

## COUNCIL MEETING – 9 JULY 2019

### REPORT OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

19 June 2019

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman), Partridge-Underwood, (Vice-Chairman), Allebone, Bell, Bone, Emerson, Francis, Gough, Harrington, Morrall, Scarborough and M Waters.

Also present: Mrs L Elliott (Managing Director), Mr S Darcy (Director of Resources/Section 151 Officer), Miss J Thomas (Director of Place and Strategic Growth/Monitoring Officer), Miss K Denton, Mrs V Jessop, Mr A Piper and Mr E Symons (Assistant Directors), Mr N Robinson (Principal Revenue and Benefits Manager) and Mrs C A Mundy (Democratic Services Officer).

(Councillor G Lawman attended as an observer.)

#### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Carr, 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 declarations were made:

Name of Councillor	Minute number	Reason
Bell	Min no. 6 – Capital funding ref: Nene Valley Crematorium	Registerable - Director of Nene Valley Crematorium
Griffiths and Partridge-Underwood	Min no. 9 – Community asset transfer – Bozeat	Personal – both live in Bozeat
Scarborough	Min no. 7 – Treasury Management Outturn	Personal – wife has a contract with Santander Bank

#### 3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 MARCH 2019

The minutes of the resources committee of 20 March 2019 were received.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the resources committee held on 20 March 2019, be confirmed and signed.

The chairman informed the meeting that he intended to change the order of the agenda and that agenda item 13 would be heard first, unless any discussion was required on the exempt appendices.

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

The annexed circulated report, along with exempt appendices, of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the write off, of irrecoverable debts as follows:

• Non-domestic rate cases	£35,337.58
• Council tax cases	£17,394.66
• Housing benefit overpayment cases	£2,354.01

Appended to the report were details of each case with further detail provided in the exempt appendices.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the sum of £55,086.25 of irrecoverable council tax, non-domestic rate and housing benefit overpayment balances be written off;
- (ii) It be noted that the sum of £40,204.37 had been written off under the delegated powers of the section 151 officer.

#### **5. 2018-19 REVENUE OUTTURN**

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the council's revenue expenditure against approved budget for the financial year 2018-19.

The closure of accounts for the 2018-19 financial years had been completed and this included a review of the balance sheet accounts for completeness and accuracy. The accounts would now be subject to internal audit, which may result in amendments to the revenue outturn position which will be reported to resources committee.

The revenue budget had been set in February 2018 at £11.059m, with associated ongoing sustainable funding of £10.604m. To support this £0.46m had been expected to be required from revenue reserves.

The director of resources reported that there had been no requirement to use any general reserves this year. This had been achieved by utilising the flexible use of capital receipts alongside general underspends across services and had resulted in a decrease of £0.311m being required from the initial £10.604m of sustainable funding.

The director of resources clarified that this was a much better position than that reported in March which had indicated that £2.150m would have been required from reserves.

The final outturn position was detailed in the report as follows:

- Net service underspend: £767k (a favourable movement of £1.07m);
- Net increase in external funding: £230k (a favourable movement of £230k).

Further details of the final net service spend was also shown in the appendix to the report.

The report also detailed the variance analysis over £50k, namely budget savings, budget pressures and funding movements. The report further detailed the flexible use of capital receipts and the 2018-19 revenue budget and reserves. The director of resources referred to the reduction in contribution from general reserves of £438k which would have a positive effect on 2019/20.

**RESOLVED** that the outturn position, subject to audit, as outlined in the report along with the reasons for the projected outturn variations as at 31 March 2019 be noted.

## **6. 2018-19 CAPITAL OUTTURN**

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the capital expenditure against approved budget for the financial year 2018-19.

The capital programme had been agreed in February 2018. An updated forecast outturn of £3.719m was reported to committee in March 2019, with the final capital programme monitoring statement for 2018-19, as appended to the report, being £3.274m, being a variation of £0.445m.

The director of resources also gave a verbal update and reported that the majority of capital monies carried over had been spent by May 2019.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix 1 - Capital Outturn report to 31 March 2019;
- Appendix 2 - Capital programme funding position;
- Appendix 3 - Analysis of significant capital budget underspends;
- Appendix 4 - Nene Valley crematorium pathways;
- Appendix 5 - Nene Valley crematorium garden infrastructure.

Reference was also made to the capital programme 2019-20 with an update on new schemes submitted by officers for 1a High Street; 2a High Street; 16a Market Street and 17 Market Street, with further details provided in the report. Reference was also made to a request for a further £100k for the IT Transformation scheme.

(Councillor Bell left the meeting during discussion and voting on the Nene Valley Crematorium update, having a registerable interest as director of Nene Valley Crematorium.)

The report detailed the request received from Nene Valley Crematorium to release £860k into the capital programme, from the previously approved in principle budget of £1247m. Two business cases were included at appendices 4 and 5.

Members made particular reference to the IT transformation project and asked if the work was proving to be value for money. The director responded that the works were ongoing but scheduled to complete on time and were necessary to ensure we were ready for local government reform.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the outturn position on the capital programme and the reasons for the variances as shown at appendix 1 be noted;
- (ii) the positions on the funding of the capital programme and the reprofiling of budgets at appendix 2 be noted;

**R1 RECOMMENDED** that:

- (i) approval be given to the release of £860k for future infrastructure development of the crematorium site, as detailed in appendix 4;
- (ii) approval be given to the inclusion of the additional budget requests as detailed in section 7 in the agreed 2019-20 capital programme.

(Councillor Bell re-joined the meeting.)

## **7. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN – ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19**

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the annual report of treasury management activity for 2018-19. The treasury management function contributes towards the council's overall objective of the efficient use of resources. The council complied with the code requirements for the 2018/19 financial year.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Prudential indicators for the year 2018-19;
- Economic overview.

The report made reference to investments and money market transactions, investment trusts, borrowing and future prospects and the director of resources reported that there had been a 1% return on investments.

**RESOLVED** that approval be given to the treasury management outturn position.

At this point of the meeting the chairman asked the director of resources to update members on the delay with the audit process. He explained that the new auditors had been appointed by the government and had experienced staffing issues resulting in a delay to the completion of audits for the whole of Northamptonshire. Members asked if this was breach of contract and what redress there would be. The managing director informed the committee that she had drafted a letter on behalf of all the Northamptonshire chief executives to request compensation. This had resulted in a negative response that nothing could be done. It was suggested that this matter be escalated to the local MPs to raise in Parliament. The chairman believed they had already raised this as an issue. On a positive note the new unitary councils would be able to choose their own auditors.

## **8. PROPERTY MATTERS**

The annexed circulated report of the director was received to provide an update on ongoing approved projects, as per the list of current projects appended to the report.

Members asked for clarity on the following to which the assistant director responded:

PP012 - Drill Hall - One bid had been received and pre-planning advice had been recommended to give an indication of whether planning consent could be obtained. There had been demonstrable progress with this item.

PP006 – Bassett’s Park Skate Park - Work had been ongoing to encourage the community to form a constituted group, which would enable them to bid for additional funding, which the council would be unable to do. This would potentially double the funding and enhance the scheme that could be provided. Work was ongoing on this and the assistant director would provide members with a briefing note on progress.

PP001 - Redhill Farm Roads and Sewers – there had been a lack of progress with this, due to the issues with the county council. Officers were pushing for this to be completed.

PP027 – Greatwell Homes land rationalisation – considerable progress had been made on this and a report would be submitted to members in September.

Members also asked that as there was an additional year to vesting day whether deferred projects could be brought forward.

The managing director clarified that a member briefing on priorities for the future would be organised. She did, however, caution that the structural change order, expected in October or November, may contain certain constraints under section 24, where project expenditure may have to be approved by the joint committee over a cost threshold of £1m. This would also apply to revenue commitments over £250,000, although these are yet to be agreed. This would be a direction from the Secretary of State.

The chairman also informed members that there would be a member briefing session held in relation to the multi-storey car park and town centre improvements.

**RESOLVED** that the progress made on the projects outlined within the appendix be noted.

## **9. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER REQUEST**

(Councillors Griffiths and Partridge-Underwood had both declared an interest remained in the council chamber, but did not participate in the discussion or voting on this item.)

The annexed circulated report, open appendix and exempt appendix, of the director was received in relation to a request to transfer the land at Bozeat village green, in accordance with the approved community asset transfer policy.

The application, from Bozeat parish council, for the transfer of land at the village green was appended to the report. The land had been used and maintained by the parish council for over 30 years. The village green was used to host regular events and a flagpole and electricity supply had been installed.

The application was for a freehold transfer, which is not in accordance with the community asset transfer policy, however, the committee could, if it wished, agree to the disposal of the freehold, subject to the transfer including sufficient protection of the asset for future use by the public.

Members discussed the proposal before them and considered that this was an excellent proposal and use of this piece of land. Councillor Gough proposed that the freehold of the land be transferred to Bozeat Parish Council; this was seconded by Councillor Bell and on being put to the vote declared carried.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) approval be given to the freehold transfer of the land at Bozeat, edged red on the appended plan, to Bozeat Parish Council;
- (ii) the terms of the freehold transfer be negotiated between the council's corporate landlord and the parish council in order to ensure that the council's interests are protected.

## **10. HOUSING OPTIONS UPDATE**

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

During 2018 the committee had received reports about the budget pressures of the increasing temporary accommodation placements, and additional case

work since the introduction of the new homeless reduction act and increases in service costs and staffing concerns.

The report detailed that homeless cases and the demand for homes continued to increase; though homelessness placements into temporary and emergency hotel accommodation had reduced and were at a three year low. This was as a direct result of implementing measures to mitigate homeless, through homeless prevention initiatives, experienced staffing arrangements and robust case management, along with the purchase and letting of properties by the council for temporary accommodation use.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix 1- Management information (homeless applications, housing register applications and temporary accommodation use);
- Appendix 2 - Temporary accommodation (costs and mitigation);
- Appendix 3 - Affordable housing delivery;
- Appendix 4 - Current staff structure.

Additional temporary officer capacity had been directed to reducing the use and cost of temporary accommodation placements and this has, had a significant impact.

Grants to landlords had been provided to secure accommodation and early help crisis payments had been made to help maintain existing accommodation, or access alternatives, which had also reduced the costs and levels of temporary accommodation use.

Management direction and experienced homeless officer casework management had assisted with the flow of new homeless applications and whilst casework was still more than average per officer it was predicted that this would reduce and become more manageable.

Additional capacity was needed and would be directed towards the housing register as detailed in appendix 1. During the coming six months the focus of the service would be directed to housing register administration and housing enabling to encourage more affordable homes to be built to meet housing needs. More homes would also be secured in the private sector with officers providing assistance and support to landlords and tenants to sustain tenancies.

There was a need for more housing association homes to discharge homeless duty and prevent homelessness through the council's housing register. Funding has been set aside to purchase properties for use as temporary accommodation and this had helped mitigate against the rising cost of homelessness. Appendix 3 further detailed the number of housing association affordable homes coming forward.

To reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation further, and manage the levels of homeless and housing register applications, there was a need to

continue the employment of experienced skilled case workers. A current structure chart was appended to the report detailing the vacancy levels within the service. A recruitment exercise had been unsuccessful and the use of temporary agency staff would need to continue until skilled candidates could be appointed.

Members across the meeting thanked the assistant director and all the housing team for the excellent work they had undertaken over the preceding months, with early intervention and radical steps taken to meet the challenges, the achievements of the service were exemplary.

A member also asked who would be responsible for housing services after vesting day. It was clarified that this would fall under the unitary council of North Northamptonshire.

The assistant director thanked members for their kind words which she would pass onto her team. She did also offer to hold another member briefing to explain the process for housing tenancies. This was welcomed.

**RESOLVED** that temporary arrangements continue until July 2020 for three staff to deliver housing options services, with the decision on the financing of this being delegated to the leader of the council and the director of resources (S151 officer).

## **11. UNITARY – PROGRESS UPDATE**

The annexed circulated report of the managing director was received to update members on the unitary proposal submitted in August 2018.

The report detailed the decision of the Secretary of State to proceed with the proposal and put the Structural Change Order (SCO) before Parliament in the autumn. The announcement was appended to the report.

The North Northamptonshire Joint Committee would meet on 24 June 2019 to consider issues arising from the creation of the shadow authority including its constitution, members' remuneration and the process for appointing interim chief officers.

Vesting day had been confirmed as being 1 April 2021 and the following points were clarified:

- BCW will continue to operate and provide services in its area until 31 March 2021;
- The term of office of current councillors will be extended until that date;
- BCW will prepare its own budget and accounts for 2020/21;
- Councillors elected to the shadow authority will be 'twin hatters' if they are also members of this council (or any of the other constituent councils of North Northamptonshire) in May 2020.



The Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had asked for the sovereign councils to consider whether the shadow authority should be set up immediately following the approval of the SCO, expected to be in September/October 2019 (option 1); or whether the shadow authority should be set up after the elections in May 2020 (option 2).

Under option 1, all members of the sovereign councils in both the West and North areas would become members of the relevant shadow authority. Under option 2, the shadow authority would only form once the elections to it had taken place and would have a membership of 78.

It was considered that option 2 provided a much cleaner arrangement with key decisions being made by people who have been elected to each unitary council. This was the option preferred by MHCLG and was also the clear preference of leaders across the council.

MHCLG is also seeking views on the proposal to cancel the 2020 district and borough elections. Leaders unanimously considered that this should be agreed. It had also been recognised that some members may not wish to continue for an extended term and MHCLG had asked what the preference would be on the period of time, post the May 2020 elections, where no by-elections would be held. The period would normally be six months but it is recommended that this period be extended to 12 months, so no by-elections are held between May 2020 and Vesting day of 1 April 2021.

The report also referred to the implementation of the programme which would commence with the 'discovery and design' phase being carried out countywide and the subsequent 'implementation and stabilisation phases being conducted separately in West and North Northamptonshire.

The managing director, in consultation with the leader, also referred to the membership of the local government reform sub-committee which had been agreed at annual council on 21 May 2019.

It was proposed that the membership be updated and that the following councillors be appointed thereto:

Councillors Griffiths, Partridge-Underwood, Allebone, Graves and Harrington (Conservative members) and Councillors Francis and Scarborough (Labour members.)

On being put to the vote this was declared carried.

Members discussed the options before them and agreed that option 2 would be the best way forward with the shadow authority commencing after the elections in May 2020. They also agreed that the district and borough council elections, scheduled for May 2020, be cancelled and that no by-elections be held for a period of 12 months from May 2020 to vesting day of 1 April 2021.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the latest update on the unitary situation be noted;
- (ii) the managing director and leader of the council be authorised to advise the MHCLG of the council's preference for the shadow authorities to come into being after the elections to it in May 2020 (option 2); for the district and borough council elections, scheduled for May 2020, to be cancelled; and that no by-elections be held for the period of 12 months from May 2020 to Vesting Day on 1 April 2021.
- (iii) approval be given to Councillors Griffiths, Partridge-Underwood, Allebone, Graves, Harrington, Francis and Scarborough being appointed to the local government reform sub-committee.

(Councillor M Waters abstained from voting on this item.)

**12. URGENT ACTION TAKEN: GRANT FUNDING FOR VOLUNTARY IMPACT NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

The annexed circulated report of the director of resources was received in relation to an urgent action taken to authorise a one-off voluntary sector grant payment of £7140 to Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire.

This payment would enable the voluntary sector to engage with communities across the county through the restructure of local government. Each of the district and borough councils had been asked to support the work on an equal basis. The urgent action form was appended to the report.

Some members were disappointed that this decision had been made via the urgent action process as they would not have supported the application for funding, as they considered that previously the support for ViN had been from the county council. It was suggested that ViN be encouraged to attend a meeting of the partnerships and performance committee to give a presentation of their work.

The managing director clarified that when ViN had presented to her and fellow chief executives she had challenged them and asked a number of questions to ensure that the work they were doing in relation to local government reform and engagement with the community was relevant for Wellingborough.

**RESOLVED** that the urgent action taken be noted.

**13. URGENT ACTION TAKEN: CAPITAL FUNDING FOR NENE VALLEY CREMATORIUM**

The annexed circulated report of the assistant director was received in relation to the urgent action taken to authorise the use of a Nene Valley Crematorium capital project underspend to fund the previously approved scheme for the skylight, to enable the work to progress with as little impact to business as possible.

The urgent action was appended to the report.

**RESOLVED** that the urgent action taken be noted.

The director of resources gave a verbal update on an additional urgent action that had recently been taken in relation to the provision of free market stalls between the period 27 July 2019 and 17 August 2019 for the duration of the 'beach event'. It was hoped that this would attract more traders. There would be a maximum loss of income of around £1000.00. This would formally be reported to committee in September as an urgent action.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.40pm.

