

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Policy & Finance Committee** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Notts NG24 1BY on Thursday, 27 January 2022 at 6.00 pm.

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

Councillor Mrs R Holloway, Councillor R Jackson, Councillor P Peacock
and Councillor R White

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor T Wendels (Committee Member)

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

Sanjiv Kohli – Director – Resources and Deputy Chief Executive declared an Interest in Agenda Item No. 24 – Disposal of Land at Lowfield Lane, Balderton, as a Director of Arkwood Developments Limited.

290 DECLARATIONS OF INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

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

291 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2021

The minutes from the meeting held on 25 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

292 FORWARD PLAN OF POLICY & FINANCE ITEMS

The Committee noted the Forward Plan items to be considered by the Committee up until the change in governance.

293 REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS POLICY FOR CUSTOMERS

The Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing presented a report which sought approval for a Reasonable Adjustment for Customers Policy. The draft policy was attached as an appendix to the report. Such a policy had been recommended by the Housing Ombudsman self-assessment and the Policy dealt with what was classed as a reasonable adjustment, including how the Council communicated with customers. The draft policy had been considered by the Homes & Communities Committee at their meeting held on 24 January 2022, who recommended adoption.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Reasonable Adjustment for Customers Policy, be approved.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the Council consider the needs of its customers and to meet the recommendation of the Housing Ombudsman Self – Assessment Code.

294 DEALING WITH UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR AND VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Director – Housing, Health & Wellbeing presented a report which sought approval for a revised Dealing with Unreasonable Behaviour and Vexatious Complaints Policy. The revised policy, explained how the Council would manage unacceptable behaviour. It was noted that such cases were the exception and each would be dealt with on its own merit. The draft policy had been considered by the Homes & Communities Committee at their meeting held on 24 January 2022, who recommended adoption.

AGREED (unanimously) that the revised Dealing with Unreasonable Behaviour and Vexatious Complaints Policy, be approved.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the Dealing with Unreasonable Behaviour and Vexatious Complaints Policy is fit for purpose.

295 NEWARK TOWNS FUND UPDATE AND APPROVALS

The Director - Planning and Growth presented a report which provided an update on the Newark Town Deal and identified Towns Fund Projects and which sought approval for the Outline Business Cases (OBC) for the Cycle Town project and the International Air and Space Training Institute (IASTI), subject to assurance by Quod consulting in consultation with the District Council's S151 Officer.

The report advised that the OBC for the Cycle Town project had been received by Quod consulting and they had issued their evaluation report concluding that the project offered high value for money and recommended that it be approved. Equally, Quod consulting had concluded that the IASTI project would offer value for money and had demonstrated its deliverability.

The report also updated in respect of the business cases for the other Towns Fund projects and progress in respect of the Newark Southern Link Road.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) Members welcome and note the update provided;
- (b) Members approve, subject to the recommendation(s) of the Council's S151 Officer, in consultation with Quod Consulting, the Outline Business Case for the Cycle Town Project;

- (c) Members approve, subject to the recommendation(s) of the Council's S151 Officer in consultation with Quod consulting, the Outline Business Case for the International Air and Space Training Institute (IASTI);
- (d) subject to (b) above delegated authority be given to the Director – Planning & Growth, in consultation with the Assistant Director – Legal & Democratic Services, to enter into a Contract with Brompton Bike Hire as the supplier of the folding bikes and docks in order to deliver the Cycle Town project in accordance with the approved Outline Business Case, with the match funding detailed in the report being incorporated into the Council's Capital Programme;
- (e) subject to (c) above delegated authority be given to the Director – Planning & Growth, in consultation with the Assistant Director – Legal & Democratic Services, to enter into a Contract with the Lincoln College Group (Newark College) as the Project Sponsor for the International Air & Space Training Institute, in accordance with the approved Outline Business Case; and
- (f) delegated authority be given to the Council's S151 Officer to approve final Full Business Cases for the Cycle Town project and IASTI, subject to recommendations from Quod Consulting (or another independent third party Assurance provider) and endorsement by the Newark Towns Board.

Reason for Decision

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

296 HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE (HSHAZ)

The Director - Planning and Growth presented a report which updated the Committee on the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) and sought delegated authority to offer and administer grants of up to £15k each per scheme. The HSHAZ was government backed and part-funded initiative in partnership with Historic England. The HSAZ ran from 2020 to 2024 and contained numerous work strands which were detailed in the report.

It was reported that following targeted surveying, negotiation with relevant landowners, and completion of feasibility of design and costs workings the Council Officers, in conjunction with Historic England, works were sufficiently progressed to such a degree that grants could be issued through delegated authority.

AGREED (unanimously) that delegated authority be granted to the Director – Planning and Growth, following consultation with the Chairman of the Economic Development Committee, to make grant offers and deal with the subsequent administration of grants for schemes which will each total less than £15k.

Reason for Decision

To continue the promotion of the High Street Heritage Action Zone.

297 COMMERCIAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Transformation Manager presented a report which sought approval for the Commercial Strategy 2022-2026 and associated Action Plan. The Council's Commercial Plan expired in March 2021 and a new refreshed Commercial Strategy was required to cover 2022 to 2026 to allow the Council to best address the financial gap in funding that was forecast from 2023/24. The strategy outlined the framework for addressing the financial challenge whilst the Action Plan detailed the specific projects and tasks which supported the delivery of the strategy.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Commercial Strategy and Action Plan be approved.

Reason for Decision

For the Council to be commercial and business-like (secure value for money and be careful and creative with resources) to achieve efficiencies and earn income to be invested in resident services.

298 POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF LAND - BOWBRIDGE ROAD, NEWARK

The Business Manager – Corporate Property presented a report which updated the Committee on the opportunity to purchase land adjacent to Newark Hospital, on land off Bowbridge Road. Following a lengthy period of negotiation with the sole land agent representing the owners of both land parcels, the Council presented the 'Maximum Offer' permitted by Members in an attempt to secure the freehold purchase of the sites had now been accepted. The Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Council had now concluded agreed terms which would require the Council to construct and manage the car park alongside the Trusts lease. Following due diligence work and site investigations, it was now proposed to re-affirm the maximum offer to purchase the freehold of both parcels of land.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Director – Planning & Growth, in consultation with the Business Manager – Corporate Property be given delegated authority to:

- (a) confirm to the land agent representing both landowners that the Maximum Offer is the full and final offer from this Council to purchase the two freehold interests detailed at Appendix A, subject also to the agreement of the Trust to lease the land;
- (b) subject to the Maximum Offer being accepted as detailed at a) above to enter into a Lease Agreement with the Sherwood Forest Hospital Trust on the terms set out in the exempt report; and

- (c) amend the Council Council's Capital Programme to reflect a purchase in accordance with the Maximum Offer and capital costs of implementing a car park for the Trust, as detailed in the exempt report.

Reason for Decision

To secure additional car parking in order to support the function and reputation of Newark Hospital.

299 GENERAL FUND, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) AND CAPITAL PROJECTED OUTTURN REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2022 AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2021

The Business Manager - Financial Services presented a report which compared the Revised Budgets with the Projected Outturn forecast for the period ending 31 March 2022. 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 favourable variance against the revised budget of £0.720m on service budgets, with an overall favourable variance of £0.453m which was forecast to be transferred to usable reserves. Appendix A to the report detailed the variances in service areas and other budgets, including the variances due to vacant posts.

The HRA budget showed a projected favourable variance against the revised budget of £0.675m. 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 £38.413m.

AGREED (with 5 votes for and 1 abstention) that:

- (a) the General Fund projected favourable outturn variance of £0.453m to usable reserves be noted;
- (b) the Housing Revenue Account projected favourable outturn variance of £0.696m to the Major Repairs Reserve be noted;
- (c) the variations to the Capital Programme at Appendix C be approved; and
- (d) the Capital Programme revised budget and financing of £38.413m be approved.

Reason for Decision

To update Members with the forecast outturn position for the 2021/22 financial year.

300 POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE REVENUE BUDGET 2022/23

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 2022/23. Appendices A and B to the report summarised the budget proposed for the Committee for 2022/23 by service team and subjective level respectively. Appendix C to the report summarised the main reasons for changes between the 2022/23 base budget within the 2021/25 Medium Term Financial Plan and the current draft 2022/23 budget for services for this Committee. A schedule of proposed levels of fees and charges pertaining to the Committee were given at Appendix D.

It was noted that the Committee’s proposed 2022/23 budget was £111,000 more than its base budget within the 2021/25 Medium Term Financial Plan which was an increase of 2%. Employee budgets of £5.615m accounted for 69% of controllable costs

AGREED (with 5 votes for and 1 abstention) that the following recommendations be made to the Policy and Finance Committee meeting on 21 February 2022:

- i. the 2022/23 base budget in Appendix A for inclusion in the overall council budget; and
- ii. to Council on 8 March 2022 the 2022/23 fees & charges in Appendix D.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the budgets and fees & charges finally proposed for 2022/23 are recommended to the meeting on 21 February 2022.

301 2022/23 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 2022/23. The report showed the actual outturn of the Housing Revenue Account for the year 2020/21; examined the proposed income and expenditure on the Housing Revenue Account for 2022/23 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 2023/24 to 2025/26. The report also made recommendations to set rent levels and service charges for 2022/23 with effect from April 2022.

The setting of the Housing Revenue Account budget and the approval of rent levels would be presented to the Full Council Meeting in February 2022, which would allow the required time to notify tenants of proposed changes to rents in accordance with the legislation.

AGREED (with 5 votes for and 1 against) that the following recommendations be made to the Full Council at its meeting on 8 February 2022:

- a) the HRA budget for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix A1 to this report;

- b) an increase of 4.1% (CPI + 1%) in the 2022/23 rents of all properties in the HRA as at 31 March 2022; and
- c) the 2022/23 service charges as set out in Appendix C to this report.

Reason for Decision

To advise Members of the proposed HRA budget and changes in rent and service charge levels for 2022/23 and for these to be recommended to Full Council at its meeting on 8 February 2022.

302 LANDLORD STRATEGY

The Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing presented a report which sought approval for the Council's Landlord Strategy which set out the approach the Council intended to take with landlord services over the next five years. The proposed strategy was attached as an appendix to the report.

The document set out the Council's approach to tenure; tenant and leasehold management; income including rent and service charge management; services to older people and housing with care as well as asset management and regeneration.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Landlord Strategy, as the narrative for the Council's 30 year HRA Business Plan, be approved.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the Council has a clear approach for landlord services into the future and that the finances were in place to support them.

303 ALLOCATION OF HRA EFFICIENCY SAVINGS WITHIN HOUSING SERVICES

The Director- Housing, Health & Wellbeing presented a report which updated the Committee on the proposed allocation of budget savings from the integration of housing services back to the Council and requested delegated authority be given to the Homes & Communities Committee to approve the allocation of budgets subject to individual business case reports being presented.

It was reported that cost savings had been estimated to be £0.95m per annum through the life of the HRA Business Plan, however, in practice, savings of £1.053m were generated. It had been agreed that these savings would be used to improve the experience of tenants, through service enhancements, to the quality of homes and to neighbourhoods. Based on tenants' feedback the Council had now identified how the use of savings during 2022/23 would be prioritised. The full proposals were set out in the report.

AGREED (unanimously) that the proposals as set out in the report be approved, to enable Officers to build these proposals into the budget process for 2022-23.

Reason for Decision

To provide the plan for efficiency savings investment to show how these will be used to develop and enrich services that are important and make a difference to tenants.

304 MAGNUS HOCKEY PITCH REFURBISHMENT

The Health Improvement and Community Relations Manager presented a report which sought approval to progress with the refurbishment of the existing Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) at the Magnus Academy, to secure a “fit for purpose” facility that would enable school and community use and Newark Hockey Club (NHC), to continue to train and play competitive hockey in Newark.

The report proposed the Council finances the new AGP facility through an approved procurement method and thereafter operates the pitch through Active4Today for a period of 15 years. The terms of management would be set in a Community Use Agreement (CUA). The change in approach and estimated costs were detailed in the report. The report also referred to additional grant funding opportunities which would be explored. This included working with NHC to bid for grant funding towards the purchase of new goals and ‘dug outs’ through the Nottinghamshire County Council Local Communities Scheme. Based on the current assumptions it was noted that the estimated annual shortfall in income of circa £1,800.

The Committee considered that if the proposal could be delivered with no shortfall, such a model could be used for other similar projects within the District.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the proposal to progress with the refurbishment of the Artificial Grass Pitch at the Magnus Academy be approved;
- (b) the increase of £112,500 in the capital budget, funded by borrowing, be approved;
- (c) the reprofiling of the capital scheme into the 2022/23 financial year be approved; and
- (d) the shortfall of £1,800 be absorbed into the Council base budget, based on the reduction of £28,800 in the budgeted Management Fee to Active 4 Today together with the increase in capital charges of £30,600 within the General Fund revenue account from 2023/24.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the facility is retained as a valuable recreational infrastructure resource for the wider community and to enable Newark Hockey Club to continue to play competitive hockey in Newark.

305 DIGITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Business Manager – ICT & Digital Services presented a report which provided an update on the Digital Strategy 2021-24 and associated projects. It was noted that a Digital Transformation Board made up of key officers from across the Council had been established to review all digital projects and prioritises. These projects were in accordance with the Council's Community Plan objectives. The report outlined initiatives already undertaken and those proposed as part of the Action Plan.

AGREED (unanimously) that the update provided be noted.

Reason for Decision

To update Members on the continued development regarding the work being undertaken on the Digital Strategy, Digital Transformation board and action plan.

306 URGENCY ITEM - YMCA COMMUNITY & ACTIVITY VILLAGE

The Committee noted the decision to:

- (a) approve a payment of £10,998.57 to the YMCA from the Council's 50% share of the Elm Avenue sales receipt to provide third party match contribution to a grant of £100,000 for a cycle pump track at the YMCA Community and Activity Village, Newark;
- (b) approve adjusted payment to the YMCA in respect of the Elm Avenue capital receipt of £340,027.46; and
- (c) add £351,026.03 to the capital programme to facilitate these payments.

AGREED (unanimously) that the urgency item be noted.

Reason for Decision

To ensure grant funding is secured.

307 URGENCY ITEM - 45 AND 47 GRANGE ROAD, AND 99 GRANGE ROAD, NEWARK

The Committee noted the decision to further extend the 2009 Option Agreement with Catesby for land to the rear of 45-47 Grange Road, Newark and 99 Grange Road, Newark with a Base Price of £75,000 and Additional Payment of £176,500.

AGREED (unanimously) that the urgency item be noted.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that a revised option is secured and represents best consideration for the Council.

308 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.

309 POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF LAND - BOWBRIDGE ROAD, NEWARK

The Committee considered the exempt report in relation to a possible purchase of land at Bowbridge Road, Newark.

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

310 DISPOSAL OF LAND AT LOWFIELD LANE, BALDERTON

The Committee considered the exempt report in relation to the disposal of land at Lowfield Lane, Balderton.

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

Meeting closed at 7.24 pm.

Chairman