

COUNCIL MEETING – 20 OCTOBER 2020

REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

30 September 2020

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman), Partridge-Underwood (Vice-Chairman), Allebone, Bell, Emerson, Francis, Graves, Harrington, Henley, L Lawman, Morrall, Scarborough, Skittrall, Ward and Weatherill.

Also present: Mr S Darcy (Director/Section 151 Officer), Mr A Piper and Mr E Symons (Assistant Directors), Mrs C A Mundy (Senior Democratic Services Officer (Committees and Members)) – minute taker, Mrs F Hubbard (Senior Democratic Services Officer (Civic)) – meeting producer.

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

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 was made:

| Councillor | Minute no. | Reason |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Emerson | Min 5 Financial monitoring and position statement for 2020-21 | Personal – Involved with the Victoria Centre |
| Graves | Min 5 Financial monitoring and position statement for 2020-21 | Personal – Member and user of Shire Community Services scheme |
| Henley | Min 5 Financial monitoring and position statement for 2020-21 | Other interest Active Volunteer with One Wellingborough |
| L Lawman | Min 4 Community Asset Transfer- Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre | Personal – Husband is speaking on this item and is a member of Hemmingwell Skills Centre |
| | Min 5 Financial monitoring and position statement for 2020-21 | Personal Husband is a director of Shire Community Services. |

| | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| Scarborough | Min 4 Community Asset Transfer – Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre | Other interest He knows one of the trustees well as a former close colleague at UoN |
| Skittrall | Min 5 Financial monitoring and position statement for 2020-21 | Other interest Director of Shire Services |

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 24 JUNE 2020

The minutes of the resources committee of 24 June 2020 were received.

It was proposed by Councillor L Lawman and seconded by Councillor Partridge-Underwood that the minutes be adopted.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the resources committee held on 24 June 2020, be confirmed and signed.

4. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER REQUEST – HEMMINGWELL COMMUNITY AND SKILLS CENTRE

The annexed circulated report of the assistant director was received to consider a request for a community asset transfer of the Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre, in accordance with the approved community asset transfer policy.

An application had been received from the Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre, requesting a community asset transfer. The centre had been occupied under a lease for a number of years.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix 1 - Business Case;
- Appendix 2 – Response to queries;
- Appendix 3 – Valuation;
- Appendix 4 – Budget information;
- Appendix 5 – Profit and loss financial information;
- Appendix 5 – Draft 2019 accounts

The Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre CIO had originally submitted a CAT application in September 2019 requesting the transfer of the centre to the CIO. The documents were reviewed and feedback provided on the application, which showed the positive work carried out at the centre. At that time further information had been requested on how the centre would be managed.

A more detailed application had subsequently been received, and this indicated that new service initiatives would be offered such as the provision of a youth club, library, IT and training facilities alongside meeting space for the use of the community. The centre provided an important role in supporting and sustaining the community particularly during the current crisis.

The application requested the freehold transfer of the Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre, however, members were advised that as part of the recently completed transfer of assets to Greatwell Homes, the freehold of the property was to be included in such transfer to Greatwell Homes and would therefore not be able to be transferred to the Hemmingwell Community Skills Centre. The centre would be given a 25 year lease, on a nominal rent, to ensure security for a significant period of time, should the CAT be approved. If the CAT was not successful the freehold would be transferred to Greatwell Homes with no lease in place meaning the facility would have to close. Greatwell Homes wishes to support the facility, but is unable to contribute financially to the running costs; however, they have agreed to grant a long lease on a nominal rent if the application succeeds.

If the CAT was successful the current rental payment of £15,000 per annum would be reduced to a nominal rent, plus service charge, and would allow re-allocation of the income the CIO receives from centre activities to maintain the building and pay for staff and services.

The report recommended that the CAT be approved.

The chairman thanked the assistant director for the report. Two requests to address the meeting had been received from Mr Knaggs and Ms Brown from the centre. Mr Knaggs had been unable to attend the meeting and had submitted his apologies. Councillor G Lawman had also made a request to speak. Each speaker addressed the meeting.

Ms Brown stressed the importance of the centre for the community, which had an active food pantry providing hot food to children, weekly vegetable and meat boxes for those who were struggling in the current climate; various groups also met at the centre and work was ongoing with Northamptonshire Rights and Equalities Council to target and engage with black people on the estate. There was also educational coaching for young people. Prior to the pandemic the hall had been used for social events, such as birthday parties and it was hoped that this would continue in the future. It was an invaluable asset for those living on the Hemmingwell estate.

Councillor Lawman also spoke and reminded members of the invaluable work undertaken by Simon Trundle, from the Hope Church, and from Goodwill Solutions. The business case referred to the proposed rebranding of the centre – to be known as The Nest – and the vision that it would be similar to a village hall with the centre being used for lots of different things for the health and well being of those living on the Hemmingwell estate. Volunteers from the community would be involved with assisting those employed to make The Nest

a success. Whilst the preference would be for the freehold of the premises to be transferred it was noted that the intention was for this to pass to Greatwell Homes who, in turn, would lease the premises, at a nominal rent, to the centre.

Members discussed the report. Many praised the invaluable support that the centre had given over the years, helping to bring the community together and providing social events, sports facilities, hot meals, meeting rooms and educational support. It was felt that the business plan was very ambitious, and that there would be a need for fundraising in the future as it was expected that current funding, for example from the county council, would cease and it was not known what the future intention of the North Northamptonshire Council would be with regard to grant funding. Members remembered the excellent work undertaken by Mr Trundle and believed that the centre would thrive and flourish with the help of volunteers from the community.

Councillor Partridge-Underwood proposed the motion within the report, which was seconded by Councillor Morrall.

On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Approval be given to the community asset transfer of the Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre in accordance with the community asset transfer policy;
- (ii) delegated authority be given to the assistant director (corporate landlord) to review the assessment of the social value of the services to be provided by the CIO.

(The speakers left the meeting.)

5. FINANCIAL MONITORING AND POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2020-21

The annexed circulated report on the section 151 officer was received to detail the monitoring position of the revenue expenditure.

This was the first monitoring report for the 2020-2021 financial year.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix 1 - Revenue monitoring position to 31 July 2020;
- Appendix 2 – Community and voluntary support grants 2020-2021.

Mr Darcy, Executive Director/Section 151 Officer reported that the revenue monitoring position was currently showing a forecast overspend of £116k, made up from a number of net pressures and efficiencies, including the increased cost of mixed recyclates per tonne and the pressures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. He would be calling an informal meeting in October to discuss the Covid pressures and was hopeful that funding would be forthcoming from the government to offset the current expenditure.

He also referred members to section 7 of the report.

Following discussions with the future Northants place programme it had transpired that all the north authorities had voluntary support contracts/agreements in place until at least March 2022. It was therefore recommended that the borough council extend the regular community and voluntary support grants, totalling £159k, for a further year to March 2022.

This proposal, if approved, would be recommended to the North Northamptonshire shadow authority in the medium term financial plan, for the future North Northamptonshire Council.

Members discussed the information within the report, particularly around the budget pressures and costs incurred for recycles and IT provision and queried the amount of the Covid support grant and the expenditure incurred.

Mr Darcy confirmed that some of the costs with regard to the recycling were for the additional distance contaminated waste was transported for disposal, it also related to the end of the existing contract, with rates of disposal increasing considerably. The increase in IT costs was for the setting up of virtual meetings and the provision of hardware at the start of the Covid pandemic.

(The chairman adjourned the meeting for a few minutes as there was a technical issue with the live streaming of the meeting. The problem was resolved and the meeting recommenced.)

Members gave their full support to the extension to the funding feeling that this would give more certainty to the voluntary sector over the next month when their services would be required more and more.

Councillors also referenced Nene Valley Community Action (NVCA) which had been set up to provide infrastructure in both East Northamptonshire and then Wellingborough. It was believed that there were no longer premises in Wellingborough and officers were asked to ascertain that they were still providing the assistance that they had been set up to do. Another member commented on the excellent service that had been provided by NVCA in the Kingsway area. Mr Darcy clarified that all voluntary groups were monitored and checks were in place. If performance and outcomes were not of the standard expected, the council would go out to the market for an alternative delivery provider.

The motion within the report was proposed by Councillor Partridge-Underwood and seconded by Councillor Harrington. On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the position on the revenue monitoring and the reasons for the variances reported and detailed in appendix 1 be noted;

- (ii) approval be given, in principle, to extend the council's current community support grant agreements and service level agreements with the voluntary sector organisations as set out in section 7 of this report and appendix 2, and make a recommendation to the North Northamptonshire Shadow Authority that the financial provisions to cover the agreement extensions be included in the 2021/22 draft budget for the new North Northamptonshire Council.

6. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING

The annexed circulated report of the section 151 officer was received in relation to the capital programme monitoring information available to 31 July 2020.

The report detailed that the total capital budget for 2020-21 of £19.660m was reported to the resources committee in June 2020. Subsequent updates and amendments were reported to the committee with a revised capital budget for 2020-21 of £13.949m.

Appended to the report were the following:

Appendix 1 - Capital outturn report to 31 July 2020;
Appendix 2- Capital programme funding position.

Updates and amendments to the 2020-21 capital programme were further detailed in the report. Also detailed were the schemes that were unlikely to be completed within the financial year with £5,512m being carried forward to 2021-2022.

The report also detailed a request for budget funding of £170k to install a water feature in the tithe barn area of the town centre.

A request for capital funding had been submitted for a budget of £69k to improve protection within a number of local parks, car parks and open spaces which are deemed a high risk for traveller incursion. Work had already been undertaken at Kingsway to ensure that encampments were prevented.

The executive director referred members to section 6 of the report which outlined the 5.5m of reprofiling being schemes identified that were unlikely to complete within the financial year. The revised capital programme was now £14m which was fully committed. It was expected that there would be substantial spend of £8.5m by the end of October and a significant higher spend before the end of the year.

Members asked questions around the reprofiling, particularly around the compulsory purchase orders.

The executive director responded taking on board the comments made. He clarified that the slippages related to a small proportion of the capital budget

and were less than £1m. In relation to the CPO project this would be looked at by the North Northamptonshire Council as part of a wider remit.

There was particular concern, and disappointment, that the most vulnerable and those who were desperate for modifications due to their disability, had not been getting the adaptations that they urgently needed to improve their lives. Covid had made life even harder for those with additional needs and it was considered that this needed to be given priority. It was also considered that the planned works at Castle Theatre should have been progressed during the shut down.

The executive director responded to the concern. He explained that the council had tried to bring back in house some services under the disabled facilities grant from Greatwell Homes. Some services were also connected to the county council and ongoing discussions were taking place about the delays. Once the unitary council was in place it was hoped that there would be greater control. He would arrange for a member briefing note to be issued on progress.

With regard to the Castle Theatre a number of employees had been furloughed until the end of October. There was also a need to establish how the Covid changes would impact the theatre operationally and the earlier specification would be revisited to ensure it was fit for purpose.

Reference was made to the brooks and waterways project, members were pleased to see that the contract had been let and asked when works would commence. The executive director clarified that work would be starting soon.

Some members considered that the cost of the proposed water feature at the Tithe Barn was high and wondered if the money could be spent in a different way. There was concern regarding potential vandalism and in regard to the cost of the monthly maintenance.

Other members felt that concerns raised over vandalism were negative and that the water feature would be a considerable asset to the town. Many councillors had commented over the years on the benefits of a café culture when visiting different countries and how water features always attracted people and gave a nice environment for people to sit and take in the ambience of the area where there were lots of iconic buildings in this location. The monthly maintenance costs were necessary to make sure that all health and safety issues around water were taken into consideration. It was believed that residents needed and deserved a nice area to sit and take in the environment around them.

A lengthy debate ensued.

Members were reminded that the Wellingborough Town Centre Regeneration Working Group had held a number of meetings regarding the regeneration of the town centre and that this was its recommendation. The people of the town would, however, be able to pass comment on the public realm consultation

and these comments would be taken into consideration before a final decision was made.

The debate concluded and the chairman put the motion, as detailed in the report, to the meeting.

Items (i) to (iii) were declared carried.

Recommendation (i) was declared carried with 12 votes in favour and three votes against.

Recommendation (ii) was declared carried.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the projected outturn and anticipated variances as at 31 July 2020 be noted;
- (ii) the external funding as detailed in appendix 2 be noted;
- (iii) the updates and amendments to the 2020-2021 capital programme as detailed in the report at section 6 be noted;

R1 RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) approval be given, in principle, to the request for capital funding of £170k as shown in section 7 of the report;
- (ii) approval be given to the request for a capital budget of £69k, to improve protection within a number of local parks, as detailed in section 8 of the report, into the current 2020-21 capital programme.

7. PROPERTY MATTERS

The annexed circulated report of the director was received to give an update on the current situation with property matters.

Appended to the report were the following:

Appendix 1 – Current projects;

Appendix 2 – Former youth club, Orchard Road, Finedon

Mr Piper presented the report and gave an update on the High Street/Jacksons Lane site. Deloitte, the council's consultant had been in regular contact with the proposed developer, who had been provided with pre-application advice from the planning officers that they were currently considering. Officers were hoping that a report could be presented to the council meeting on 20 October and that a conditional contract could be entered into to dispose of the site to Keepmoat. This would protect both the council and the developer's interests. Officers would hold an informal drop in session for members in advance of the meeting to enable members to raise questions.

Members discussed the report raising queries in relation to the Youth Club and whether rental payments had been received. Mr Piper responded that the building had originally been let on very long lease for a nominal rent. The tenant had abandoned the premises and possession was required to enable it to be declared surplus to requirements so that a decision on its future could be made. More than one party had expressed an interest in the building should it return to the council.

A query regarding the multi storey car park works had been raised with Mr Piper in relation to the standard of the workmanship and what remedial work would be undertaken.

Mr Piper updated members and said that the concerns had been reported to the contractors and he had been informed that the works had been carried out but he would make further enquiries and provide a member briefing note giving an update on the position.

Reference was made to the cycling and walking schemes which were being developed with the county council who were the lead authority. The St Barnabas scheme had been developed with the borough council and had been a success. There was concern about the county council schemes located in the town centre which some members thought had proved to be inappropriate.

Mr Piper clarified that these schemes weren't detailed in this report as they were a county council project but he would provide a member briefing note about the work and discussions that were taking place for member's information. With regard to the council owned cycleways an inspection of these would be carried out following issues raised by members of the public.

Members also raised concern over the lack of a crossing for access from the Queensway/Northampton Road end of Wellingborough to Wilby. Residents from the new development to the rear of Sainsbury's at Park Farm Way, also needed to be able to cross the road to enjoy the countryside and it was considered that this should be a priority. Mr Piper clarified that this was already the subject of discussion.

Members referenced the High Street and the verbal update provided by Mr Piper. Clarity was sought over what decision the report would be asking for. Mr Piper confirmed that at a council meeting in 2012 agreement had been reached over the proposed developer. The decision now was about whether to sell the land and enter into a conditional contract, which would protect both the council and the developer. This would be an 'in principle' decision. The chairman clarified that such decision would be taken by full council.

Members were concerned that officers intended to bring the High Street report to the next council meeting in October. It was considered that a decision of this scale needed to be fully scrutinised and it was suggested that this report be presented to the next resources committee and that it be recommended to council for the final decision. The decision was of great public interest and it was felt that they needed the opportunity to get involved.

(The chairman informed the meeting that Councillor Skittrall had lost connectivity during the discussion and would therefore abstain from voting.)

Councillor Henley proposed an amendment to the proposed action to add an additional item at 4.4 as follows:

“that a report relating to the High Street site be presented to the next resources committee for recommendation to the following council meeting.”

This was seconded by Councillor Francis.

Members considered the amendment and were happy that this should go through the process of the committee structure. It was, however, noted that at the public meeting it had been promised that the decision would be taken by full council. Members agreed that it should be a full council decision but were happy for it to be discussed in detail by the resources committee in the first instance. It was noted that this did not necessarily need to be the next scheduled meeting as an additional resources committee, to discuss this one item, could be called and the recommendation could then be presented to an extraordinary council meeting for the final decision.

Members debated the options and it was agreed that the proposed amendment be updated as follows:

“That a report relating to the High Street be presented to an additional resources committee, for recommendation to an extraordinary council meeting, who would make the final decision.”

Councillors Henley and Francis accepted this slight change to the original amendment.

This updated amendment was put to the vote and declared carried.

This became the substantive motion, in addition to the proposed actions contained in the report, and on being put to the vote, all were declared carried.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the progress made with regard to the projects outlined in appendix 1 be noted;
- (ii) approval be given, in principle, to the disposal of the site of the former Youth Club at Orchard Road, Finedon;
- (iii) Officers be instructed to bring a further report to the committee regarding the options for the disposal of the site as detailed above;
- (iv) a report relating to the High Street/Jacksons Lane site be presented to an additional resources committee, which in turn would make a recommendation to an extraordinary council meeting, for the final decision to be made.

8. IRRECOVERABLE COUNCIL TAX, HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS AND SUNDRY DEBTS

The annexed circulated report and exempt appendices of the assistant director was received in request the write off of irrecoverable debts.

The total amount of irrecoverable debt is detailed below:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Council tax | 54,832.88; |
| Household benefit overpayment cases | 6,574.64; |
| Sundry debts | 49,400.08; |
| Non-domestic rates | 19,822.68 |

RESOLVED that approval be given:

- (i) to the write-off of £130,630.28 of irrecoverable council tax and housing benefit overpayment balances;
- (ii) to note that the amount of £82,715.32 has been written off under the delegated powers of the section 151 officer.

9. ANY OTHER ITEM THAT THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES IS URGENT

The chairman had no further business to discuss and thanked everyone for their attendance; and officers for the organisation and conduct during the meeting; before declaring the meeting closed.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 9.50pm.

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