

COUNCIL MEETING – 26 FEBRUARY 2019
REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

6 February 2019

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

Also present: Mrs L Elliott (Managing Director), Mr S Darcy (Director/S151 Officer), Miss K Denton, Mrs V Jessop and Mr A Piper (Assistant Directors), Mr R Watson (Senior Revenue Officer) and Mrs C A Mundy (Democratic Services Officer - Committees).

(Councillor G Lawman attended as an observer.)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Bell, L Lawman and Scarborough.

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 12 DECEMBER 2018

The minutes of the resources committee, held on 12 December 2018, were received.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the resources committee, held on 12 December 2018, be confirmed and signed.

(The chairman agreed to bring forward agenda items 10 and 12 but reminded members that agenda item 12 was an exempt item.)

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

The annexed circulated report and exempt appendix of the section 151 officer was received to seek approval to the write off, of irrecoverable debts.

The following sums were considered to be irrecoverable as detailed in the report and recommended for write off:

Appendix A: Non domestic rate cases £5,429.86
Appendix B: Council tax cases £4,523.32

The report also detailed that the council's section 151 officer, had written off under delegated powers, the sum of £21,905.46.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) approval be given to the write-off of £9,953.18 of irrecoverable council tax, non-domestic rate and housing benefit overpayment balances;
- (ii) It be noted that the amount of £21,905.36 had been written off under the delegated powers of the section 151 officer.

5. REVENUE BUDGET 2019-20 AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN PROJECTION

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received (along with a tabled addition to appendix A) to provide members with detailed proposals for the 2019-20 revenue budget together with an updated forecast for subsequent financial years.

Appended to the reports were the following:

- Appendix 1 - 2019-20 Budget Analysis;
- Appendix 2 - Medium term financial projections 2019-20 to 2022-23;
- Appendix 3 - Budget 2019-20 consultation response analysis
- Appendix 4 - Fees and charges schedule;
- Appendix 5 - Section 25 report.

Also detailed within the report was the proposal, in respect of council tax for 2019-20, in line with the draft budget position previously presented to the resources committee in December 2018, with a recommendation for future years' council tax increases.

The chairman welcomed Mr Darcy, Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, to the meeting who presented the report.

The report detailed the severe financial challenges that the council continued to experience along with the continuing reliance on the use of reserves to balance the revenue budget in 2019-20. The risk of not delivering a balanced budget over the medium term was now critical as the level of reserves had significantly diminished and future funding levels were uncertain.

The report, and the director, detailed the following:

- the medium term financial outlook;
- New Homes Bonus;
- the council's approach to the budget pressures for 2019-20 and the medium term;
- savings proposals and budget additions;
- council tax and referendum levels;
- the budget 2019-20;

- budget forecasts 2020-21 to 2022-23;
- the general fund balance;
- business rates;
- budget consultation; and the
- Chief finance officer's statement as required under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2005.

Members discussed the report and some of the comments arising from the consultation. The section 151 officer's recommendations for the increase in council tax for 2019-20 of £5.00 (4.52%) with increases in 2020-21-22-23 were discussed and agreed.

The chairman reminded members that the council tax resolution would be presented to the council meeting on 26 February 2019 and that this would include the council tax for the borough council, county council and the Police, Fire and Crime commissioner.

R1 RECOMMENDED that approval be given to:

- (i) an increase in the council's average band D council tax in 2019-20 of £5.00 (4.52%), as allowed within the referendum limits;
- (ii) in principle, the following increase in the council's average band D council tax in 2020-21 to 2022-23, subject to meeting the referendum criteria:
 - (a) 2020-21: £5.00 (4.32%);
 - (b) 2021-22: £5.00 (4.14%);
 - (c) 2022-23: £5.00 (3.98%).
- (iii) the revenue budget for 2019-20 and financial projections, both as appended to the report;
- (iv) the fees and charges schedule, as appended to the report.

6. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the capital financing available to the council for the medium term, along with a list of proposed capital schemes.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix A - Summary of capital resources;
- Appendix B - List of proposed capital schemes;
- Appendix C - Summary of proposed capital schemes

The chairman permitted Councillor Gough, ward member for Earls Barton to address the meeting in relation to a request for funding towards the skate park, which had been submitted. This scheme had not scored sufficiently high enough to be considered for funding. Cllr Gough explained that the current skate park had been damaged and needed to be replaced or repaired. Whilst fundraising had been taking place applications for grant funding from various organisations had not been successful. He asked if consideration could be

given to a reduced amount of money being granted so that either repairs could be progressed, or smaller sections of Skate Park could be purchased in stages.

The managing director recommended that the best way forward would be for the current fundraising group to establish themselves as a properly constituted entity; they could then make an application to the community grants scheme detailing a business case, which may score more highly.

Members asked what the section 106 monies from the various housing developments at Earls Barton had been spent on, what was left and if any conditions were attached thereto. The managing director would ask for this information to be provided via a members' briefing note.

The report also detailed the supplementary budget request to support the Warm Home Fund Initiative; along with a request for section 106 funding to be utilised for asbestos removal to enable a contaminated area at Ladywell allotments to be brought back into use.

Members discussed the recommended schemes and were particularly pleased that 43a/44a High Street would be converted into residential properties, and that the public realm improvements to Croyland Gardens and the Tithe Barn would be carried out. There was some concern that surveillance cameras to alleviate fly tipping had not scored more highly, as fly tipping was considered to be a blight on the landscape across the borough, however it had scored sufficiently to be recommended for approval. The chairman thanked members for their comments and concurred with the issues regarding fly tipping which he was planning to address with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

A query was raised over the multi-storey car park and the report which estimated that the lifespan of the car park could increase by 50 years, if the council invested in repairs of £2m. The assistant director clarified that this information had been provided by experts, but was subject to the concrete being repaired and waterproofing taking place. A further survey would be sought prior to any contract being awarded and such contract would need to contain a guarantee of workmanship and expected lifespan.

Members noted the number of items that were to be progressed and asked if the ambitious programme would be realised.

The chairman concurred that this was indeed an ambitious programme but the property and projects team was now fully staffed and a considerable amount of progress was being made on these projects, any concerns or delays would be reported back to committee.

R2 RECOMMENDED that approval be given to:

- (i) the capital funding being made available for the financial years 2019-20 to 2023-24, as detailed in the appendix;

- (ii) the prioritised capital schemes being released into the current capital programme;
- (iii) the list of schemes as shown in appendix B, and to the schemes in schedule 1 for release into the capital programme 2019-20 to 2023-24;
- (iv) the inclusion of the supplementary budget request, as detailed in section 7 of the report, in the agreed capital programme;
- (v) the previously awarded section 106 funding for Ladywell allotments being used towards asbestos removal

7. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2019/20

The annexed circulated report of the assistant director was received in relation to the publication, by 1 April 2019, of the Pay Policy Statement.

The draft Pay Policy Statement was appended to the report.

R3 RECOMMENDED that approval be given to the Pay Policy Statement 2019/20 for publication by 1 April 2019.

8. HOUSING OPTIONS UPDATE

The annexed circulated report of the director was received in relation to the costs and service delivery of the housing options service.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix 1: Management information;
- Appendix 2: Temporary accommodation – costs and mitigation with circulated up to date information
- Appendix 3: Housing internal review;
- Appendix 4: Affordable housing delivery

The assistant director reported that a review of the housing options service had been undertaken by two of the assistant directors who had met with officers to understand the strengths of the service. The outcome of the review emphasised the need to focus on improving staff morale, governance, delivery and performance. There would be a requirement for additional officer support, management direction and the targeted delivery of work streams. The main objectives would be to purchase more homes for temporary accommodation, enable the delivery of affordable homes and work with registered housing providers to meet some of the communities more complex health needs, plus securing arrangements with private landlords to lease their properties to discharge homeless duties.

Members were pleased with the work being undertaken in regard to the provision of housing for families, most of which had been provided within the town. They asked if any consideration had been given to purchasing properties in village locations. The assistant director clarified that this could be a possibility, though cautioned that houses in villages were normally more expensive and not always as readily available to purchase.

RESOLVED to:

- (i) continue with the temporary arrangements for three staff until August 2019 to deliver housing options services, funded from the 2019/2020 revenue budget;
- (ii) approve up to £1m of further capital investment for additional homes to be used for temporary accommodation, the decision on the use of which to be delegated to the leader of the council, the managing director and section 151 officer.

9. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT SERVICE

The annexed circulated report of the director was received in relation to the delivery of the home improvement agency service which was being brought back in house from April 2019.

The report detailed how the service would be managed by the environmental health team for an initial trial period, which would be reviewed in June 2019. The disabled facilities grant application process would also be reviewed and streamlined to ensure efficient working practices, which would enable more grant applications to be delivered for a greater number of customers in need of adaptations and lead to a larger take up of the disabled facilities grant.

R4 RECOMMENDED that approval be given to the revised establishment and staffing structure to deliver the disabled facilities grant service in-house from 1 April 2019.

10. PROPERTY MATTERS

The annexed circulated report of the director was received in relation to the ongoing approved projects identified in the appendices.

Appended to the report were details of the property and projects – current projects; and property and projects – business as usual.

The assistant director clarified that he now had a fully staffed property and projects team who were progressing a carefully prioritised list of projects, he did, however, comment that there was a difference between commitment and delivery and some schemes may not be completed by the commencement of the unitary authority, should this progress, but the projects would be committed and underway.

Members asked if in future there could be a column added to the appendices showing the timeline deadline.

The assistant director confirmed that it was his intention to add this and he was continuing to develop the timelines and a summary for the future reporting process. The managing director concurred that this was a work in progress and that in future a RAG analysis could also be provided to assist members.

RESOLVED that the progress with regard to the projects as outlined in the appendices be noted.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.10pm.

