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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, 21 January 2021 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 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.

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

Councillor T. Wendels and Sanjiv Kohli, Director-Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, declared interests in Agenda Item Numbers 13 and 15 (exempt) – Arkwood Developments - Loan Agreement as Directors of Arkwood Developments Limited.

Nigel Hill, Elections & Democratic Services Business Manager, declared an interest in exempt Agenda Item No. 18(d) – Service Reviews – Elections & Democratic Services.

175 DECLARATIONS OF INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

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

176 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2020

The minutes from the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

177 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman updated the Committee on the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, noting the continual processing of grants to support local businesses, and progress with the vaccination centre at Newark Showground and the transport options that were available to residents to access the site. He expressed his thanks to all staff for their continuing hard work and effort in responding to the Pandemic. It was noted that the 'R' rate within the District was reducing, but was still at a high level.

The Chairman also reported on the current flood warnings and recent incidents of flooding within the District. He advised that some evacuations were underway and warnings had been issued to at risk properties. He confirmed that staff were ready to respond to further flooding as appropriate, and with any clean-up activities, should further flooding occur.

178 FORWARD PLAN OF POLICY & FINANCE ITEMS

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

179 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2021-23

The Director – Governance & Organisational Development presented a report concerning a light touch review of the Council’s Equality and Diversity Strategy. The Strategy had been due for review in 2020, however, given the challenges faced by the District, initially by the floods in February, followed by the outbreak of the pandemic, it was considered not appropriate to go out to consultation. It was therefore proposed to undertake a light touch review to ensure that the Council continues to have an up to date document, and that a full review be undertaken once the results from the 2021 census were available.

AGREED (unanimously) that the revised Equality & Diversity Strategy for 2021/23 be approved.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the Council can continue to fulfil its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

180 E-NEWSLETTERS

The Assistant Director - Transformation & Communications presented a report which sought to replace the Council’s printed version of the Voice newsletter, to an E-newsletter format. Within this move, there was also a proposal to incorporate an alternative provision for tenants, where previously a quarterly printed publication was provided by Newark & Sherwood Homes. The proposal was not to return to a primary printed publication, either for residents or tenants, but to introduce an E-newsletter format which would equally be useable for both purposes and add a range of additional functionality.

The report outlined the benefits of moving to E-newsletters which included cost savings, interactive nature, issuing timely publications, as well meeting objectives within the Community Plan. Subject to approval, a procurement exercise would be undertaken to acquire the required software to produce E-newsletters and consultation would be required with tenants regarding the choices available and giving them the option to receive a paper version.

As Chairman of the Homes & Communities Committee, Councillor T. Wendels confirmed that this Committee, at their meeting held on 18 January 2021, did support

the recommendation to move to E-newsletters. However, concerns had been raised by the Committee that residents of the District should not miss out on information by not having paper copies. Councillor D Lloyd advised that certain publications would still be sent in paper form, such as Council Tax bills and rent change notifications and other information could be included with these. In addition, it was proposed that the implementation of the introduction of E-newsletters be reviewed in order to ensure residents and tenants were able to access appropriate information.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the proposed move to E-Newsletters to replace the current printed versions of the Voice and the development of an E-newsletter platform as set out in paragraph 4 of the report, be approved;
- (b) the proposal to move to E-Newsletters, as an alternative provision for Council tenants to replace the printed publications they previously received, be approved in principle, subject to the outcome of the consultation referred to in paragraph 5.2 of the report; and
- (c) the Homes & Communities and Policy & Finance Committees both receive a review, when appropriate, on the implementation of both schemes.

Reason for Decision

To move forward with a modern digital way to communicate with our residents, which provides better value for money and best meets the needs of the resident and tenant.

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

The Business Manager – Financial Services 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 eight 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 against the revised budget of £0.942m on service budgets, with an overall unfavourable variance of £0.478m. 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 £0.942m was because the Council was predicted to receive £1.719m less income from sales, fees and charges than budgeted for. However, it was estimated that the Council would be able to claim between £0.400m and £0.500m from the government in compensation for loss of income which would reduce the projected overall unfavourable variance.

The HRA budget showed a projected favourable variance against the revised budget of £2.042m. 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 £35.906m.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the General Fund projected unfavourable outturn variance of between £0.078m (unfavourable) and £(0.022)m (favourable) be noted;
- (b) the Housing Revenue Account projected favourable outturn variance of £2.042m be noted;
- (c) the variations to the Capital Programme at Appendix C be approved;
and
- (d) the Capital Programme revised budget and financing of £35.906m be approved.

Reason for Decision

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

182 2021/22 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT SETTING

The Business Manager - Financial Services presented a report in relation to the Housing Revenue Account Budget and rent setting for 2021/22. The report showed the actual outturn of the Housing Revenue Account for the year 2019/20; examined the proposed income and expenditure on the Housing Revenue Account for 2021/22 in accordance with Section 76 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; and provided indicative figures of income and expenditure for the financial years 2022/23 to 2024/25. The report also made recommendations to set rent levels and service charges for 2021/22 with effect from April 2021.

The setting of the Housing Revenue Account budget and the approval of rent levels would be presented to the Full Council Meeting in February 2021, which would allow the required time to notify tenants of proposed changes to rents in accordance with the legislation.

AGREED (unanimously) to recommend to Full Council at its meeting on 9 February 2021:

- (a) the HRA budget for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix A1 to the report;
- (b) an increase of 1.5% (CPI + 1%) in the 2021/22 rents of all properties in the HRA as at 31 March 2021;
- (c) an increase of 1.5% (CPI + 1%) in all 2021/22 service charges, except for the television (TV) licence costs payable by tenants of Gladstone House; and
- (d) that the TV licence costs payable by tenants of Gladstone House in 2021/22 remain at £0.21 per week.

Reason for Decision

To advise Members of the proposed HRA budget and changes in rent and service charge levels for 2021/22 and for these to be recommended to Council at its meeting on 9 February 2021.

183 POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22

The Business Manager – Financial Services presented a report which informed Members of the budget and scale of fees and charges for the areas falling under the remit of the Policy & Finance Committee for 2021/22. Appendices A and B to the report summarised the budget proposed for the Committee for 2021/22 by service team and subjective level respectively. Appendix C to the report listed the reasons for increases or decreases of over £10,000 between the 2020/21 initial budget and proposed 2021/22 budget for services in Policy & Finance Committee. A schedule of proposed levels of fees and charges pertaining to the Committee were given at Appendix D.

The Committee's proposed 2021/22 budget was £490,000 more than its 2020/21 initial budget; an increase of 10%. The £490,000 increase in the Committee's proposed 2021/22 budget was comprised of a £709,000 increase in employee costs and a £26,000 increase in running cost, partially offset by a £245,000 increase in income.

AGREED (unanimously) that the following recommendations be made to Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 22 February 2021:

- i. the 2021/22 base budget in Appendix A to the report, for inclusion in the overall council budget;
- ii. and to Full Council on 9 March 2021 the 2021/22 fees & charges in Appendix D to the report.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the budgets and fees and charges finally proposed for 2021/22 are recommended to the Policy & Finance Committee on 22 February 2021.

184 BUSINESS RESILIENCE PROGRAMME

The Business Manager – Economic Growth presented a report which outlined proposals for the delivery of a Business Resilience Programme focussing on key sectors identified in the Council's Economic Growth Strategy. It was proposed that a fund of £300,000 be allocated to a series of programmes designed with sector delivery partners to enable business resilience and growth in identified sectors. This programme would be complimentary to the existing Retail High Street Diversification Fund created by the Council in November 2020 which was targeted at independent retailers.

The Programme would be delivered by the private sector and enabled through a

procurement exercise to suppliers with specialisms in identified sectors. It was considered that this would assist in minimising the reliance on the public sector via solely grant provision and enable long term supported economic growth.

AGREED (unanimously) that the creation of £300,000 budget be approved, for the delivery of a Newark & Sherwood Business Resilience Programme running through 2021/22, funded through £100,000 use of the Additional Restrictions Grant and a one off contribution from the Council's 2021/22 budget.

Reason for Decision

Businesses have endured a difficult year with the pandemic, and whilst survival has been the priority as we move into a national vaccination programme it is important for business and industry are able to adapt and build resilience. This approach will allow our local businesses in the identified key sectors of our economy, to have the necessary support for future economic growth.

185 ARKWOOD DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED - LOAN AGREEMENT

The Business Manager – Law & Information Governance presented a report which updated Members in relation to the Council's loan arrangements with Arkwood Developments Limited. It was reported that the terms of the loan agreement were now almost finalised, and once agreed in principle, there would be a final review in the context of new state subsidy rules before the agreement was finalised.

It was noted that the Director – Governance & Organisational Development and the Business Manager – Financial Services had previously been given delegated authority by the Committee to finalise and enter into the loan agreement on behalf of the Council.

AGREED (unanimously) that the report be noted.

Reason for Decision

To facilitate the progress of the housing development at Bowbridge Road by Arkwood Developments Limited, and future developments.

186 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.

187 ARKWOOD DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED - LOAN AGREEMENT

The Committee noted the exempt report regarding the Loan Agreement with Arkwood Developments Limited.

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

1972).

188 LITIGATION MATTER

The Committee considered an exempt report regarding a litigation matter.

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

189 DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER ROBIN HOOD HOTEL

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

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

190 SERVICE REVIEWS

The Committee considered exempt reports relating to a number of Service Reviews.

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

Meeting closed at 7.43 pm.

Chairman

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