



GREAT YARMOUTH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council

Minutes

Thursday, 14 December 2023 at 19:00

Her Worship, The Mayor, Councillor P Carpenter, Councillors Annison, Bensly, Bird, Borg, Boyd, Candon, Capewell, G Carpenter, Flaxman- Taylor, Freeman, Galer, Grant, Green, D Hammond, Jeal, Lawn, Martin, McMullen, Murray-Smith, Mogford, Newcombe, Pilkington, Plant, Robinson-Payne, Rundle, Sharp, Smith, Stenhouse, Thompson, Upton, Wainwright, Waters-Bunn, Wells, A Wright & B Wright.

Ms S Oxtoby (Chief Executive Officer), Ms C Whatling (Monitoring Officer), Ms K Sly (Executive Director) - Resources, Mrs P Boyce (Executive Director - People), Mrs S Wintle (Corporate Services Manager), Mrs N Turner (Head of Housing Assets), Mrs M Lee (Head of Customer Services), Mr T Williams (Press & Communications Manager) & Mrs C Webb (Democratic Services Officer).

01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cordiner-Achenbach, Smith-Clare & Williamson.

02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor P Carpenter declared a personal interest in item 12 as she is the Cabinet Member for Children's Services at Norfolk County Council.

Councillors Freeman, Grant, Rundle, Thompson & Wainwright declared a personal interest in item 17 as they are Parish Councillors.

However, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, they were allowed to both speak and vote on the item.

03 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Her Worship, The Mayor, invited Members and Officers present to her Christmas Reception which would be held in the Assembly Room following Council.

04 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council gave a verbal update in respect of County Deal and the recent demolition of five homes at The Marrams, Hemsby.

05 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

Her Worship, The Mayor, informed Council that she had received no items of urgent business.

06 MINUTES

That the minutes of Council held on 27 July be confirmed.

Proposer: Councillor Wainwright

Seconder: Councillor Smith

CARRIED

07 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Cannell from the Great Yarmouth & District Trades Union Council addressed Council and asked the following question:-

The Great Yarmouth and District Trades Union Council would like Great Yarmouth Borough Council to ask Anglian Water when they are going to construct a full sewage treatment works at Caister to replace the existing pumping station. Until such time as that is complete, and raw sewage is no longer being pumped into the North Sea, will Great Yarmouth Borough Council suspend future development in the Borough, until such time as there is an adequate sewage treatment infrastructure for new development has been provided.

Councillor Wells reported that the Borough Council has contacted Anglian Water who are responsible for sewage treatment and future capacity of sewerage

works, and can confirm we have received the following response :-

We have a full sewage works in Caister (not just a pumping station). It is designed for a population equivalent of 170,000 and current estimates of the population equivalent we serve is 108,301; which includes holiday population and trade effluent. It has full treatment on site and discharges via a long sea outfall (approx 1 mile out into the sea).

We design to 'population equivalent'; which is a way of estimating loading numbers which are a standard across the industry. This site is permitted by the EA and they monitor our performance through sampling and visits to site.

If this question is relating to storm flows and the discharges during storm events, Anglian Water have confirmed that Between 1st May - 30th September they have to treat 850l/s before discharging storm and between 1st October to 30th April they have to treat 570l/s. The Environment A do monitor us against this and we have to share spill data with the public and the EA.

The Anglian Water representative has advised that they are always happy to host site visits and take customers around the facility in order to help to understand how the sewerage treatment process works.

Anglian Water are duty bound to manage new connections under Section 94 of the Water Industry Act 1991, making them duty bound to ensure capacity.

Under this duty they work with developers to understand exactly when new developments will be coming on line and plan for it accordingly at the receiving Water Recycling Centre. When assessing network capacity AW take into account the additional foul flows from any new development and look at developers surface water strategy to ensure it meets the surface water hierarchy requirements with a connection to the public sewer a last resort.

If we were to identify any capacity constraints in relation to a new development we will request a planning condition be applied if the planning authority approve the application. This will allow us to work with the applicant on a suitable foul drainage strategy. Any mitigation works are funded via our infrastructure charge.

Anglian Water proactively comment on major applications (10+ dwellings) however, if there are concerns with minor applications we encourage people to contact planningliaison@anglianwater.co.uk and request we make formal comments directly to the relevant planning authority.

Great Yarmouth has no plans to suspend future development in the Borough. There is adequate sewerage treatment works and monitoring of capacity against future development.

Mr Cannell asked a supplementary question. Councillor Wells requested that Mr Cannell submit his supplementary question in writing to enable him to give a full response. Councillor A Wright asked that the response be circulated to all members for information.

Her Worship, The Mayor, thanked Mr Cannell for attending Council and asking his question this evening.

08 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBER FOR THE NORFOLK COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The Leader of the Council proposed that Councillor Lawn be appointed substitute member for the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership. This was seconded by Councillor Plant.

Councillor Wainwright proposed that Councillor Pilkington be appointed as substitute member for the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership.

Proposer: Councillor Smith

Seconder: Councillor Plant

That Council appoint Councillor Lawn as substitute member for the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership.

CARRIED

09 23-150 - REALLOCATION OF UNUSED CASINO LICENCE

The Leader of the Council reported that following the governments review of the Gambling Act 2005 and the publication of the Gambling White Paper in April 2023, the Department for Media, Culture and Sport recently wrote to the Council requesting confirmation as to whether it wishes to retain the large casino licence, granted in 2008. To retain the licence, the Council must be able to provide persuasive evidence that this is likely to lead to the development of a large casino within a reasonable time frame.

The Leader of the Council reported that permission was given in May 2008 but no casino has yet to be developed, and a large casino does not feature in the Town Investment Plan.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council agree the proposal for the reallocation of the unused large casino licence.

Proposer: Councillor Smith

Seconder: Councillor Plant

That Council agree the proposal for the reallocation of the unused Large Casino Licence.

CARRIED

10 23-202 - REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Leader of the Council reported that under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 all local authorities are required to complete a review of their parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least every five years.

When undertaking a review, the law says that an authority must:-

a) Seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances:

b) Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility of disabled persons.

The consultation ran from 9 October until the 14 November 2023. Following the review, it is considered that there should be no change to the existing arrangements.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council note the outcome of the review of polling places and polling stations in accordance with the Council's statutory obligations and approve the attached schedule of polling districts and polling stations incorporating the proposed final recommendations.

Councillor Bensly asked officers to reconsider The Pavilion at Hemsby for use as a polling station and to contact Hemsby Parish Council to discuss the matter further.

Proposer: Councillor Smith
Seconder: Councillor Plant

That Council note the outcome of the review of polling places and polling stations in accordance with the Council's statutory obligations and approve the attached schedule of polling districts and polling stations incorporating the proposed final recommendations.

CARRIED

11 23-162 - GREAT YARMOUTH'S USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that the limited availability of affordable rented accommodation in both the private and social sectors, has resulted in the Council not always being able to prevent homelessness or, where a household is found to be statutorily homeless, secure suitable settled accommodation in a reasonable amount of time. This situation has led to the need to accommodate high numbers of households in temporary accommodation, which includes the use of costly and unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that to reduce the need for temporary

accommodation it is proposed to facilitate access to affordable private rented accommodation through the creation of a social lettings scheme and to provide more social housing by accelerating the Council's affordable housing delivery programme.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that in recent years, the private rental market in the Borough Council area has seen an increase of rents. These are unaffordable to many households on low incomes, including households in receipt of benefits. The private rented sector has an important role to play in the provision of housing, therefore, to make it more accessible to households on low incomes, it is proposed to pursue the creation of a social lettings scheme. The social lettings scheme would be operated by a Council owned company and offer affordable, quality private rented accommodation to households at risk of homelessness. Moreover, such a scheme would also assist with supporting regeneration and renewal in the Borough as it provides further opportunities to bring empty homes back into use.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that although the Council continues to deliver and enable additional social housing, new provision combined with the impact of the Right to Buy and lower levels of turnover of existing stock is failing to meet need. Therefore, it is proposed that the Council's affordable housing delivery programme is accelerated to meet strategic housing need, which includes homeless prevention. The proposed acquisition programme is to comprise of two funding routes: Retained Right to Buy Receipts and Homes England grant; each route will be match funded by borrowing on rental income within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The proposed programme will seek to deliver up to 60 acquisitions of open market dwellings over the period 2023-26 and will supplement new build delivery over this period. All housing will be held in the HRA.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that an interim measure, to ensure that the cost of temporary accommodation is minimised, it is proposed that the Council enter into lease agreements for suitable properties to be used as temporary accommodation. It will be ensured that all proposed lease agreements are subject to robust business cases and have adequate break clauses.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that subject to Members approval of the these proposals, work will begin in earnest to facilitate access to private rented accommodation and an increase in the provision of social housing. With respect to the creation of a social lettings scheme, to enable the use of appropriate tenancies and the ability to charge sub-market rents, the delivery of the proposed scheme requires a suitable Council owned vehicle. A fully costed proposal will be presented to Cabinet in early 2024.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that the acceleration of the affordable housing delivery programme is based on the Council acquiring open market housing to meet need. Homes England grant will be subject to successful indicative bids for affordable housing.

Individual business cases for leased short term temporary accommodation will consider the financial viability and dwelling mix. Officers under existing delegations will ensure leasing opportunities have adequate break clauses in order to provide the Council's temporary accommodation offer on a short-term basis.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that this report sets out proposals to facilitate access to quality, affordable housing for private and social rent which aim to prevent homelessness and reduce the number of households being placed in temporary accommodation. In addition, as an interim measure whilst additional settled accommodation is being delivered, to negate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation as a form of temporary accommodation, it recognises the need to provide more cost-effective and suitable temporary accommodation through leasing arrangements and the use of HRA dwellings.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that Cabinet at their meeting on the 4th December 2023 agreed the following:-

1. To pursue the creation of a social lettings scheme, including an in-principle capital budget of £2million of General Fund borrowing, this being subject to Council approval (see recommendation (d) below),
2. To the proposed acceleration of the Council's affordable housing delivery programme, and for submission of grant funding bids to Homes England; and
3. That as an interim measure, to negate the use of bed and breakfast, up to 50 homes are to be leased to provide temporary accommodation. In line with the Council's Property Acquisitions and Disposals Policy, the decision to acquire and / or lease accommodation is delegated to the Executive Director – People, the Executive Director of Property and Housing Assets, and the Section 151 Officer.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor proposed that Council were recommended to agree that a £2 million in principle capital budget is set aside to fund a social lettings scheme.

Councillor Wainwright reported that he fully supported this proposal but it is a shame that the situation has been allowed to get to this dire position, mainly down to the shortage of social housing units and central government/Homes England not building enough new homes. The Labour administration had proposed something similar to this in 2013 at Beacon Park but when the Conservative administration took over, they immediately withdrew the plans.

Councillor Smith reported that he fully supported the proposal and that a shortage of homes was a problem across the whole country and that a cross-party delegation made up of 119 District Leaders had come together to lobby the Chancellor of the Exchequer for more funding and would be sending a delegation to Parliament at the end of January 2024. The Leader would keep the Council informed.

Proposer: Councillor Flaxman-Taylor
Seconder: Councillor Wells

That Council agree that a £2 million in principle capital budget is set aside to fund a

social lettings scheme.

CARRIED

12 23-052 - COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS 2024-25

The Leader of the Council reported that this report sought approval of the levels of council tax discount that shall apply for 2024/25.

The Leader of the Council reported that for the financial year 2024/25 it is proposed that there is one change to these discounts regarding Empty Property and Second Homes Premiums, as the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has now been given Royal Assent.

The Leader of the Council reported that at present, Empty Property Premiums can be up to 100% for those properties that have been empty between 2 years and less than five years, 200% for those properties empty for between 5 years and less than 10 years and 300% for properties that have been empty for more than 10 years. The enactment of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill now gives Councils the discretion to apply an Empty Property Premium of 100% after one year of the property being empty, instead of the current two years with effect from April 2024. The Premiums for the 200% and 300% will remain as currently of 5 years and 10 years respectively.

The Leader of the Council reported that a new Second Home Premium will mean the Council we will be able to charge a 100% Premium for second homes properties that are substantially furnished but unoccupied. Legislation states that billing authorities are required to give the council tax payers 12 months' notice meaning this cannot be applied until 1st April 2025. Second homes are in 2 classes, A and B. A Class A property is furnished, but no one's main home and there is a planning restriction preventing occupancy for at least 28 days of the year, for example, holiday chalets and it is not recommended this class is included as this will would include furnished lets that are temporarily unoccupied due to the restriction.

The Leader of the Council reported that the appendices provided a summary of empty properties and second homes, as well as the additional income for the council if the changes were applied. Full Details of the recommended Council Tax Discounts to be applied in 2024/25 can be found from pages 30 to 31 of the agenda report.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council, as detailed on page 28 of the agenda report, are recommended to:-

(1) Approve the council tax discounts as shown in the table in Section 4.1 which will apply for 2024/25; and

(2) Approve the Second Homes Premium of 100% for Class B properties (that we currently charge 100% council tax) to commence from 1 April 2025.

Proposer: Councillor Smith
Secunder: Councillor Plant

That Council:-

(1) Approve the council tax discounts as shown in the table in Section 4.1 which will apply for 2024/25; and

(2) Approve the Second Homes Premium of 100% for Class B properties (that we currently charge 100% council tax) to commence from 1 April 2025.

CARRIED.

13 23-051 - COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024-25

The Leader of the Council reported that this report sought Council for approval of the recommended Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25.

The Leader of the Council reported that there have been minimal changes to the scheme since its first introduction and financial assistance for those classed as working age customers has been limited to a maximum of 91.5% of their council tax liability. Those customers of pension age remain unaffected by the Council Tax Support Scheme and continue to receive the same financial level of assistance as they did under the Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

The Leader of the Council reported that serious consideration has been given to the 2024/25 Council Tax Support Scheme in recognition that the Council, like many other Local Authorities, is facing considerable challenges with budgets and have a lack of clarity around future government funding settlements.

The Leader of the Council reported that unlike council tax benefit where the expenditure was fully subsidised, funding for Council Tax Support schemes was less than council tax benefit and has since been lost within the Revenue Support Grant and core funding which has continued to reduce and be re-purposed over recent years. Taking the financial challenges into account, this year the council has considered options to reduce the overall cost of the Council Tax Support scheme.

The Leader of the Council reported that a public consultation on the five options ran for a 12 week period and has now closed. As well as being published on the Council's website, every household in receipt of council tax support at that time was contacted directly by letter advising them that the council was considering a change to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 and that a change could affect the level of financial support they would receive. They were invited to take part in the formal consultation.

The Leader of the Council reported that options under consideration ranged from

continuing with the current scheme, to various stepped reductions in the maximum award from 87.5% to 75% of the Council Tax Liability. A total number of 146 responded to the consultation, 76% of the responders were in receipt of Council Tax Support. As part of the consultation process, these options were considered by Members of Scrutiny Committee on the 24th October 2023. The impact of any change has been considered by undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment on the recommended option, and can be found at Appendix A.

The Leader of the Council reported that in recognition of the Council's financial position, it is recommended that a change to the existing scheme is made to reduce the overall cost to the Council. However, it is also important that a hardship fund would be available to help mitigate the impact of the change on vulnerable households. It is proposed that the maximum award of Council Tax Support for working age is amended to 80% of the Council Tax Liability.

The Leader of the Council reported that this change would affect all working age recipients with no protections in place for certain groups except for Care Leavers. The Equality Impact Assessment recognises the impact of this change on individuals and households, however, also concludes that working age households on low income eligible for Council Tax Support are likely to be similarly impacted to those with additional disability financial support to help with day to day living. It is recommended a hardship scheme is in place in the sum of £200,000 to help support individuals and households who may be in more financial difficulty. The scheme would only be eligible to working age recipients of Council Tax Support with an eligibility criteria prioritising the most vulnerable groups.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council, as detailed on page 37 of the agenda report, agree to the following:-

- (1) To amend the Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 to reduce the maximum council tax support to 80% of the Council Tax liability,
- (2) To protect Care Leavers from this change,
- (3) To make provision for a hardship scheme of £200,000,
- (4) To form a cross party Member Working Group to agree the hardship scheme and to monitor and receive regular reports on the impact of the change to the Council Tax Support Scheme; and
- (5) To delegate the ability for the Head of Customer Services & Revenue & Benefits Service Manager to make any smaller adjustments to the scheme that may be required to align to the wider welfare benefits system for 2024/25.

Councillor Freeman addressed Council and informed them of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet in regard to the Council Tax Support Scheme 2024-25.

Councillor Wainwright reported that the support scheme should remain at 91.5% unless the Council could secure funding for the Hardship Scheme for a 3 year period from Norfolk County Council.

Councillor A Wright reported that he was concerned that the Leader of the Council had stated that a consultation had taken place, but 69% of respondents had stated that they wanted the council tax reduction to remain at 91% and only 3% agreed with it being reduced to 80%. It appeared that after going out to consultation, that the respondents had clearly been ignored, therefore, the consultation was a complete waste of time. With the cost of living crisis hitting particularly hitting hard amongst our residents on low wages/income, it was perverse that the Council was seeking to take even more of their limited income away, especially when the energy costs were sky rocketing with standing charges hitting them unfairly, with those residents having dual fuel having to pay nearly £300 per year. This cut would take approximately £750,000 out of Great Yarmouth's economy and the pockets of those least able to afford it and the Council should be supporting those residents rather than taking money away from them.

Councillor A Wright responded on a point of clarification following Councillor Plant's comments in regard to that residents should be grateful that the officers had negotiated a good deal for the Council with £400,000 being given back and just £200,000 going in to a hardship fund. Councillor A Wright pointed out that it was like Councillor Plant giving him £20 and Councillor Wright giving him back £10 and Councillor Plant saying that was a good deal.

The Chief Executive Officer reported that it was hoped to agree a long term MOU with Norfolk County Council for the amount of £200k to be returned to us for the hardship Fund and the scheme would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Councillor Plant reported that he supported the scheme which would both reduce the Council's overheads and provide a benefit to our most vulnerable residents to the amount of £200k.

Councillor Wells reported that he found the CEO's comments to be very reassuring. The proposal was a sensible, prudent compromise in times of extreme budget challenges and he fully supported it.

Councillor Candon reported that he agreed with Councillor Plant's comments and that he fully supported the proposal. The Council was faced with making hard decisions and this would result in a more targeted system for those residents who needed it most.

The Leader of the Council reported that of the 6,258 residents who were written to, the Council had only received 146 responses. The old scheme was operated at a cost of £265k to our local tax-payers. The OAP's in the borough would not be affected.

Councillor Wainwright pointed out that this scheme would particularly hit working families with children hard.

Councillor Jeal reported that he could not support this proposal. Nelson Ward was the 11th most deprived ward in the country and he was extremely disappointed that none of the money generated in Nelson Ward would be returned to it.

Proposer: Councillor Smith

Seconder: Councillor Plant

That Council:-

(1) To amend the Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 to reduce the maximum council tax support to 80% of the Council Tax liability,

(2) To protect Care Leavers from this change,

(3) To make provision for a hardship scheme of £200,000,

(4) To form a cross party Member Working Group to agree the hardship scheme and to monitor and receive regular reports on the impact of the change to the Council Tax Support Scheme; and

(5) To delegate the ability for the Head of Customer Services & Revenue & Benefits Service Manager to make any smaller adjustments to the scheme that may be required to align to the wider welfare benefits system for 2024/25.

CARRIED.

14 23-053 - COUNCIL TAX BASE 2024-25

The Leader of the Council reported that this report asks the Council to approve the calculation of the 2024/25 tax base totalling 30,581. This is the total number of domestic properties in the Borough using band D as the average property band which is to be approved by Council.

The Leader of the Council reported that Council Tax base is 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. Details of the Tax Base Calculation can be found within the report and for the purposes of this report the Local Council Tax Support Scheme has been estimated for maximum award of 80% for working age claimants.

The Leader of the Council reported that the normal non-collection rate used is 1.75%. However, for this year the non-collection rate has been estimated as higher than normal due to the national cost of living issues at 2%.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council, as detailed on page 42 of the agenda report, agree that the calculation of the 2024/25 tax base totalling 30,581 which represents an increase of 730 in the tax base, and the estimated tax bases for the Borough and for each parish, as shown in Appendix A.

Proposer: Councillor Smith
Seconded: Councillor Plant

That Council agree that the calculation of the 2024/25 tax base totalling 30,581 which represents an increase of 730 in the tax base, and the estimated tax bases for the Borough and for each parish, as shown in Appendix A.

CARRIED.

15 23-173 - 2023-24 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID YEAR REPORT

The Leader of the Council reported that the Council adopted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Council to approve treasury management semi-annual and annual reports. This report includes the new requirement in the 2021 Code, mandatory from 1st April 2023, of quarterly reporting of the treasury management prudential indicators. The non-treasury prudential indicators are incorporated in the Council's normal quarterly Capital report.

The Leader of the Council reported that the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24 was approved by Council on 21st February 2023. This report provides a monitoring position for the first six months of the 2023/24 financial year.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council, as detailed at page 46 of the agenda report agree to the approval of the treasury management half yearly report for 2023/24 and the amended target as outlined at paragraph 9.10. of the report.

Proposer: Councillor Smith
Seconded: Councillor Plant

That Council agree to the approval of the treasury management half yearly report for 2023/24 and the amended target as outlined at paragraph 9.10. of the report.

CARRIED.

16 23-174 - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY REVIEW 2024-25 TO 2026-27

The Leader of the Council reported that the Council receives a refresh of the Medium Term Financial Strategy annually which is revised in light of known spending pressures taking into account the wider economic context. There is a legal requirement to set an annual budget and set the Council tax each year and part of this includes a number of preparatory reports and pieces of work that are prepared in support of setting the budget one being the update of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Leader of the Council reported that the MTFS sets out the context within which the financial planning for the Council is undertaken and the priorities, i.e. the business strategy that will mitigate future funding gaps. The MTFS also includes the latest financial projections for the three years that are covered by the strategy and have been informed by known pressures in the current year and levels of inflation and interest rates. This is ahead of the provisional settlement announcement and the detailed work on the service budgets for 2024/25.

The Leader of the Council reported that there continues to be significant uncertainties around funding for Local Government as the sector faces continued inflationary pressures for both day to day revenue spend and capital projects. The challenges that the Borough Council are facing are not unique, with reports of all tiers of authorities facing continued financial pressures being made public on a regular basis, it flags the pressures facing the sector and the need for timely decisions on local government funding reviews.

The Leader of the Council reported that the economic climate of high inflation and interest rates and demand for services for example temporary housing has impacted on the financial position of the Council in a significant way. It is a legal requirement to set a balanced budget each year and there will be a need to identify and deliver significant savings and additional income in the short term to medium term in addition to using reserves to manage the risks.

The Leader of the Council reported that assumptions included in the MTFS will be subject to review as the detail of the 2024/25 budget is finalised. The Leader of the Council proposed that Council, as detailed at page 60 of the agenda report:-

- (1) Agree the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the key themes of the business strategy as outlined at Section 8; and
- (2) Agree to continue with the business rates pool for 2024/25 subject to the finalisation of the forecasts for 2024/25 and the outcome local government finance settlement, to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Leader to approve.

Councillor Wainwright reported that it was imperative that the Council set a balanced budget and that the Council found itself in a dire situation after 13 years of a Conservative Administration. In 2010, under a Labour Administration, the Council received £9.96m a year, in 2024, the Council would receive £3.98m and we have lost out on £80m of government grants. Council Tax has increased by 18% and the continued cuts affected every resident of the Borough and this needed to stop now.

The Leader of the Council summed up his proposal. He acknowledged the intense pressures the Council was under and that the budget had been produced as a result of a lot of hard work undertaken during cross-party working. He thanked all the hard work undertaken by the Section 151 Officer and her finance team. Councils up and down the Country would be undertaking the same difficult decisions over the next few weeks and he urged all the members present in the Council Chamber this evening to support the proposal to enable the Council to move forwards.

Proposer: Councillor Smith
Seconded: Councillor Plant

That Council:-

- (1) Agree the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the key themes of the business strategy as outlined at Section 8; and
- (2) Agree to continue with the business rates pool for 2024/25 subject to the finalisation of the forecasts for 2024/25 and the outcome local government finance settlement, to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Leader to approve.

CARRIED.

17 23-155 - SAVINGS 2024-25 - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Leader of the Council reported that this report sets out the next steps for the Council's plan to present a balanced budget for approval in February 2024 for the 2024/25 financial year. The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27 was presented to Cabinet in November for recommendation to Council in December.

The Leader of the Council reported that the MTFS included updated financial projections for the period of the strategy which at the time forecast a gap of £2.5 million in 2024/25 increasing to in excess of £4million by 2026/27. These are ahead of the detailed service budgets being produced for which work is underway.

The Leader of the Council reported that the MTFS included a savings target of £2m for 2024/25 allowing for £500k to be taken from reserves. It should be noted that this is ahead of the production of the detailed service budget and the announcement of the finance settlement for 2024/25, however the delivery of the savings and additional income is an essential element of the business strategy work to deliver a balanced budget for the coming financial year.

The Leader of the Council reported that as part of the budget process savings and additional income proposals have been submitted by officers for consideration by Members and this report now presents an update to Members on the work to date and makes recommendations on savings and income proposals to be taken forward as part of the budget for 2024/25.

The Leader of the Council reported that, to date, there have been various officer and member working groups including joint party working groups to discuss the budget and savings proposals that are being presented for approval. Further discussions are still being held and options for closing the budget gap and these will be finalised over the coming months and presented within the budget reports for approval in February 2024.

The Leader of the Council reported that this report provides the outcome of the discussions to date and the implementation plan for the savings proposals to allow where applicable some of the proposals to be progressed for implementation to achieve forecast savings and deliver income as anticipated in the 2024/25 financial year. Savings proposals have been grouped into 3 groups and are detailed at page 4 and 5 of 5 within the supplementary agenda pack

The Leader of the Council reported that this report is recommending approval for £1.489 million, in addition to those currently approved and in progress, savings and income which will have a significant impact on reducing the forecast budget gap for 2024/25 and future years. As the details of the service budgets are produced over the coming weeks and once the finance settlement has been announced this work will inform the final budget to be presented for approval in January/February 2024.

The Leader of the Council reported that early approval of the savings as detailed in the report supports the financial planning process for producing a balanced budget for 2024/25.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council agree the savings and additional income proposals as outlined at Appendix A for implementation for the 2024/25 budget.

Councillor Freeman, Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, reported the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet for consideration, that the cut to the Lifeguard provision at a cost of £58k be removed.

Councillor Wainwright moved an amendment that the funding for the Lifeguard provision be put on hold until the Council had undertaken talks with GYTABIA and other providers to take over the funding of this very important service which keeps both local residents and visitors safe, and, ultimately, to bring the decision to Full Budget Council.

The Leader of the Council proposed that the savings be left in and that GYTABIA be formally asked for financial support. The Section 151 Officer asked for clarification, i.e. was this a formal proposal to review the Lifeguard funding and remove the corresponding line from the budget. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that an amendment had been proposed to remove the corresponding line in regard to Lifeguard provision and that Council was being asked to vote on the remainder of the recommendations.

The Leader of the Council reported that he seconded the amendment. Following a vote, the amendment was approved.

Councillor Capewell reported that under group 1, there was a saving item listed "Review of vacant posts and opportunities to make changes to structures across some services" which was due to save the Council just over £188,000 in year 1. He understood why structural changes would need to take place in a Council or a larger enterprise which had been operating for a long period of time to meet the new and different demands on the organisation. However,

this could be a really distressing time for the employees involved. Councillor Capewell reported that drawing from his own personal experience, having gone through the risk of redundancy three times and being made redundant twice, he would like a reassurance that staff members who might lose their jobs due to a restructure were treated like human beings, and not like figures on a spreadsheet. At the recent Scrutiny Committee, the officer responsible for the in-house ARC service confirmed that employees were notified in regard to the potential changes to their employment by email. This was not the right thing to do regardless of the situation, we are a Council which should have the upmost respect for its employees who did an amazing job for this Council and its residents.

The Chief Executive Officer assured Council that every member of staff was valued and treated with the upmost respect and support.

Councillor Martin asked for clarification in regard to the single person council tax discount. Councillor Wells explained that the figures related to persons who were erroneously claiming the single person discount.

Proposer: Councillor Smith
Seconder: Councillor Plant

That Council agree the savings and additional income proposals as outlined at Appendix A for implementation for the 2024/25 budget.

CARRIED

18 GYN TRANSFER PROJECT

The Leader of the Council reported that the Council's contract with GYN terminated on 30th September 2024. The Cabinet had authorised a process whereby the Council completed an asset purchase from GYN of those assets needed/left at the date of transfer, transferring the service back to the Council into a GYBC Company structure.

The Leader of the Council reported that this process has now commenced with the appointment of a Project Lead in late August 2023 to oversee the in-sourcing of the service. This report made recommendations to Council on important decisions that would inform the direction of travel and therefore the mobilisation of the new service. The key areas discussed were the host vehicle for the service and fleet procurement.

The Leader of the Council reported that in June 2023, the Cabinet decision was to bring the service back into the Council via a newly-formed Local Authority Trading Company (LATCO) or the existing LATCO, GYS. Since then officers have explored a third option which would be to bring the service back as an in-house workforce or what used to be known as a DLO or a Direct Labour Organisation. Independent legal advice has been sought via Browne Jacobsen who have prepared an options report and evaluation of all 3 options. The report is attached at Appendix 1 to the agenda

report.

The Leader of the Council reported that within each of the options the indicative set up costs have been considered, along with the annual support costs. At this stage these do not include all support costs for example IT software support as this level of detail is not available. It can be assumed that these costs are currently a charge into GYN through the overhead charging mechanism and therefore will be a cost that will continue to be charged whatever the delivery vehicle.

The Leader of the Council reported that based on the legal opinion of Browne Jacobson and the considerations set out above, the recommendation is to insource the service to provide an in-house workforce. This option, in particular, provides the Council with complete control over the service and importantly, will not create added pressures on the GYS Management to absorb another service into the business and allows to continue its progress in delivering its improvement plan.

The Leader of the Council reported that the recommendation is not consistent with the original Cabinet decision to insource the GYN into a Council-owned company structure. Therefore, this report is seeking Cabinet approval to change that decision in respect of insourcing the service into an in-house workforce rather than a new or existing LATCO as originally agreed.

The Leader of the Council reported that, in addition to this, the current fleet that is being used by GYN is aged (up to 10 years old), in poor condition and have high levels of maintenance on a regular basis and comes at a significant cost at £7,030 per van. This gives a poor perception of the service and as they break down regularly, they impact on the productivity of the service. In summary, the current fleet is not viable and needs to be replaced. Irrespective of the delivery model, a decision on the fleet procurement needs to be made to enable the procurement timetable and the fleet to be in operation for the commencement of the new arrangement for September 2024.

The Leader of the Council reported that based on the evaluation of the options to procure the new fleet, it is recommended that the Council procure the fleet using the TPPL framework and that the fleet is procured through a lease agreement as the costs are spread over the life of the lease and it would make an estimated saving of £378,253 plus interest charges over the cost of purchasing the fleet outright.

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council:-

- (1) Approve to the services currently delivered by GYN be insourced and delivered by a direct labour organisation (DLO),
- (2) Approve the budget of £1,802,420 to enable the procurement of the fleet as outlined in the report using the using the TPPL framework; and
- (3) Approve the budget of £145,000 to fund the set-up costs and enable the support services to be provided as outlined in the report to facilitate delivery of the

project.

Proposer: Councillor Smith
Seconder: Councillor Candon

That Council:-

(1) Approve to the services currently delivered by GYN be insourced and delivered by a direct labour organisation (DLO),

(2) Approve the budget of £1,802,420 to enable the procurement of the fleet as outlined in the report using the using the TPPL framework; and

(3) Approve the budget of £145,000 to fund the set-up costs and enable the support services to be provided as outlined in the report to facilitate delivery of the project.

CARRIED

The meeting closed at 20:57

The meeting ended at: TBC