

COUNCIL MEETING – 1 MARCH 2016

REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

3 February 2016

Present: Councillors Bell, Chairman, Griffiths, Vice-Chairman, Allebone, Carr, Emerson, Francis, Hallam, Harrington, Henley, Partridge-Underwood, Scarborough and Ward.

Also present: Mr J T Campbell, Chief Executive, Mrs L Elliott, Head of Finance, Mrs B Lawrence, Head of Resources, Miss J Thomas, Head of Planning and Local Development, Miss S Lyons, Monitoring Officer/Solicitor District Law, Mr R Watson, Business Rates Manager and Mrs C A Mundy, Democratic Services Officer.

(Councillor G Lawman attended as an observer.)

1. APOLOGIES

RESOLVED to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bailey, Morrall and M Waters.

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, the following declarations were made.

Councillor	Min. no.	Report Title	Reason
Allebone	11	The Castle (Wellingborough) Ltd.	Personal and prejudicial – is a Board Member of The Castle.
Henley	11	The Castle (Wellingborough) Ltd.	Personal and prejudicial – is an employee of a company referenced in the report.
Scarborough	11	The Castle (Wellingborough) Ltd.	Personal – wife has shares in a company referenced in the report.

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2015.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Resources Committee held on 9 December 2015, be confirmed and signed.

4. VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANT – DAYLIGHT CENTRE FELLOWSHIP

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received to consider a request from the Daylight Centre Fellowship (DCF) for financial support toward the operation the Queen's Hall building as a drop in centre for vulnerable people; along with the local foodbank scheme.

The Daylight Centre Fellowship has historically been funded through a number of sources but is finding it increasingly difficult to replace lost or time limited funding and to meet the increased needs from the community. They currently do not receive a grant as part of the council's voluntary sector funding scheme.

The council leases the Queen's Hall building and 10 High Street Place to the organisation. Due to financial pressures the organisation is currently finding it difficult to meet the rental payments on time.

To relieve the immediate financial situation, and give time for other funding opportunities to be investigated, the organisation was seeking a grant of £4,500, as a contribution towards its running costs.

Members commended the services provided by the Daylight Centre Fellowship and asked why they had previously not been included in the council's voluntary sector grant funding scheme. The Head of Finance clarified that this service provision previously fell under the remit of the county council, and this request was for a one-off grant to assist at a difficult time.

It was proposed by Councillor Scarborough and seconded by Councillor Henley that the Daylight Centre Fellowship be awarded a grant equating to six month's rent as a contribution towards the running of the Queen's Hall and 10 High Street Place. On being put to the vote this motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED that a one-off unconditional grant, equating to six months rental, be awarded to the Daylight Centre Fellowship, as a contribution towards the running of the Queen's Hall and 10 High Street Place.

5. LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

The annexed circulated report of the Chief Executive was received in relation to the current situation with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and to recommend that the council join the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP) area. The report outlined the background to LEPs and why membership of SEMLEP should now be considered.

All seven district councils in Northamptonshire had joined the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership (NEP) in 2011 with all apart from Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire (ENDC) also members of SEMLEP. It had become apparent that involvement in a larger geographical area may be of benefit to the council with the advent of the 'devolution agenda'. ENDC had recently applied to join SEMLEP.

Members considered that this was the way forward and that it would be beneficial to apply to join.

RESOLVED that the council seek membership of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership at an annual cost of £7,000.

6. REVENUE BUDGET 2016-17 AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY PROJECTIONS

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received to provide members with detailed proposals for the revenue budget 2016-17 together with an updated forecast of the projected position for the subsequent financial years. A proposal in respect of council tax for 2016-17 was also included in line with the draft budget position previously presented at the Resources Committee on 9 December 2015 for consultation, and a recommendation for future council tax increases.

Appended to the report were the following:

Appendix one:	2016-17 Budget analysis;
Appendix two:	Pressures and savings included as part of the 2016-17 budget;
Appendix three:	Medium term financial projections 2016-17 to 2019-20;
Appendix four:	Initial ideas for savings proposals for 2016-17 and beyond;
Appendix five:	Lowest quartile council tax figures assumptions;
Appendix six:	Budget 2016-17 consultation response analysis;
Appendix seven:	Fees and charges schedule;
Appendix eight:	Section 25 report.

The report explained the position regarding the medium term financial outlook detailing the funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for 2016-17, how it was made up and the overall reduction of £512,000 or 12.9% in formula grant.

Also detailed in the report was a summary of the new homes bonus received in each year since its inception in 2011. The council expected to receive £6.7m over the medium term but potential changes to the scheme indicated a revised projection of £5.4m.

This reduction, plus the reduction in central funding, meant that by 2019-20 the council would have £1.415m less funding, creating a significant change in the level of resources and thus presenting a heightened risk over the medium term.

The report detailed the council's approach to the budget pressures for the coming year and the medium term, along with savings proposals and budget additions.

With regard to council tax, Wellingborough remained one of 51 councils in the country with the lowest level of the council tax. This gave the council the opportunity to either increase the band D council tax by £5 or 2%, whichever is the greater. A council tax increase of £5 for 2016-17 is included in the projections. A £5 increase on the average band D is an increase of 5.22% equal to 10 pence per week or 42 pence per month. For the years 2017-18 and 2019-20 a council tax increase of 1.99% had been built into the calculations, subject to the council's ranking as having one of the lowest levels of council tax.

The report also made reference to the economic outlook; the budget for 2016-17; the budget forecasts for 2017-18 and 2019-20; the general fund balance; the collection fund deficit and council tax; feedback from the budget consultation and the business rates scheme.

The Section 151 officer's statement, as required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves, was also received. This report covered the financial risks facing the authority in the medium term, in addition to those risks already identified. The Head of Finance, as Section 151 officer, stressed to the committee that the potential loss of the new homes bonus would cause significant pressures on budgets. There would also be a need for maximum income to come from council tax in future years and in the longer term.

Members considered the report and, whilst not wishing to increase the Borough Council of Wellingborough's part of the council tax, accepted that it was necessary to do so and supported the recommendation. Members were also aware that there would be significant increases to the county council part of the council tax as well which would impact on council tax payers. Councillor Scarborough also asked for clarity on appendix 2 to the report in relation to the reduction in community support. The Head of Finance agreed to find out the detail of this and advise.

R1 RECOMMENDED that approval be given to:

- (i) an increase in the council's average band D council tax in 2016-17 of £5, as allowed within the referendum levels announced;
- (ii) an increase in the council's average band D council tax in 2017-18 to 2019-20 of £5 or 1.99%, whichever is the greater, subject to meeting the referendum criteria;
- (iii) the revenue budget for 2016-17 and financial plans, after consideration of the S151 officer's Section 25 report;
- (iv) the development of an efficiency plan, by the Head of Finance, to allow the council to take advantage of the four year settlement proposal offered by central government;
- (v) the fees and charges schedule.

7. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received in relation to the capital financing available to the council for the medium term, together with a list of proposed capital schemes.

The following were appended to the report:

- a summary of capital resources;
- the list of proposed capital schemes;
- and a list of capital schemes where information was required.

The report detailed how the schemes shown as prioritised would affect capital resources and similarly how capital resources would be affected if these schemes and the schemes awaiting further information were approved. Other schemes previously approved were awaiting final approval for funding release.

Members asked that there be caution in undertaking any public realm works in the Broad Green area as there were rumours that the county council was considering traffic management changes in this vicinity.

R2 RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) the capital funding for the financial years 2016-17 to 2020-21 be approved;
- (ii) the list of prioritised capital schemes be noted and approval be given to schedule 1 for release into the capital programme 2016-17 to 2020-21;
- (iii) the capital schemes awaiting information be approved in principle and that it be noted that schemes will be released into the capital programme as soon as further information was received.

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

The annexed circulated report and exempt appendices of the Head of Finance was received in relation to the write off or irrecoverable debts.

A member sought clarity on one item, which the Business Rates Manager responded to.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the sum of £9,628.10 of irrecoverable council tax and housing benefit overpayments be written off;
- (ii) it be noted that the amount of £35,837.35 has been written off under the delegated powers of the Section 151.

(Councillors Allebone and Henley left the meeting having declared a personal and prejudicial interest on the following item and did not return.)

9. 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:

Min. No.	Title	Reason
11	Request for advance of contractual payment for cash flow purposes – The Castle (Wellingborough) Ltd.	A decision was required to be made by the council.

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 descriptions shown in schedule 12A to the Act:

Minute No.	Items	Paragraph of Schedule 12A
11	Request for advance of contractual payment for cash flow purposes – The Castle (Wellingborough) Ltd.	E1

11. REQUEST FOR ADVANCE OF CONTRACTUAL PAYMENT FOR CASH FLOW PURPOSES – THE CASTLE (WELLINGBOROUGH) LTD.

The chairman had given approval to this urgent exempt circulated report of the Head of Finance being brought before the committee.

The report detailed a request received from The Castle (Wellingborough) Ltd for an advance of £50,000 of the council's budgeted contractual payment to them (due to be paid in April 2016) to assist with a problem with cash flow that had arisen following a number of issues, including changes to credit card merchant services.

Members discussed this request and expressed concern about the content of the report, asking for clarity that this was monies that were already allocated.

The Head of Finance confirmed this to be the case. On 1 April 2016, £90,000 was due to be paid for maintenance costs along with a further £93,350 for the half year contract fee. This would be followed in October 2016 with the second six monthly contract payment of £93,349.

She also explained that The Castle (Wellingborough) Ltd. had applied for backdated cultural status with HMRC, and this may give rise to a reimbursement of VAT but this would not be received before the end of the financial year. There was a need for the company to pay suppliers and its employees. She also informed the committee that she was seeking advice about state aid implications should the committee agree to the advance, and the charging of interest, which would be charged at a commercial rate of approximately 11% per annum.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the request made by The Castle (Wellingborough) Limited for the sum of £50,000, due to be paid on 1 April 2016, to be paid in advance, subject to the clarification and appropriate charging of interest.

Chairman

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

