



Policy and Resources Committee

Minutes

Tuesday, 08 November 2022 at 18:00

PRESENT:-

Councillor Smith (in the Chair); Councillors P Carpenter, Candon, Flaxman-Taylor, Grant, P Hammond, Jeal, Myers, Wainwright, Wells, Williamson, B Walker & A Wright

Ms K Sly (Finance Director), Ms C Whatling (Monitoring Officer), Mrs K Blakemore (Strategic Director), Mrs P Boyce (Strategic Director), Mr S Brabben (Revenue & Benefits Service Manager), Mrs M Lee (Head of Customer Services), Mr J Wilson (Head of Environment & Sustainability), Mr J Wedon (Senior Performance & Data Protection Officer), Mr C Silverwood (Director of Operational Services), Mr M Brett (IT Support), Mrs S Wintle (Corporate Services Manager) & Mrs C Webb (Democratic Services Officer).

01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the Chief Executive Officer.

02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared at the meeting.

03 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 27 September 2022 were confirmed subject to the following amendment :-

Item 6 - The wording it was hoped - be added following the wording the Chairman assured Members that.

04 FORWARD PLAN

Members were advised of an item to be added to the Forward Plan - Local Plan Initial Consultation, would be added to the Forward Plan and be brought to the December meeting.

Members noted the contents of the Forward Plan.

05 FINAL DRAFT OPEN SPACE SPD

Members received and considered the Principal Strategic Planner's report which asked Members to consider endorsing the Final Draft Open Space SPD for consultation.

The Principal Strategic Planner reported that the Open Space Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was a supporting planning guidance document that would explain when on and off-site provision of open space would be required and how much off-site provision and maintenance would cost.

It was advised that the requirement for new residential development to provide open space was already set out in Policy H4 of the adopted LPP2. This SPD would help developers to meet such requirements.

It was reported that the document had been supported by evidence set out in the Open Space Needs Assessment and Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy to identify which parts of the Borough were in need of open space

The Principal Strategic Planner advised that an initial consultation had already taken place to consider the content of the SPD. Some relatively minor changes had been made to the document following this. A consultation statement was appended to the report setting out how comments had been considered.

Members noted that the Local Plan Working Party had considered and endorsed the SPD to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee on the 18th October.

It was advised that as an SPD, the final draft document must be consulted along with screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). Subject to endorsement the SPD could be consulted over a minimum of 4 weeks, any subsequent final changes made, and the document would be presented again to this Committee for adoption (Feb/Mar).

RESOLVED :

That Committee endorsed the final Final Draft Open Space SPD for

consultation.

06 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2023/24

Members received and considered the Head of Customer Services Report.

The Head of Customer Services advised Members that the report sought endorsement on the recommendations for the 2023 Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

The Head of Customer Services referred Members to the Committee report of the 12th July which sought permission to commence consult in relation to the next years Scheme. The consultation had run for a 12 week period and was based around retaining the existing scheme. Members were advised that limited responses to the consultation were received, however, the results were included at Appendix 1 for information.

It was advised that the estimated costs and funding of the scheme was outlined in section 5 of the report and Members were asked to endorse the recommendations as outlined in section 7 of the report. Members were asked to note that the 2023 scheme would be subject to Full Council Approval.

RESOLVED :

That Committee endorse the recommendation to continue with the existing scheme for 2023/24 which is subject to Council approval - a maximum award of 91.5% of the Council Tax Liability for Working Age.

07 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2023/24

Members received and considered the Revenues and Benefit Service Manager's report.

The Revenues and Benefit Service Manager reported that the Council Tax base was a technical calculation that must be formally set each year. It is the first stage of the Council Tax setting process that will be finalised once the budgets have been agreed

For the purposes of this report the Local Council Tax Support Scheme had been estimated for maximum award of 91.5% for working age claimants.

It was advised that the normal non-collection rate used is 1.75%. However, for this year the non-collection rate had been estimated as higher than normal due to the national cost of living issues at 2.1%.

The calculation of the 2023/24 tax base totalling 29,851 showed a positive growth on prior year of 507.

The report asked the Committee to endorse the calculation of the 2023/24 tax base totalling 29,851 as shown in Appendix A. This was the total number of domestic properties in the Borough using band D as the average property band which is to be

approved by Council.

RESOLVED :

That Committee endorse the calculation of the 2023/24 tax base totalling 29,851 and the estimated tax bases for the Borough and for each parish, as shown in Appendix A of the Revenues and Benefits Manager's report.

08 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS 2023/24

Councillor Grant hereby declared an interest in his capacity as a owner of a large holiday park and advised that he would not take part in the discussion nor vote on this item.

The Committee received and considered the Revenue and Benefits Manager's report.

The Revenue and Benefits Manager reported that under Section 11A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 Councils have discretion in setting the level of council tax charged in respect of these unoccupied properties and second homes.

Page 2 of the report highlighted the proposed discounts for 2023/24 and the equivalent of what was being charged in 2022/23.

It was reported that under the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill legislation currently going through Parliament the government was proposing further changes to take effect from 1 April 2024

In this legislation Councils will be able to exercise their discretion to

1. commence the Empty Property Premium after 1 year of the property becoming empty (instead of after two years)

and

2. Introduce a premium on unoccupied and furnished properties (second homes) of up to 100%.

It was advised that if the council wished to commence the premium from 1 April 2024, then a determination to do so needed to be at least 1 year before the beginning of the financial year it is to commence.

It is proposed that this premium is introduced from 1 April 2024 onto Class B properties, where the Council already charge 100% Council Tax.

The premium would not be charged on Class A properties such as holiday chalets which have various restricted periods on when they can be occupied

A consideration of empty property discount change to take effect from 1 April 2023 could be to remove the 100% discount for properties that are empty between one day and one month. Many local councils no longer give a discount for this period and Great Yarmouth would be merely coming into line with those councils

The committee were asked to endorse the council tax discounts as shown in Table 2 that will apply for 2023/24.

The committee were also asked, pending the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill receiving Royal Assent, to approve changes with effect from 1 April 2024 of the following:

1. The Empty Property premium of 100% for properties that have been empty for one year or more commences from 1 April 2024.
2. The Second Homes Premium of 100% for Class B properties (that we currently charge 100% Council Tax) commences from 1 April 2024.

And that with effect from 1 April 2023

3. the 100% discount for empty properties that are empty for one day and up to one month is removed and therefore a 0% discount is applied

Members were advised that recommendation 3 within the report should state 2023 and not 2024.

Councillor Myers asked in relation to Class D properties and whether this now meant that any developer with an empty property would be exempt from any discounts, this was confirmed.

RESOLVED :

That Committee endorse the following :-

(1) The council tax discounts as shown in Section 3.1 which will apply for 2023/24

(2) The Committee the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill receiving Royal Assent to approve the changes with effect from 1 April 2024 that;

- i) The Empty Property premium of 100% for properties that have been empty for one year or more commences from 1 April 2024
- ii) That the Second Homes Premium of 100% for Class B properties (that we currently charge 100% council tax) commences from 1 April 2024.

(3) The 100% discount for empty properties that are empty for one day and up to one month is removed and so that 0% discount is applied with effect from 1 April 2023.

09 REVENUES WRITE OFF REPORT

Members received and considered the Revenue and Benefits Manager's report.

The Revenue and Benefits Manager advised that the report sought the approval and authorisation of a schedule of individual Business Rate and Sundry Debt accounts where the debt is recommended for write off.

The scheme of delegation for write offs of uncollectible debts means that debts over £10,000 are referred for member approval

Members of the Committee were asked to note that the Committee last considered the Revenues Write off report and schedules of debt in September 2021.

Members were asked to approve and authorise individual write offs as detailed within the Schedule 1 (Business Rates) and Schedule 2 (Sundry Debt) Write Off report.

RESOLVED :

That Committee approve and authorise individual write offs as detailed within the Schedule 1 (Business Rates) and Schedule 2 (Sundry Debt) of the write off report.

10 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the Information Governance Lead and Data Protection Officer's report which presented an update on performance for the second quarter of 2022/23 (Jul – Sep) where progress is assessed against Targets which are set at the start of the financial year.

The report provided an update on the position of key projects that were linked to the corporate priorities from 'The Plan 2020-2025'. A summary of progress for the suite of key projects and individual highlight reports for each of the key projects were presented in Appendix 1 of this report.

The performance measures gave a comprehensive overview of how the authority as a whole was performing and covers most Council functions.

RESOLVED :

That Committee agree:

(1) That all measures to be monitored during the next quarter.

(2) That all key projects will continue to be monitored over the next quarter with the aim of maintaining a green status and where possible attaining a green status for those key projects which are currently amber.

11 2022-23 PERIOD 6 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

Members received and considered the Finance Director's report.

The Finance Director reported that the General Fund Summary at Appendix A showed the high-level budget monitoring position at 30 September 2022 of a deficit position of £88k, against the original budget of £208k. (a surplus of £120k).

Whilst it was noted that this was an improved position than that reported at month 4 it did not include the recently approved pay award increase which was more than estimated to result in a £750k impact. The change in relation to this

will be updated within the month 10 report to be presented later in the financial year. It was also advised that it also didn't account for any inflationary increases in utility charges, currently estimated to have a £90k impact but currently not reflected in the position reported under appendix A. With these factors considered the forecast position is just over £1m deficit for 22/23.

The overall position will continue to be monitored in the current financial year and will be reported to Management Team and Members accordingly, proactive work that is underway in the current year includes review of vacant posts and the impact on services where these continue to be held as vacant, in addition to in year savings.

In addition, a review of the reserves has been considered for the work for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, this will see unallocated reserves released in the current year to provide funding to the general fund reserve.

The capital 2022/23 budget stands at £79.2m as at month 6. Spend is anticipated to increase as the year progresses and currently the forecast spend is £42m with £37.2m to be carried forward into future years. The position will continue to be monitored as projects progress.

The Committee is asked to note the content of the report and the revised forecast for the general fund for 2022/23.

RESOLVED :

That Committee note the content of the report and the revised forecast for the General Fund for 2022/23.

12 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023-24 TO 2025-26

Members received and considered the Finance Manager's report.

The Finance Manager advised that the report presented the medium-term financial strategy for 2023/24 to 2025/26.

The strategy is refreshed each year as part of the preparation for the following years budget process and includes the latest high level financial forecasts which have been updated for known spending pressures and commitments.

The report provided members with an update on the forecast gap for the later financial years from 2023/24 which was currently £2.4m increasing to £3 million by 2025/26.

The projections take into account the current spending pressures, most significantly the impact of the pay award from the current financial year, the continued inflationary pressures and the impact of increases to interest rate.

Members were advised that the continued uncertainty around local

government funding did make the budgeting process somewhat challenging. Whilst further announcements were expected later this month the detail for local government finance will not be known until the provisional finance settlement for 2023/24 is received which we can expect later in December.

It was reported that earlier in the year it was announced that there would be a two year settlement, however, this has not been confirmed at this time.

The MTFS includes details of the assumptions for the level of funding anticipated over the period of the strategy, including council tax, government grant and business rates. The Council has been a member of the Norfolk business rates pool in recent years and this report is recommending that it continues to be a member for 2023/24.

The Council must continue to have a business strategy in place which seeks to reduce the future funding gap by delivering efficiencies and additional income to deliver a sustainable budget in the medium to long term.

The strategy priorities are detailed at section 8 of the strategy document and this is included from page 206 of the agenda. These include:

- strategic asset management
- economic and housing growth
- technological investment
- and reviewing the operating model for the Council to ensure that Council is operating in the most efficient way.
- Identification of savings and additional savings.

The MTFS also provides an updated reserves statement, which provides details on the level of reserves held. The use of reserves should only be seen as a short-term funding option as this is not sustainable in the longer term, although it is expected that there will be a requirement to use reserves in the short term to reduce the forecast gap.

The strategy (at section 8.19) has started to allocate indicative targets for savings and additional income to be delivered over the short to medium term, some of these are estimated to be delivered on the back of work that is currently in train. For example where we have identified assets for disposal that will generate capital receipts that can be used to reduce the pressures on the revenue account from financing the capital programme from borrowing.

In addition to these, allocating targets to identify savings and income in the current and next year totalling £1.25million would require a call on reserves in the short term of £1.6m.

In summary before assuming the level of savings to be delivered there is a forecast gap for next year is £2.4m, this is ahead of the detailed budget work that is currently being undertaken by finance and services and before the consideration of savings and additional income opportunities that will be brought forward for approval as part of the budget reports.

The report is recommending the approval of the MTFS, the updated reserves statement and the continuation of the business rates pool for 2023/24, these are included on page 192 of the agenda.

Councillor Wainwright reported that the MTFS was not good news for the residents of the borough.

RESOLVED :

That Committee recommend to Council :-

- 1) The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the key themes of the business strategy as outlined at Section 8;
- 2) The revised reserves statement as included at Appendix A to the MTFS;
- 3) Continue with the business rates pool for 2023/24 subject to the finalisation of the forecasts for 2023/24 and the outcome local government finance settlement, to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Leader to approve.

13 GREAT YARMOUTH NORSE (GYN) REPORT

The Chairman reported that this item had been removed from the agenda for this evenings meeting.

14 GREEN FLEET STRATEGY (2022-2032)

Members received and considered the Director of Operational Services and Head of Environment and Sustainability's report which provided members with a proposed Green Fleet Strategy which spans the Borough Council's service vehicles and those of the new wholly owned company Great Yarmouth Services (GYS) Limited. In doing so the report set out how the Council will invest in its operational fleet driven by available and emerging low carbon technologies.

The report also asked Members to support an investment and replacement programme to create a new green fleet with a significant reduction in carbon emissions by way of available procurement frameworks. The early adoption of a more sustainable fleet will ensure the Council moves towards in line with its net zero target by 2035.

Members received a presentation from the Director of Operational Services and Head of Environment and Sustainability.

Councillor Grant commented with regard to Bio-Methane and Caister Sewer works, and asked whether any form of communication had been held to discuss a possible opportunity of partnership working with NCC, Caister Sewer Works and GYBC. The Head of Environment and Sustainability advised that he had not been approached by the County Council to discuss this matter.

Councillor Grant further asked for clarity around what the requested £50,000 would be

spent on, it was advised that this had been an estimated amount based on the SLR study and had been set aside to assess the current depot's ability to deliver the future needs of the service, Councillor Grant asked if the sight was deemed unsuitable whether this site would be utilised for housing, the Head of Environment and Sustainability confirmed that if the site was to be deemed unsuitable then alternative uses would be looked at.

Councillor Wells thanked the Officers for the work that had gone in to delivering the report and strategy.

Councillor Myers asked with regard to HVO and sought clarification of where UK supplies would come from and whether they would come from a sustainable source. The Head of Environment and Sustainability confirmed that the current supplier was Ricks and advised that Officers would continue to do their best to get supplies from the most sustainable source.

Members were advised that there had been a slight change to the recommendations within the report, in that recommendation 5 (to become recommendation 6 due to two recommendation 5 within the report) be considered as follows :-

a) Agrees to release of the previously agreed capital budget allocation of £1.13million in 2022/23;

b) **Recommends to Council** the addition of an extra £106,000 (due to a cost increase since the budget was agreed last year) in 2022/23 and the allocation of a further capital spend of £1.7 million in 2023/24 for vehicle acquisitions.

RESOLVED :

That Policy & Resources Committee:

1. Agrees the Green Fleet Strategy as set out in this report including the conversion of the whole fleet from diesel to sustainably sourced fuels including Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) and electric where possible to achieve immediate carbon savings.

2. Supports the replacement of:

(i) Six Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCV) with the latest Euro 6 vehicles to run on HVO in 2022/23 to deliver frontline operational services via the new GYS Limited company.

(ii) Six Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCV) with the latest Euro 6 vehicles to run on HVO in 2023/24

(iii) One Refuse Collection Vehicle (RCV) with electric Refuse Collection Vehicles (eRCV) in 2023/24.

(iv) One panel van with an electric equivalent in 2023/24.

3. Agrees that up to £20,000 per vehicle can be made available to retrofit emerging fuel technology including hydrogen within the fleet of Euro 6 RCVs to reduce fuel and associated carbon emissions further. Subject to the success of the initial trial, there would be an outlay of £20,000 for one vehicle retrofit funded from the invest-to-save reserve.

4. Agrees to release £50,000 from invest-to-save for a feasibility study to assess the current depot's ability to deliver the future needs of the service.

5. Agrees to investigate options for members and the workforce which encourage greater active travel including use of public transport, lift-sharing and salary sacrifice schemes which enable greater uptake of electric vehicles.

6. (a) Agrees to the release of the previously agreed capital budget allocation of £1.13million in 2022/23;

(b) **Recommends to Council** the addition of an extra £106,000 (due to a cost increase since the budget was agreed last year) in 2022/23 and the allocation of a further capital spend of £1.7 million in 2023/24 for vehicle acquisitions.

7. **Recommends to Council** to agree to lease all operational vehicles to the new company Great Yarmouth Services (GYS) Limited and delegates authority to the Deputy Section 151 Officer to agree the lease terms.

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed at the meeting.

16 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

RESOLVED :

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 12(A) of the said Act.

17 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

(Confidential Minute on this Item)

The meeting ended at: 20:00