deputy section 151 officer.

Councillor Lawman queried the reported saving of £2k from the information technology shared service, as the figure quoted did not match that detailed in the report to be presented to the partnership and performance committee on 24 September 2018.

The deputy section 151 officer commented that this may be due to timing issues. The managing director confirmed that she would clarify the figures and report back.

RESOLVED that the position in relation to the revenue monitoring and reasons for the variances reported and detailed in the appendix to the report be noted.

5. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the capital programme monitoring information as at 31 July 2018.

The total capital budget for 2018-19 of £6.987m had been reported to the last resources committee in June; subsequent updates and amendments to the budget were detailed within the report, which gave a revised budget for 2018-19 of £5.927m.

The capital outturn report to 31 July 2018 and the capital programme funding position were appended to the report.

The report detailed the current position with regard to the approved schemes, with comments provided by the responsible officers. A list of the schemes that were unlikely to be completed within the financial year were identified within the report and this resulted in £2.259m being carried forward to 2019-20.

Councillors commented on the report and were pleased that the service delivery for disabled facilities grants (DFG) was being brought back 'in-house', it was hoped that this would result in improvements and adaptations to homes being brought forward more quickly. They also stressed that DFG grants should be spent as soon as possible to make lives easier for those in need of adaptations.

Members also asked whether the council would be in a position to spend the re-profiled amount of £2.259m during 2019-20 as it intended or whether there would be restrictions on expenditure should the unitary proposal come to fruition. The managing director confirmed that until March 2020 this would remain a 'sovereign council', in control of its own budgets. The council would still need to make good quality, well-informed decisions on how the money was

spent. Future decisions, however, could come under the scrutiny of the shadow board.

Councillors expressed some concern that the indication was that the £5.9m of capital, due to be spent this financial year, would not be spent in full. The managing director explained that this would continue to be closely monitored and reviewed with the responsible officers.

Officers were particularly commended for the work on the heritage and shop front initiatives, and the housing initiative, where three families will be housed in temporary council owned accommodation in the very near future. They urged officers to request supplementary funding should properties become available to purchase. The managing director clarified that her recent discussions with the assistant director had suggested that this would be an option which members were likely to support.

Capital community grants were also discussed with members praising the parish councils and community organisations in moving forward with their schemes. Members were keen to encourage other parish councils and community groups to apply for this funding and suggested that when notifications were sent out, members also be informed, to encourage applications to be brought forward.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the projected outturn and anticipated variances as at 31 July 2018 be noted;
- (ii) the external funding as detailed in appendix two of the report be noted;
- (iii) the updates and amendments to the 2018-19 capital programme as detailed within the report, be noted.

6. CADET CENTRE – LAND AT SPRING GARDENS

The annexed circulated report of the director was received in relation to the urgent action taken in relation to the transfer of Spring Gardens to the East Midlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Association.

In September 2017 resources committee had agreed to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Major Edward (Mick) Mannock by transferring land to the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association.

During the legal process the association raised a concern that the transfer did not cover the whole area of the lease currently held by the organisation, and that this would be overly complex and difficult to manage. A request was made for the whole area, edged green and detailed in the appended plan, to the report, be transferred. Due to the timescale of the transfer, which was intended to coincide with the centenary of Major Mannock's death in July 2018, the chairman of resources committee agreed to take urgent action, along with the managing director, to agree such transfer.

Councillor Scarborough, who supported the transfer, raised concern that the original agreement had been for a small area of land and that the land in question was much larger than that originally agreed. He asked if the current value of the land was known. The director informed the committee that the land had originally been valued at £1,000 when the decision to transfer was made but had recently been valued at £25,000, which was still a relatively small sum for land. The valuation would have been influenced by the very long lease in place. Members were reminded that this land had been given as a commemorative gift rather than a community asset transfer. The land could not be used for anything other than the original intention as restrictive covenants and conditions had been put into the legal documentation to limit its future use. Members reiterated that officers should be mindful of making sure that up to date valuations should be obtained prior to land being transferred.

RESOLVED that the urgent action taken by the chairman of resources committee and the managing director in relation to the transfer of land to the East Midlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Association be noted.

7. PROPERTY MATTERS

The annexed circulated report of the director was received to provide an update on property matters.

The report detailed the ongoing work in relation to the following:

- Croyland Hall and Abbey;
- Wellingborough Homes land rationalisation;
- Croyland Road development site;
- Doddington Road development site;
- Drill Hall;
- Town Centre parking;
- Redwell Leisure Centre;
- The Tithe Barn;
- Tithe Barn Road offices;
- 20 Sheep Street;
- Section 106 projects;
- Castle Theatre;
- Crematorium;
- Multi storey car park;
- Asset management – disposal and acquisition;
- Management of the commercial property portfolio;
- High Street/Jacksons Lane retained land and
- Road adoptions/street lights and brooks.

The report also made reference to the potential disposal of 20 Sheep Street.

Members made a number of comments and raised queries which the assistant director responded to as follows:

- Drill Hall - Officers were asked if the frontage of the Drill Hall would be retained. The assistant director clarified that any proposed scheme was expected to retain the frontage; should a scheme come forward without the frontage included then a developer would have to explain why the frontage could not be retained.
- Croyland Hall – Tresham College had successfully relocated and they were now in situ.
- Wellingborough homes land rationalisation - members were pleased with the progress made and asked when there would be a committee report on the land rationalisation and buildings physically in place on the first three development sites which had been identified. The assistant director was hopeful that the legal work would be progressed within the next three months.
- Croyland Road - the land was now being marketed on the Underwood's website.
- Tithe Barn Road offices - members were pleased to see the progress made and asked if plans had now been drawn, and whether there could be some movement on this development. The assistant director confirmed that plans had been drawn for a mixed development and this was the subject of discussion between the consultants and architects. The county council would be vacating part of the building on 25 September 2018. Relocation of borough council staff would not take place until 2019 as an empty building would incur empty property rates. One member asked if consideration had been given to demolishing the building and redeveloping the area. The chairman considered that this could be an option but noted that it would be costly and take a considerable time to do this; the council needed to be mindful of delivering where possible by 2020.
- Castle Theatre contract - there was ongoing work taking place to finalise the contract with Parkwood, which was near conclusion.
- Redhill Farm road adoptions - ward councillors would be updated on developments in this area.
- Redwell Leisure Centre – clarity was sought over the playing pitch strategy and whether the 3G pitch, which had recently been approved, would still be required. The assistant director confirmed that this work was likely to indicate the need for additional pitches and was separate to the 3G project.
- Church Street site - a member asked if there was any intention to fill the space where the former restaurant was located in Church Street. The assistant director said that the site had been stabilised and tidied up but there were currently no plans to fill the space as it may form part of larger plans moving forward.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the progress with regard to the projects, as detailed in the report, be noted;
- (ii) approval be given to the disposal of 20 Sheep Street at best consideration.

8. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER AND SALE OF LAND POLICIES

The annexed circulated report of the director was received to seek approval to:

- a draft policy to deal with requests for the potential transfer of property assets to the community;
- a draft policy for the sale of small areas of council owned land to owners of adjacent property.

The council received frequent requests from parish councils and other community organisations wishing to have council owned property transferred to them for continued use within the community. Requests were also received from owners of adjoining properties wishing to purchase small areas of land for use with their existing property. There were no policies in place to deal with these requests and to assist members with the decision making process.

Appended to the report were two draft policies, one for the transfer of assets to the community; and the second for the sale of land.

Members asked whether at point 2.2 of the community asset transfer policy, parish councils and town councils be included. The assistant director confirmed he could do this.

Members also asked if there was a mechanism whereby land could be moved to parishes under a separate process to this. The managing director clarified that if a parish council delivered a service which had been delegated by a local authority which, for example, may result in it requiring the use of a building, that building could be transferred to ensure service delivery.

Members also sought assurance that any proposed asset transfers would be brought before committee. The managing director clarified that this would be the case.

RESOLVED that approval be given to:

- (i) the policy and procedure for applications for the transfer of assets to the community, to take immediate effect;
- (ii) the policy and procedure for applications for the sale of land, to take immediate effect.

9. IRRECOVERABLE COUNCIL TAX, HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS, NON-DOMESTIC RATES AND SUNDRY DEBTS

The annexed circulated report and exempt appendices were received.

Members wished to ask questions in relation to the confidential appendices.

RESOLVED that the open report be noted as members wished to discuss the confidential appendices.

10. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items in accordance with section 100A(4) to the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information of the description shown in schedule 12A to the Act.

Minute No.	Item	Exemption
11	Irrecoverable council tax, housing benefit overpayments, non-domestic rates and sundry debts – exempt appendices	E3

11. IRRECOVERABLE COUNCIL TAX, HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS, NON-DOMESTIC RATES AND SUNDRY DEBTS

The annexed circulated exempt appendices were discussed.

Members asked about individual cases and the circumstances around non-payments and why debts had accumulated. The work undertaken to collect these debts through the court, and before reaching court, was also discussed. It was noted that in comparison with many other local authorities the level of debt write-off was significantly lower.

The chairman suggested that it would be useful to hold a training session for members to explain the process and options available to the council and for this to also encompass universal credit and business debts, this was agreed.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the sum of £43,041.76 be written off as irrecoverable council tax, non-domestic rate and housing benefit overpayment balances;
- (ii) it be noted that the amount of £30,509.86 had been written off under the delegated power of the section 151 officer.

12. URGENT MATTER

The chairman decided that the following matter was urgent within the meaning of section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 for the reason set out below:

Min no.	Subject	Reason for urgency
13	Business rates retention bid to be part of a pilot scheme	A decision was required to meet the deadline to submit an application.

13. BUSINESS RATES RETENTION – BID TO BE PART OF A PILOT SCHEME

The annexed circulated urgent report of the managing director was received in relation to the proposals by the current Northamptonshire business rates pool to bid for a 75% business rates retention (BRR) pilot.

Under delegated powers (3.3.14 of the constitution) the managing director had taken action to agree that the Borough Council of Wellingborough form part of the pilot scheme with final details in relation to the pooling arrangements to be agreed in consultation with the leader of the council.

RESOLVED that it be noted:

- (i) that the council will be included in a bid for pilot status for 75% business rates retention as part of a Northamptonshire Pool;
- (ii) that the managing director, in consultation with the leader of the council, will agree the financial and governance aspects of the partnership arrangement with the other local authorities in Northamptonshire within the proposed pilot pool.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.50pm.