

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Policy & Finance Committee** broadcast from the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Notts NG24 1BY on Thursday, 26 November 2020 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor D Lloyd (Chairman)
Councillor K Girling (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor B Clarke-Smith, Councillor R Jackson, Councillor P Peacock,
Councillor T Wendels and Councillor R White

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor R Blaney, Councillor Mrs B Brooks, Councillor Mrs R
Holloway and Councillor M Skinner

The meeting was held remotely, in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

153 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS AND AS TO THE PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest.

154 DECLARATIONS OF INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

The Chairman advised that the proceedings were being audio recorded and live streamed on social media by the Council.

155 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2020

The minutes from the meeting held on 24 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

156 FORWARD PLAN OF POLICY & FINANCE ITEMS

The Committee noted the Forward Plan items to be considered by the Committee over the next 12 months.

157 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE OF HRA LAND

The Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing presented a report which set out a business case for Newark & Sherwood District Council's Street Scene Service to deliver the grounds maintenance of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) or housing service land rather than contracting the service to a third party. The Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing reported that the both the Homes & Communities and Leisure & Environment Committees had supported the proposal to bring the existing contract to an end and bring the service in-house and were recommending approval to the Policy & Finance Committee.

The report detailed the review of the current service which had been subject to consultation through a tenant survey. Three options were set out in the report: A- no change to the current contract specification; B - changes to the current specification to deliver a higher specification service in line with tenant requests for improvement; and C - adaptation of the current specification to deliver a higher specification service. In respect of staffing all three options required an increase in the current Street Scene staffing levels. The existing contractor, ID Verde, were likely to have a number of staff working on the contract for the whole time, therefore TUPE regulations would apply if the contract was to be awarded to the District Council.

The report set out the estimated 2021/22 revenue costs of extending the current contract and of the three options proposed if the Council were to deliver the service in-house. General fund revenue costs were for the purchase of small grounds maintenance equipment with the purchase of vehicles and larger equipment would be capital expenditure.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the termination of the existing grounds maintenance contract be approved with the grounds maintenance service for the Housing Revenue Account to be in sourced and provided through Newark & Sherwood District Council's Street Scene; and
- (b) a one off revenue cost to the General Fund of £14,420 (to be funded from reserves) and a capital outlay of £133,600 (funded by borrowing) for Option A be approved.

Reason for Decision

Providing greater efficiencies through the synergies between the existing in-house provision and the requirements for maintaining HRA land; to improve accountability to tenants on the quality and responsive of the grounds maintenance and street scene, giving a consistent service to tenants; and to strengthen our in-house team and secure additional contracts that enable the Council to improve and maintain a 'Cleaner Safer Greener' District.

158 PARTNERSHIP FOR THE EAST MIDLANDS BUILDING CONSULTANCY

The Director - Planning & Growth presented a report which provided an update on the outcomes of the Practitioner Led Service Review of the service which included the financial position for the East Midlands Building Consultancy (EMBC) and the Council, and the recommended next steps for the partnership and extension of the contract.

The service review was undertaken by Capita with the aim to analyse the current service provision and provide suggested solutions to improve the service in the short, medium and long terms. Three service improvements were suggested: option 1 – business as usual with service improvements; option 2 – joint ventures – larger informal partnership with other councils / partners; and option 3 – a joint authority wholly owned trading company.

The outcome of the review was option 1 - to continue with the existing partnership with South Kesteven District Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council with service improvements which would still allow for services to be provided to other local authorities on a consultancy basis rather than a formal partnership.

The report provided full details of the EMBC financial position which took into account the impact of Covid-19 on income and furloughing staff. Based on income to date the forecast position was that there could be a trading deficit of £8,256 and general fund contribution of £74,167 per partner. If accurate this would comprise an increase of £474 on the budgeted contribution per partner.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the existing contract with East Midlands Building Consultancy for Building Control Services in partnership with Rushcliffe Borough Council and South Kesteven District Council be extended until April 2023, subject to annual review; and
- b) the financial position of the East Midlands Building Consultancy be noted.

Reason for Decision

To provide a sustainable Building Control service in partnership with neighbouring authorities.

159 REVISED CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY

The Business Manager – Customer Services presented a report which sought approval for a revised Customer Feedback Policy. The Policy had been revised following the re-integration of housing services back into the Council from Newark and Sherwood Homes. The Policy had also been updated to incorporate the latest best practice from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman to ensure it was compliant with the relevant codes of practice. It was reported that the Homes & Communities had recommended approval of the revised Policy.

AGREED (unanimously) that the revised Customer Feedback Policy be approved.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the Customer Feedback Policy is fit for purpose and adheres to both of the Ombudsman's Code of Practices.

160 NEWARK TOWNS FUND

The Director - Planning & Growth presented a report which provided an update on the Newark Town Investment Plan (TIP) and sought approval for the appropriate budget to progress with feasibility work for the Council owned Great North Road Gateway Site.

In accordance with the Towns Fund guidance, the Newark TIP was formally submitted to the Government on 31 July 2020 which was the deadline for the first cohort. To date seven places within this first cohort had been announced. Following the submission of the TIP a number of qualifications had been provided to the Government who have been assessing the proposals. The Government were still to announce if the TIP was to be supported but it was hoped that the Council would secure significant investment.

The Director – Planning & Growth referred to the report considered by the Economic Development Committee at their meeting held on 18 November which provided an update on a number of TIP projects. The report to this Committee focused on the Great North Road 'Gateway Site' which was in the Council's ownership.

In relation to the existing livestock market it was noted that a third party had confirmed they wished to progress with a new livestock market but not at the current site. The current site remained vacant and redundant. In the interests of reducing holding costs for the Council and preparing the site for redevelopment it was recommended that funds were made available to tender for the demolition and secure holding of the existing cattle market site.

In relation to the lorry park, if the Council were to consider any relocation, it will be necessary for feasibility work to be undertaken in order to understand the acceptability and costs of its relocation. This feasibility work would need to be progressed alongside feasibility work for the technical ability and capacity of the Gateway Site to accommodate a range of aspirations including the International Air and Space Training Institute. The projected costs for demolition of the existing cattle market and the feasibility works were detailed in a separate exempt report.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the ongoing negotiations with Government to secure a capital contribution from the Towns Fund of up to £25mbe noted;
- b) the allocation of budget outlined in the exempt report to secure the demolition and secure holding of the existing Cattle Market site be approved;
- c) the allocation of budget outlined in the exempt report to undertake feasibility work on the relocation of the Cattle Market and Lorry Park to Newark Showground or other identified site(s) be approved; and
- d) the allocation of budget outlined in the exempt report to undertake feasibility work on developing the Newark Gateway Site (the exiting Cattle Market and lorry park), including the delivery of the Newark Town Investment Plan aspirations be approved.

Reason for Decision

To continue the development the Newark Towns Strategy and Investment Plan.

161 INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT

The Business Manager - Planning Policy & Infrastructure presented a report which provided the Committee with the first iteration of the Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS). This comprised of a report relating to the previous financial year on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 planning obligations, and a report on the infrastructure projects or types of infrastructure that the Council intended to fund wholly or partly by the levy, excluding the neighbourhood portion. It was noted that the IFS was a requirement of amended CIL legislation.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Infrastructure Funding Statement, attached as an Appendix to the report, be approved for publication before the end of the calendar year.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the District Council was operating in accordance with the requirements of the Community Infrastructure Regulations.

162 FLOWSERVE SITE UPDATE

The Director - Planning & Growth presented a report which provided an update relating to changes in ownership of the Flowserve site, the resulting likely impacts on the Flowserve Sports and Social Club's occupation of sporting land on the site, and a proposition for the Council to enter into a financial relationship to provide a new landowner with an ongoing rental guarantee.

The landlord, CB Collier NK (SSC) Ltd, had informed the Council that, based on an appraisal of the financial standing of the Sports and Social club, it could only support retaining the Sports and Social Club (SSC) or other current sporting and community groups on the site if the Council were to step in to assist. Therefore, a request was made that the Council enter into an arrangement with the landlord to cover, via guarantee, up to £45,000 per annum in year 1, £55,000 per annum in year 2, and £75,000 per annum thereafter. The landlord confirmed that lease expectations were informed by advice from a firm of surveyors. It was considered that such rent levels were unsustainable and the Sports and Social Club, in conjunction with Newark Town Football Club, stated that an affordable lease was £10,000 per annum for the site.

It was considered disappointing that the Sports and Social Club and the landlord were unable to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Ending the tenancy of the Sports and Social Club would lead to the loss of the sporting and community organisation facilities. However, the Council could act as honest broker for both parties to conclude a mutually acceptable arrangement, albeit that would require a significant reduction in lease expectations. The Council could also assist with work to find new accommodation for any club or organisation displaced if the lease was brought to an end and the Sports and Social Club or individual groups were required to vacate the site. It was noted that the site would remain as protected sports and recreational land irrespective of tenancy.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) CB Collier NK (SSC) Limited be informed that its proposal as detailed in paragraph 2.8 of the report is declined; and
- b) the Council offers to act as a broker between CB Collier NK (SSC) Limited and the Sports and Social Club to assist the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable lease arrangement, and if necessary assist the affected clubs and associations in finding alternative accommodation.

Reason for Decision

To update Members on recent developments and to make clear the Council's position.

163 RECRUITMENT OF ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICERS

In accordance with Section 100(B)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman agreed to take this item as a late item of business in order to facilitate the recruitment of the proposed Community Relations Officer posts as soon as possible.

The Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing presented a report which sought approval for the recruitment of two additional full time permanent Community Relations Officers. This proposal would increase the capacity and resilience within the Health Improvement & Community Relations (HART) Team as part of the restructure proposals within the wider Housing, Health & Wellbeing Directorate. It was considered that there was some urgency to recruit the posts in order to respond in a timely manner to the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 and the associated challenges of winter in terms of increased risk of adverse weather conditions and potential flooding which would require a community relations / HART response.

The additional cost for the two Community Relations Officers for a three month period from January through to March 2021 was £17,500 including on-costs. For 2021/22, the additional budget requirement was £75,125 including on costs for the two posts. These figures had been included as part of the draft budget setting process for the Council's overall General Fund.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the proposal to recruit two additional Community Relations Officers to the existing Health Improvement and Community Relations / HART Team be approved; and
- b) budget provision of £75,125 be made within the General Fund budget for Housing, Health & Wellbeing for the 2021/22 financial year and future years.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the Health Improvement & Community Relations / HART Team structure is able to deliver Business Plan and Community Plan objectives and appropriate emergency response requirement.

164 GENERAL FUND, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) AND CAPITAL PROJECTED OUTTURN REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2021 AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

The Deputy Chief Executive, Director - Resources and Section 151 Officer presented a report which compared the Revised Budgets with the Projected Outturn forecast for the period ending 31 March 2021. The forecast was based on six months performance on the Council's revenue and capital budgets including the General Fund Revenue, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme. The accounts showed a projected unfavourable variance of against the revised budget of £0.953m service budgets, with an overall unfavourable variance of £1.094m. Appendix A to the report detailed the variances in service areas and other budgets.

It was noted that the main reason for the projected unfavourable variance of £0.953m was because of the predicted £1.643m less in fee income than budgeted for. However it was estimated that the Council would be able to claim between £0.300m and £0.500m from the Government in compensation for such loss of income from fees and charges. Appendix B to the report showed the areas that were predicting falls in income. It was also noted that the Nottinghamshire Business Rates Pool may return some funding for the Council in 2020/21.

The HRA budget showed a projected favourable variance against the approved budget of £1.955m. In respect of the Capital Programme, the additions and amendments which required approval were detailed in Appendix C to the report. If these variations were approved the revised budget would be reduced to £56.998m.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the General Fund projected unfavourable outturn variance of between £0.594m and £0.794m be noted;
- b) the Housing Revenue Account projected favourable outturn variance of £1.955m be noted;
- c) the variations to the Capital Programme at Appendix C to the report be approved; and
- d) the Capital Programme projected outturn and financing of £56.505m be noted.

Reason for the Decision

To update Members with the forecast outturn position for the 2020/21 financial year.

165 NEWARK CASTLE ELECTRICAL UPGRADE AND FIRE ALARM INSTALLATION

The Business Manager – Heritage, Culture & Visitors presented a report advising Members of health and safety works identified at Newark Castle and requesting that budget was allocated from the Change Management reserve to complete this work in-year.

In 2019, a health and safety review of Newark Castle was undertaken which included a refresh of the site's fire risk assessment and assessment of the wiring and electrical systems. Following the review, EP Consultants were appointed and commenced work in January 2020 to design a fire alarm system, electrics and emergency lighting system as identified in the review. Work was put on hold due to the pandemic, however the works were now urgently required to ensure the Castle could deliver events during 2021.

AGREED (unanimously) that a capital budget be created in 2020/21 for £85,000, financed from the Change Management and Management Carry Forwards Reserve for the required Newark Castle works.

Reason for Decision

To complete works urgently as identified in the health and safety risk review.

166 OLLERTON LOCAL HOUSING OFFICE - REFURBISHMENT AND RE-PURPOSE

The Business Manager – Customer Services presented a report which sought approval to refurbish the Ollerton local office and refocus the purpose for it to become a multi-use facility. It was reported that it was not possible with the current layouts, to make either the Town Hall or the Council local housing office, Covid-19 secure. Consequently customer facing services could not be delivered from those locations. It was therefore being proposed to refurbish the local housing office to provide space for Customer Services to provide all Council services including a digital area for customers to self-serve, thereby supporting the Council's digital agenda.

Discussions would also take place with other potential partners regarding the possibility of delivering services from this location. However, it was noted that space at this location was limited. The proposed refurbishment was seen as an interim solution whilst the regeneration of Ollerton town centre and the development of a public sector hub came to fruition. Current estimates for costs of the refurbishment were £50,000. The Business Manager – Customer Services reported that the proposal had been supported by the Homes & Communities Committee at their meeting held on 23 November 2020.

AGREED (unanimously) that the proposal to refurbish and re-purpose the local housing office in Ollerton, as detailed in the report be approved and the project be added to the HRA Capital Programme for 2020/21.

Reason for Decision

To enable the Council to deliver a face-to-face service to its customers in the Sherwood area and to have a fit for purpose office facility for officers to access when working in that area of the District.

167 QUARTER 2 (Q2) 2020/21 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Assistant Director – Transformation & Communications presented a report which gave Members an overview of Quarter 2 performance against the objectives and actions within the Council’s refreshed Community Plan for 2019-2023 and a range of other performance information. The report provided a commentary on progress against the eleven Community Plan objectives, reported on customer contacts, customer feedback and details of staff sickness absence rates.

AGREED (unanimously) that the report be noted.

Reason for Decision

To enable the Committee to proactively monitor and manage achievement of the Council’s objectives as set out in the Community Plan.

168 COVID-19 REVENUE SUPPORT - BUSINESS GRANTS AND ASSURANCE, COUNCIL TAX HARDSHIP FUND, TEST AND TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENTS

The Business Manager – Revenues & Benefits presented a report which provided Members with an update on the administration of a number of revenue support schemes including the business rate grant fund(s), the council tax hardship fund and test and trace support payments, all in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also provided assurances over the pre and post checks that had been conducted so far.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the progress made with the administration of the Business Grant Schemes, Council Tax Hardship Fund and the Test and Trace Support Payments be noted; and
- (b) the pre and post assurance checks conducted so far be noted.

Reason for Decision

To provide Members with an update on the administration of a number of Covid-19 revenue support schemes and to provide assurance of those schemes.

169 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

AGREED (unanimously) that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

170 URGENCY ITEM - NEXT STEPS ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the exempt urgency item.

(Summary provided in accordance with Section 100C (2) of the Local Government Act 1972).

171 NEWARK TOWNS FUND

The Committee considered the exempt report regarding Newark Towns Fund.

(Summary provided in accordance with Section 100C(2) of the Local Government Act 1972).

172 DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER ROBIN HOOD HOTEL

The Committee considered the exempt report regarding the development of the former Robin Hood Hotel.

(Summary provided in accordance with Section 100C(2) of the Local Government Act 1972).

173 OLLERTON HALL

The Committee received an exempt update regarding Ollerton Hall.

(Summary provided in accordance with Section 100C(2) of the Local Government Act 1972).

Meeting closed at 8.23 pm.

Chairman