

Council

Minutes

Thursday, 13 July 2017 at 19:00

Present :

Her Worship the Mayor Councillor Robinson-Payne (in the Chair); Councillors Andrews, Annison, Bensly, Bird, Borg, B Coleman, M Coleman, Connell, Cutting, Davis, Fairhead, Flaxman-Taylor, Grant, A Grey, K Grey, Hammond, Hanton, Jeal, Lawn, Mavroudis, Myers, Plant, Pratt, Reynolds, Rodwell, Smith, Thirtle, Wainwright, Walker, Waters-Bunn, Weymouth, Williamson and Wright.

Also in attendance :

Mrs S Oxtoby (Chief Executive Officer), Mr D Johnson (Monitoring Officer), Ms K Sly (Finance Director) Mrs K Watts (Strategic Director), Mr R Hodds (Corporate Governance Manager) and Mrs S Wintle (Senior Member Services Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carpenter, Hacon, Jones and Stenhouse.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mavroudis declared a personal interest in the item relating to the confidential report on Business Rates Write Offs and took no part in the voting or discussion there on and left the meeting when this matter was considered.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Council considered the following question from Mr J Cannell (Great Yarmouth and District Trades Union Council):-

"What is the current total debt and age profile of that debt owed in; a)Business Rates and b)Commercial Rents, to Great Yarmouth Borough Council."

In response, the Leader reported that following the June meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee where the annual debt and recovery report for 2016/17 was considered, within the report it was recognised that over the last few years 'in year' collection rates had fallen and the amount of overall debt had started to increase. The report indicated a number of reasons for this including :-

- The introduction of Council Tax reduction
- The impact of wider welfare reforms and introduction of Universal Credit
- But also highlighted the key factor that the Revenues Team, had a reduction in resource by 2.5fte.

The report outlined some key areas of improvement to address and improve in year collection rates and reduce overall debt. Following the report to Policy and Resources Committee a Business Case and Improvement Plan was considered and agreed by the Senior Management Team which included additional resource which is now being recruited to along with collection targets to be met over the next three years with targets to reduce the overall debt.

In relation to the Public question the Leader gave details of the outstanding debt and age debt profile in relation to Business Rates and Commercial Rents. In relation to the debt outstanding, recovery and enforcement action is underway or under consideration or arrangements to pay are already in place.

In accordance with the Constitution Mr Cannell was then entitled to ask a supplementary question as follows :-

" In relation to a particularly high outstanding debt to the Council, how was this amount allowed to build up and would other ratepayers in the Borough be allowed to do this ? ".

The Leader reported on how this particular confidential matter was being dealt with through the debt recovery process.

4 MINUTES

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor Grant

That the minutes of the Council meetings held on the 15 May, 16 May and the 12 June 2017 be approved.

CARRIED

5 SERVICE COMMITTEE DECISION LIST FOR THE PERIOD 12 APRIL 2017 TO 22 JUNE 2017

Council considered the Service Committee decision list for the 12 April to the 22 June 2017.

In relation to the item on redundancy and re-deployment policy, Councillor Williamson on the process that had been pursued under this particular item. In particular he referred to the changes that had taken place to the Council's Terms and Conditions of Employment he reiterated the need for the Council to value the Council's employees. Councillor Waters-Bunn supported Councillor Williamson's comments on the changes that had taken place and commented on her disappointment of the decision taken by the Policy and Resources Committee on this matter. Councillor Jeal also endorsed the comments made by both Councillors Williamson and Waters-Bunn and commented on the need for the Council to be fair to all employees.

The Leader reported that all of these comments had been expressed at the Policy and Resources Committee and he made the point that Unison had put forward their proposals for consideration on this matter. Councillor Wainwright commented that he had spoken to a representative from Unison who had indicated that the proposal considered by the Policy and Resources Committee had not in fact been suggested by Unison. The Chief Executive Officer reported that there had been a formal consultation with Unison and as a result Unison had written to the Head of Organisational Development with their proposals and the Chief Executive assured Members that full details of the comments made by Unison through the consultation period would be sent to all Members.

With regard to the item relating to Voluntary Sector Grants Councillor Wainwright commented that he was pleased to see that this issue had been completed and that he understood that a further update report would be presented to the Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee in the near future.

Proposer : Councillor Smith

Seconder : Councillor B Coleman

That the decision list for the period 20 April to the 22 June 2017 be received.

CARRIED

6 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2016-17

The Leader reported that the Outturn report reflects the financial position for the year 2017/18 and it was pleasing to be able to report an overall underspend for the year which had been allocated to the General Reserve. Whilst there are a significant variances reported against the budget for the year, Finance Officers will be reviewing these for the current year and also starting work on next years budget to allow sufficient planning for future financial challenges. Overall the Council holds a satisfactory level of reserves which can be used as one off funding to help achieve longer term efficiencies and real savings to assist in addressing future financial challenges.

Councillor Wainwright commented that he was pleased about the details regarding the reserves but expressed his concern about the funding gap of £3M. He understood that both the Chief Executive Officer and the Leader had been to see the relevant Secretary of State with regard to future funding. Councillor Wainwright also referred to the recent Queen's speech where there had been no reference to Local Government finance.

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor B Coleman

That approval be given to :-

(1) General Fund

(a) The Outturn position for the General Fund Revenue Account for 2016/17 as included in the Finance Director's report and appendices

(b) The transfers to and from reserves (general and earmarked) as detailed within the Finance Director's report (and Appendix C) along with the corresponding updates to the 2017/18 budget.

(c) Transfer the surplus of £389,704 to the general reserves.

(d) The balance on the general reserves of £4,97,335 at 31 March 2017 (after allowing for recommendation 1c)

(2) Capital Programme

(e) The financing of the 2016/17 Capital Programme as detailed within the Finance Directors report and at Appendix D

(f) The updated Capital Programme (General Fund and Housing Revenue Account) 2017/18 to 2018/19 and the associated financing of the schemes as outlined within the Finance Director's report and detailed at Appendix E.

CARRIED

7 2016/17 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT

The Leader reported that the report presented as to the Treasury Management activity for the Financial year including borrowing and investment activity. The Treasury Strategy is approved annually alongside the budget and treasury activities undertaken in line with the strategy during the year. At the end of the year the Council had external debt of just under £90M of which £58M was attributable to the Housing Revenue Account. The Council has continued to undertake its treasury activity on a prudent basis and it has remained under borrowed and has continued to take informed decisions around borrowing for the short to medium term.

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor B Coleman

That the Treasury Management Outturn report and Indicators for 2016/17 be approved.

CARRIED.

8 APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES 2017/18

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor Smith

That Councillor Lawn replace Councillor Grant on the Development Control Committee.

CARRIED

9 MOTION ON NOTICE

Council was asked to consider the following Motion on Notice from Councillors Wainwright, Williamson, Wright, Walker and Borg :-

" Now that the Government has found a magic money tree and agreed to give £1 Billion to the DUP, we call upon this Council to write to the Prime Minister Theresa May MP and Brandon Lewis MP, demanding an immediate abandonment of the Austerity programme and a lifting of the maximum 1% pay cap on our vital Public Services."

Councillor Wainwright reported that the programme of Austerity was clearly not working and agreed that the deficit had been reduced but that the national debt since 2010 had doubled to £1.9 Trillion pounds, 84% of GDP. He stated

that the average public sector worker was earning £1000 a year less than a decade ago and stated that things were far worse for nurses who had seen an average real terms pay cut of £3000 a year since 2010. By the end of the decade the Government will have cut their wages by 14% and some nurses were now being forced to use food banks. He stated that the Government also plans to cut the pay of firefighters in real terms and also referred to the issue of salaries for police constables.

Councillor Plant stated that scrapping the pay cap and offering pay rises in line with inflation across the public sector would cost £4bn a year. He stated that the Labour Party would fund a pay rise by reallocating a portion that the Government currently spends on the Corporate Welfare State. Councillor Wainwright commented that the pay cap was in place for ideological reasons because the Government was committed to finding the Corporate Welfare State rather than the Public Welfare State.

In response to the comments expressed by Councillor Wainwright, the Leader reported that the reference to the magic money tree was in fact first discovered by the current leader of the Labour Party. The Leader considered it an excellent use of money to spend in an area of our Country that had years of devastation and now has hope of a bright future. Should this Country totally abandon the Austerity Programme interest rates would rocket as those worldwide institutions that lent money to responsible Governments at reasonable rates would jack up interest rates accordingly. This would mean higher mortgage repayments, higher cost of fuel and goods with out of control inflation. The Leader also referred to the comments that had been expressed relating to the current student debt issue.

The Leader made the point that to abandon austerity would be currently unaffordable but measures are being looked at to ease the burden on the residents of this Country but they must be costed properly and not impose further long term burdens on us and our children. The Government has increased the amount you can earn before tax and has increased employment throughout the land.

Councillor B Coleman commented that the Labour Party had in the past undertaken discussions with the DUP. He also referred to figures relating to spending on Public Services that had been issued by the Institute of Financial Studies in that the overall gap between the rich and poor had reduced and was better than most other countries he agreed that we were fortunate to have a National Health Service and referred to issues relating to pensioners.

Councillor Myers commented that there was a need to put figures that had been quoted to one side because this was an issue of recruitment of teachers and nurses and the fact that there was insufficient funds to support necessary services.

Councillor Williamson commented that we currently had a low wage economy and that the public sector had been hit the most. He stated that the Labour Party in the past had invested in the economy and that with regard to wage

increases other countries had agreed to implement certain level of increases. He reported on the need to re-energise the economy.

Councillor Walker commented that the Motion discussed at Parliament to agree to the lifting of the 1% pay gap had not been dealt with by the Government when this was discussed at the House of commons.

Councillor Reynolds commented that the former Labour Prime Minister of the Country had put this Country into debt and commented that it was enterprise and not the state that creates jobs. He felt that money was being allocated into public services by the current Government.

In summing up, Councillor Wainwright commented that all of the Labour Party proposals had been costed while he did not feel that those proposed by the Conservative ones had not been properly costed.

Proposer : Councillor Wainwright

Seconder : Councillor Walker

Now that the Government has found a magic money tree and agreed to give £1 Billion to the DUP, we call upon this Council to write to the Prime Minister Theresa May MP and Brandon Lewis MP, demanding an immediate abandonment of the Austerity programme and a lifting of the maximum 1% pay cap on our vital Public Services.

Propser : Councillor Connell

Seconder : Councillor Jeal

That a recorded vote be taken on the above motion.

CARRIED

For the Motion - Councillors Andrews, Annison, Borg, Connell, Cutting, Davis, Fairhead, K Grey, Jeal, Myers, Pratt, Robinson-Payne, Rodwell, Wainwright, Walker, Waters-Bunn, Williamson and Wright.

Against the Motion - Councillors Bensly, Bird, B Coleman, M Coleman, Flaxman-Taylor, Grant, Hammond, Hanton, Lawn, Mavroudis, Plant, Reynolds, Smith, Thirtle and Weymouth

Abstentions - Councillors A Grey and Walch

For the Motion 18 votes, against the Motion 15 votes, abstentions 2 votes.

Motion CARRIED

10 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.

**11 CONFIDENTIAL SERVICE COMMITTEE DECISION LIST FOR THE PERIOD
12 APRIL 2017 TO 22 JUNE 2017**

(Confidential Minute on this Item)

The meeting ended at: 20:24