

**COUNCIL MEETING – 19 NOVEMBER 2013**  
**REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

30 October 2013

Present: Councillors Bell (Chairman), Hollyman (Vice-Chairman) Allebone, Bailey, Dholakia, Graves, Henley, Morrall, B Patel, Scarborough, Ward and Waters.

Also present: Mr J T Campbell, Chief Executive, Mr R Micklewright, Director of Resources, Mr T Wright, Director of Services, Mr C Pittman, Monitoring Officer, Mrs L Elliott, Head of Finance, Mrs B Lawrence, Head of Resources, Mr S Wood, Head of Planning and Local Development, Mrs S Knowles, Principal Accountancy Manager, Mr R Watson, Consortium Business Rates Manager and Mrs C A Mundy, Democratic Services Officer.

(Councillors Bass, G Lawman and L Lawman also attended as observers.)

**1. APOLOGIES**

**RESOLVED** to note that an apology for absence was received from Councillor Partridge-Underwood.

**2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2013 be confirmed and signed.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Minute No</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Henley	9	Mid year report on Treasury Management	Registerable – Employer is mentioned in the appendix.
Scarborough	5	Time off for public duties policy	Registerable – chairman of the Wellingborough Bench.
Scarborough	9	Mid year report on Treasury Management	Registerable – wife is freelance financial services professional currently on contract with principal building society and has substantial shareholdings in Barclays Bank PLC.

#### **4. WELLINGBOROUGH NORTH – VERBAL UPDATE**

The Head of Resources gave a verbal update to the committee on the progress made to date.

She explained that a valuation report had been commissioned from Underwoods along with an additional valuation from a second valuer. Work was ongoing to check the detailed technical specification, and quotations for handling the negotiations for the sale of the site were being obtained.

Members asked for clarification on which phase this referred to and asked when a more detailed written report would be available.

The Head of Resources clarified that this initially related to Phase I. She was hopeful that a written report would be available for the December meeting, but this would be dependent on the progress of the negotiations.

**RESOLVED** that the verbal update be noted.

#### **5. TIME OFF FOR PUBLIC DUTIES POLICY**

(Councillor Scarborough left the room during discussion on this item.)

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Resources was received to seek approval on the updated policy relating to employees' time off for public duties.

In November 1990 approval was given to a policy enabling up to 15 days paid leave of absence per year to undertake duties as a Justice of the Peace. A review of the policy had recently been undertaken, taking into consideration the latest legislation and best practice. As Magistrates were now required to sit for a minimum of 13 days each year the policy had been reviewed to take this into account and was appended to the report.

**RESOLVED** that approval be given to the Time Off for Public Duties Policy.

(Councillor Scarborough returned to the meeting.)

#### **6. REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Resources was received on the review of polling stations undertaken after the county council election held on 2 May 2013.

A review of polling stations had been undertaken following information obtained from the electorate, polling station staff and officers of the council on the suitability of polling stations. A number of representations had also been received, relating to the use of some schools, from head teachers, governors and electors, particularly those at Finedon, Ruskin and Wilby Primary Schools.

It was noted that the council had requested that, where possible, schools should not be used if there was a suitable alternative.

In addition concern had been expressed over the use of the All Saints Church Hall, Earls Barton, because of the very steep ascent from the main road and incline for ambulant disabled and elderly electors.

Ward members from the polling districts affected had been given the opportunity to put forward their views.

The proposed changes of the Returning Officer are detailed below:

EA (Finedon)            Transfer to Finedon Independent Wesleyan Chapel.  
FB (Wilby)             Transfer to Wilby Working Mens Club.  
WDA (Earls Barton) Transfer to Earls Barton Methodist Church.

Members discussed the changes, particularly in relation to the proposals for Finedon. Whilst appreciating that the council preferred that schools should not be used, members for Finedon ward noted that only eight complaints had been received, which they considered insufficient reason to move to the Finedon Independent Wesleyan Chapel. The ward members considered this alternative to be unacceptable as there was no off-street parking, the disabled access was poor and they were opposed to the suggested change. Fellow councillors were also supportive of their comments.

The Returning Officer responded to the concerns raised. He confirmed that there had been much discussion and communication regarding this review. As Returning Officer, he was duty bound to look at any complaints that were received irrespective of numbers. Having looked at all the alternative sites in Finedon he believed that the best alternative choice was the Finedon Independent Wesleyan Chapel.

**RESOLVED** to note the decision of the Returning Officer, in relation to the siting of the polling stations, as follows:

- (i) EA (Finedon) - Finedon Wesleyan Chapel, Affleck Bridge;
- (ii) FB (Wilby) - Wilby Working Mens Club, Main Road;
- (iii) WDA (Earls Barton) - Earls Barton Methodist Church.

(Councillors Bailey and Ward asked that their objection to the Finedon proposal be noted.)

## **7. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY PROJECTIONS – OCTOBER 2013**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the medium term financial position and updated members on the current financial challenges facing the borough.

The report made reference to funding, council tax, increases in spending power, increasing pressures on the expenditure budget, welfare reform,

national insurance pressures, the refreshed financial position and options to deliver efficiencies, savings and further increased spending power.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the revised financial position, and the content of the report, be noted;
- (ii) the approach proposed be endorsed and officers be given responsibility to generate ideas to bridge the budget gap.

## **8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE 2013/14 – 2018/19**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the overview of the capital programme process for 2014/15 - 2018/19 along with an update on the 2013/14 - 2017/18 programme.

The report informed the committee that internal and external customers had been invited to submit proposals for new capital schemes and these would be prioritised by the Capital Working Group during November using the service assessment criteria as detailed in the report. Once scored they would be separated into three schedules as follows:

- Schedule 1 - a list of recommended schemes for inclusion in the capital programme;
- Schedule 2 - a list of schemes which, whilst desirable were not of such high priority, but which reflected the policy decisions of the council;
- Schedule 3 - a list showing the schemes submitted but which did not score sufficiently high enough to be considered for funding at the current time.

In addition there were projects in the waiting pool which would be re-scored to establish if there had been any changes or amendments that needed to be considered.

Details of the assessment criteria were included in the report along with a breakdown of how the programme would be funded. The results would be reported to the Resources Committee in December.

Members referred to the way in which the prioritisation of schemes worked and asked if a report, or a briefing note, could be provided to explain the rationale used in making the decisions. The Head of Finance clarified that details would be included in the report to committee in December.

The report also made reference to an urgent action taken in relation to the Lea Way, Compulsory Purchase Order. A query was raised in relation to the figures for the Lea Way, Compulsory Purchase Order, and the increase in the commitment. The Principal Accountancy Manager would provide a written response directly to the councillor.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the process for prioritising capital projects for the 2014/15 – 2018/19 programme be noted;
- (ii) the urgent action taken be noted;
- (iii) approval be given to the creation of a rolling capital fund for Compulsory Purchase Orders.

## **9. MID YEAR REPORT ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

(Councillor Scabrorough left the meeting during discussion on this item.)

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the treasury management activity.

Appended to the report were a summary of investment transactions at 30 September 2013 and a summary of the economic background and outlook.

The report detailed the key changes to the strategy, agreed in March 2013, the annual investment strategy, and the 2013-14 performance to date.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

(Councillor Scarborough rejoined the meeting.)

## **10. TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT SECTION 106 PROJECTS**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received on the allocation of Section 106 (S106) funding, and requested authority to allocate £471,959 of S106 funding to a programme of borough-wide improvements.

The chairman welcomed Edeltraud Freund, representing Castle Fields Community Group, to the meeting and allowed her to address the committee for three minutes. She expressed concern over the perceived lack of consultation and engagement with community groups over how, exactly, the section 106 monies should be spent, particularly in relation to Castle Fields and asked for more consultation to take place before a final decision was made on what should be included in the scheme.

The Section 106 Monitoring Group had considered a number of projects which were detailed in the report and recommended for approval to the committee.

A lengthy debate ensued with some members raising concern over what was proposed for each project. Some considered that there was a lack of consultation with ward councillors, parish councils, partners and community groups, and asked why they had not been involved at a much earlier stage. They were also concerned about the lack of detail and transparency on each scheme and considered they could not make informed decisions without

additional information and detail. Other members were pleased with the report and fully supported the proposals as a positive way forward to use the S106 monies and encourage children and young adults to lead more active and healthier lives.

The Head of Planning and Local Development explained how the S106 funding had been obtained and how this report was seeking to earmark the funding for the projects detailed within the report, to ensure that the monies were not lost and returned to the developers. He gave an assurance that all the projects would be fully consulted on prior to any work being undertaken and that full consideration would be given to the views of ward councillors and community groups.

The Chairman also confirmed that ward councillors, community and user groups and others would be consulted and that a further report would be submitted to a future Resources Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the evaluation process and scoring method for S106 projects be agreed, and that it be noted that these will be reported in a regular S106 Monitoring Report to Resources Committee;
- (ii) approval be given to the projects identified being financed using the S106 contributions.

## **11. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT ACTIONS**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Community was received on the urgent actions taken in relation to Wellingborough Homes Annual General meeting, Scrap Metal Dealer and Collector Licence fees and the W3 Bus Service.

**RESOLVED** that the urgent actions be noted.

## **12. SENIOR MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

The annexed circulated report of the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service was received on the revised arrangements for the senior management.

The report gave details of the new senior management team (SMT) who would work alongside the senior officers of the council's shared services of Wellingborough Norse, IT Services, Legal Consortium (District Law) and Chief Internal Auditor. SMT would deal with the high level strategic and corporate issues and meet regularly with Principal Managers to form an extended management team (EMT) to deal with more operational issues.

The report also detailed the role and functions of the council's statutory officers such as the Head of the Paid Service and the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 officer) and who would undertake these roles in the future.

With regard to the role of Monitoring Officer it was proposed that the Head of the legal services consortium, District Law be appointed as Monitoring Officer. It was also recognised that it would be beneficial for there to be a local contact and accordingly it was proposed that the Principal Democratic Services Manager would undertake this role. The new arrangement would be reviewed after a 12 month period.

Members asked where the new monitoring officer was based, whether she currently carried out the role elsewhere and whether a confidential briefing note could be provided on all costs and benefits.

The Chief Executive clarified that she was currently the Monitoring Officer at Kettering Borough Council and was based there. He also confirmed that he would provide a more costs detailed breakdown to members in the form of a briefing note.

Some members considered that a Monitoring Officer who was not based on site would be inadequate and ineffective.

The Chief Executive explained that this was not a unique scenario and that there were examples of this type of working across the country. He believed that it was the only viable option in the current circumstances and was the subject of a 12 month review which would allow the effectiveness of the arrangement to be further considered.

**RESOLVED** that the progress made with the implementation of the revised Senior Management organisational structure be noted;

**R1 RECOMMENDED** that:

- (i) Sue Lyons, Head of Democratic & Legal Services at Kettering Borough Council, be designated as the Borough Council of Wellingborough's Monitoring Officer, for a 12 month period, commencing on 30 November 2013.
- (ii) a further report be submitted to Resources Committee and Council prior to the end of the 12 month period to review the operation of these arrangements.

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

The annexed circulated report and exempt appendices of the Director of Resources was received on the write off of irrecoverable non-domestic rates, council tax, housing benefit overpayments and commercial rent and to note amounts written off under delegated powers for council tax, non-domestic rates, sundry debts and housing benefit overpayments.

As members wished to discuss items in more detail this was moved to the exempt part of the meeting.

#### **14. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item 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 descriptions shown in schedule 12A to the Act:

Min. no.	Item	Paragraph of Schedule 12A
15	Exempt appendices - Irrecoverable Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates, Sundry Debts and Housing Benefit Overpayments	E3

#### **15. IRRECOVERABLE COUNCIL TAX, NON-DOMESTIC RATES, SUNDRY DEBTS AND HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS**

The exempt circulated appendices were received.

Members asked if information could be provided on current trends with regard to the number of people in arrears and the number of write-offs compared to previous years.

The Consortium Business Rates Manager reported that his service had been taking more enforcement action and had been offering different payment methods. There was a noticeable increase in debt recovery orders and bankruptcy orders and people disappearing with no forwarding address. Tracing packages had improved and often people were located and recovery action could be taken against them. The Head of Finance offered to provide a Members Briefing note on this topic.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the write-off of £124,947.41 of irrecoverable council tax, non-domestic rates and housing benefit be agreed;
- (ii) the amount of £42,739.93 had been written off under the delegated powers of the Section 151 officer.

NB: The chairman informed the committee that this was the last meeting for the Director of Resources, as Committee Manager, and also the last meeting for the Director of Services. He expressed his thanks and gratitude to both Mr Micklewright and Mr Wright for their service to the council and wished them good luck in the future.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.10pm.