

COUNCIL MEETING – 26 JULY 2016

REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

29 June 2016

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman), Partridge-Underwood (Vice-Chairman), Carr, Emerson, Hallam, G Lawman, Morrall, Scarborough, Simmons and Ward.

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

(Councillors L Lawman and Maguire attended as observers.)

A minute's silence was held in memory of Jo Cox MP, and all those who had recently been killed in Orlando and Turkey.

1. APOLOGIES

RESOLVED to note an apology for absence was received from Councillors Bailey, Francis, Graves and Henley.

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 declaration were made.

Councillor	Min. no.	Report Title	Reason
Emerson	9	Voluntary and Community Sector funding	Personal – Council representative on the Victoria Centre.
Lawman G	9	Voluntary and Community Sector funding	DPI - Board member of Shire Community Service and trustee of the Victoria Centre (as NCC representative).
Scarborough	9	Voluntary and Community Sector funding	Personal – Ordinary member of the Victoria Centre. Northampton University has shareholding in Goodwill Solutions.

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 March 2016.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Resources Committee held on 23 March 2016 be confirmed and signed.

4. 2015-16 CAPITAL OUTTURN

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received in relation to the council's capital expenditure against approved budget for the financial year 2015-16.

The final capital programme monitoring statement for 2015-16 shows an outturn of £5.19m which is a variation of 1.401m compared to the previously revised forecast of £6.593m. The reason for the final changes was detailed in appendix one to the report.

Appended to the report was the capital outturn report to 31 March 2016, the capital programme funding position, and an analysis of significant capital budget underspends.

Members raised a number of issues and asked the following:

- If a members briefing note could be provided in relation to compulsory purchase orders;
- If a different colour coding could be used to identify re-profiling in the report;
- If an update could be provided on Castlefields improvements..

It was agreed that all of the above would be dealt with. Reference was also made to the disabled facilities grant, the town centre CCTV, empty properties and Bassetts Close.

The chairman reminded members that if they had detailed questions they should submit them to officers in advance of the meeting so the information could be made available in the meeting.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The outturn position on the capital programme and the reasons for the variances be noted;
- (ii) The positions on the funding of the capital programme, including the re-profiling of budgets be noted.

5. 2015-16 REVENUE OUTTURN

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received in relation to the council's revenue expenditure against approved budget for the financial year 2015-16.

The closure of accounts process for the 2015-16 financial year was ongoing and all of the balance sheets were being reviewed for completeness and accuracy. This could result in amendments to the revenue outturn position for 2015-16 which will be reported to a future Resources Committee if required.

The council's revenue budget was set in February 2015 at £10.046m for expenditure with associated ongoing sustainable funding of £9.471m. A sum of £575,000 was needed from revenue reserves to support the expected level of expenditure when the budget was set.

The Head of Finance confirmed that the use of reserves to support the budget for the medium term was unsustainable and there continues to be a need to reduce expenditure and increase income to address this.

Appended to the report was the revenue monitoring position to 31 March 2016.

The report detailed the 2015-16 revenue outturn, the analysis of budget outturn 2015-16, and the variance analysis.

Members sought clarity that the only new reserve was for members' IT allowance of £14,000. The Principal Finance Manager confirmed this was the case.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) approval be given to the new ear marked reserves as detailed in the report;
- (ii) The utilisation of existing reserves be approved;
- (iii) The contribution to existing reserve be approved;
- (iv) The outturn position, subject to audit, as outlined in the report along with the reasons for the projected outturn variations at 31 March 2016 be noted.

6. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN – ANNUAL RETURN 2015-16

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the annual report of treasury management activity for 2015-16.

The report detailed the council's investments: investment trusts, borrowing, interest received and future prospects.

The Principal Finance Manager and Head of Finance referred to the current volatility in the markets which they were checking daily. They would bring an updated report to committee in the autumn.

Members appreciated the current position and it was reiterated that there remained a need to generate as much income as possible for the borough using its existing assets.

RESOLVED that the Treasury Management outturn position, as detailed in the report, be noted.

7. FEES AND CHARGES FOR BOROUGH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Resources was received in relation to election fees and charges, to bring them in line with national election funding arrangements and assist the council's budgetary process.

The report detailed the current fees and charges for borough and parish elections and proposed new fees and charges which were appended to the report.

Councillor Scarborough thanked the Head of Resources and complimented her team on the efficient handling of the recent referendum and asked that his thanks and the rest of the committee be passed on.

Councillor Carr asked how fees for Neighbourhood Plan referendums were calculated. The Head of Resources explained that these fees would be calculated on a pro rata basis based on electorate.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The costs, charges and expenses applicable to borough and parish council elections as set out at appendix B of the report be agreed;
- (ii) The revised fees be implemented from 1 April 2016 to be amended in line with the local government staff pay awards until a further review is carried out by Resources Committee.

8. LOCAL SEARCH FEES

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received in relation to fees for local search enquiries submitted to the council when the freehold of a property is sold.

On 4 July 2016 search enquiries of a local authority would be changing nationally and a number of new questions had been introduced. The search fees have been revised to reflect the proposed changes; in addition, from a date to be confirmed, VAT will be charges on Enquiries of a Local Authority.

The report detailed the current and proposed fees along with those of the county council.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the proposed fee changes.

9. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR FUNDING

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received on the allocation of voluntary and community funding to date, to propose further

funding streams and uses of the remaining funding, as recommended by the Grants Working Party.

Mrs Annette Breeden of Shire Community Services addressed the meeting for three minutes in relation to the services provided by Shire Community Services which included the Wellibus, Shopmobility and the volunteer medical car service. Whilst she was grateful for the funding that had been given she expressed her concern over the reduction in funding and the need to vacate their Orient way premises because they were unable to cover rental costs. They needed to remain in the town centre to be accessible for users.

Councillor G Lawman left the meeting for this item having declared an interest.

The report detailed the allocations of funding to date and balance remaining, and further proposed outcomes and outline specifications for each were appended to the report.

The report detailed the work that had been taking place and the allocations for the agreed specifications which put in place agreements with the organisations for the funding, as specified, until March 2018. Outcomes would be monitored throughout this period to ensure that the funding is delivering on the requirements as stated.

The mix of funding and procuring services gave the council both flexibility and adaptability to respond to the changing needs of the borough as a community, encouraging community groups to take an active role in the provision of services for the people of the borough.

A more detailed assessment of the methodology and timing of the process would be undertaken to ensure that for future years the voluntary and community sector had improved access to funds. The report summarised discussions held in relation to the Hemmingwell hub, Shopmobility, the Victoria Centre, small community grants, and unallocated budget.

The Head of Finance confirmed that the Principal Community Support Manager was in discussion with Shire Community Services regarding alternative accommodation.

Members referred to Wellingborough Museum's decision to decline funding and suggested that this be allocated to other heritage groups to help raise the profile of heritage issues in the borough.

The Head of Finance clarified that she could add this to the agenda for the working party and asked that if other members had anything they wished to include to let her know.

Members also referred to the Hemmingwell Hub which had recently been leased to Goodwill Solutions Ltd who were working with the community. The new arrangement was doing well and Members endorsed the wide range of services it provided to the community.

Councillor Scarborough proposed that the allocations at appendix one to the report be endorsed and this was seconded by Councillor Partridge-Underwood. On being put to the vote this was agreed.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the voluntary and community sector allocations to date be noted along with the budgetary position;
- (ii) that the recommendations of the working party, as detailed in the report be agreed;
- (iii) the allocations detailed at appendix one to the report be endorsed.

(Councillor G Lawman returned to the meeting.)

10. CREMATORIUM UPDATE

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received in relation to the final stages of the design and build project for the crematorium and on the initial operational decisions by Wellingborough Bereavement Services Ltd (WBS Ltd) trading as Nene Valley Crematorium (NVC).

The report detailed the design and build phase completion, delivery of the crematorium services, role of the shareholder and the role of the board and the final operational issues prior to opening for business.

The crematorium building had been formally handed over to the council on 31 May 2016. Wellingborough Bereavement Services Ltd, trading as Nene Valley Crematorium (NVC) would be responsible for the operational management of the services provided from the site, and the report referred to the appointment of the crematorium manager and her staff along with the Directors of the company.

Appended to the report was the pricing structure, policies in relation to the recycling of metals, and the company logo.

Members sought clarity on when the public tours of the crematorium would be held, how the pricing structure had been reached and how the operational capital loan figure of £200,000 had been reached.

The Head of Finance and Head of Resources responded to the questions as follows:

- Pricing – the pricing was competitive and the bereaved could choose various packages to suit their requirements. The services were longer than those at other crematoriums and costs were within the range of other local providers. There were also off peak prices, and Saturday, Sunday and evening options at no additional charge, along with a lower fee for those who had already had a church service. This had

been agreed to give choice to the public, and the team had been appointed to be flexible to accommodate these needs.

- There would be a number of open days for the public to have a guided tour of the site but dates had not yet been fixed.
- The working capital loan of £200,000 had been estimated to be six months' worth of running costs to enable cash flow to be generated.

Members expressed their gratitude to all the Heads of Service and the Chief Executive for bringing the crematorium to fruition.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the updated position on the design and build phase of the project be noted;
- (ii) the decisions of the directors of WBS Ltd as detailed in the report be noted;
- (iii) the previously agreed policy decision on making an operational working capital loan of £200,000 to WBS Ltd be endorsed.

R1 RECOMMENDED

- (i) that the division of key operational issues be taken forward by WBS Ltd and the council should maintain its strategic role, as detailed in the report;
- (ii) that the fees and charges, together with policies on metal recycling and "holding over" be adopted, as set out in the report.

11. THE EFFICIENCY PLAN AND KEY PROJECTS

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Finance was received in relation to the progress to date on efficiency actions undertaken in line with the agreed efficiency strategy and to agree further key property related projects to focus on in the coming months to maximise the council's use of its capital assets.

The report detailed the progress to date, which included a review by principal managers of service delivery costs and efficiencies; IT strategic review; Environmental Services structural review, Revenue and Benefits customer self-serve changes and structural review. Scoping work had taken place which focused on reducing the costs of operational buildings and rationalising the non-operational properties and these were detailed in the report. Further suggestions were detailed in the report for feasibility studies to be carried out on various projects.

There would be a need for the appointment of two fixed term contracts, to support the key projects which could be funded from capital resources.

The council's priorities for the future would be the subject of member meetings to be arranged over the summer.

Members discussed the report and concurred that additional resources would be required to bring new projects forward. Some concern was expressed over

the proposals and how these would be achieved. Officers responded to these concerns to explain that some work had already been carried out but that full feasibility studies would be undertaken and brought back to committee giving details which would aid decision making.

Councillor Lawman proposed that officers be authorised to carry out feasibility studies for the projects listed in 6.7 of the report and this was seconded by Councillor Emerson and on being put to the vote agreed.

RESOLVED to:

- (i) the progress to date on efficiencies achieved be noted;
- (ii) the proposed timetable to refresh the council's priorities for the medium term be noted;
- (iii) the progression of the key property projects as detailed in the report be agreed;
- (iv) agree to the extra resources required to deliver the projects;
- (v) authorise officers to carry out feasibility studies on the projects listed in 6.7 of the report.

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

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

Members referred to the length of time that some of the debts had been accumulating. The Business Rates Manager responded to this explaining the circumstances and the reasons why the debts had accrued and the action that had been taken during the outstanding period.

RESOLVED to:

- (i) write-off the sum of £49,031.74 of irrecoverable non-domestic rates;
- (ii) Note that an amount of £74,183.02 had been written off under the delegated powers of the Section 151 officer.

13. HIGH STREET/JACKSONS LANE SITE

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to give an update on the High Street/Jacksons Lane site.

A decision had been made at the council meeting in July 2015 to continue with the current Keepmoat scheme, but to exclude the Queens Hall, Drill Hall and the proposed surface level car park from the land to be sold (Option B). Officers had been working with Keepmoat to identify acceptable terms and were seeking authority to enter into a sales agreement with Keepmoat, on the terms outlined in appendix two to the report.

The Head of Planning and Local Development presented the report and clarified that the proposed action should read as follows:

“It is proposed that members **RECOMMEND** that council enter into a sale agreement with Keepmoat Homes Ltd on the terms identified in this report.”

A lengthy discussion ensued with members voicing various concerns to which officers responded. Members considered that they did not wish to make a decision without full input from all Members of the Council.

Councillor Scarborough proposed that a report be taken to the council meeting to be held on 26 July 2016 for discussion as to whether the council should enter into a sales agreement with Keepmoat Homes Ltd.

This was seconded by Councillor Partridge-Underwood and on being put to the vote declared carried.

RESOLVED that a report be taken to the council meeting to be held on 26 July 2016 for discussion as to whether the council should enter into a sales agreement with Keepmoat Homes Ltd.

Chairman

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

