

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 19th February, 2020
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present: The Mayor- Councillor Simon White (Chair)

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|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| Councillors: | J. Cooper | S Tagg | R. Wright |
| | J. Walklate | S. Burgess | G White |
| | G Williams | M. Stubbs | J Waring |
| | J Williams | J Tagg | A. Fox-Hewitt |
| | A. Fear | P. Northcott | B. Johnson |
| | T. Kearon | B. Proctor | A. Lawley |
| | P Waring | S. Dymond | Mrs J Cooper |
| | M. Holland | T. Johnson | G. Burnett |
| | Miss J Cooper | A. Parker | H. Maxfield |
| | M. Reddish | S. Pickup | K. Owen |
| | K. Robinson | M. Olszewski | G. Hutton |
| | E. Shenton | D. Jones | D.Grocott |
| | G. Heesom | A. Gardner | |
| | S. Sweeney | B. Panter | |

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| Officers: | David Adams | Executive Director Operational Services |
| | Geoff Durham | Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer |
| | Jan Willis | Interim Executive Director - Resources and Support Services and Section 151 Officer |
| | Martin Hamilton | Chief Executive |
| | Simon McEneny | Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth |
| | Daniel Dickinson | Head of Legal /Monitoring Officer |
| | Denise French | Democratic Services Team Leader |
| | Phil Jones | Head of Communications |

Also in attendance:

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Moffat, Rout and Wilkes.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors' Jones and Kearon declared an interest in agenda item 7. Both Members worked or had worked with Phil Butters of Keele University.

3. **MINUTES**

Resolved: That, subject to the following amendment, the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January, 2020 be agreed as a correct record:

Under item 11, Councillor John Williams be removed as recording his vote in support of the Motion.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor invited Members to attend his Civic Mass on 1 March and Charity Ball on 25 April.

5. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS AND STRATEGIES 2020/21

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Simon Tagg introduced this report and moved the recommendations which set out the recommendations of Cabinet for Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2020/21.

Cabinet proposed an increase in council tax for 2020/21 of £5.00 per year from the 2019/20 amount. This represented an increase of 2.55 percent from 2019/20. Detailed recommendations were set out in Appendix A of the report. Appendix B set out the proposed Revenue Budget for 2020/21. A summary of additional income, additional expenditure and loss of income and new pressures was given in the report.

In summary the Council's updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) indicated a forecast budget shortfall of £1.249m for 2020/21. A summary of savings and funding strategies to bridge the £1.249m gap had been identified and agreed with managers and were given at Appendix C.

The Council's s151 officer had carried out a review of the Council's Balances and Reserves together with a risk assessment. Details were given in Appendices D and E. The MTFS and budget proposals had been scrutinised by the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

The Capital Programme for 2020/21 was given in Appendix F of the report.

The Leader advised Members that many vacant posts had been filled which eliminated the need for, often expensive interim cover. The budget also included a further boost to the Council's reserves.

The Interim Executive Director of Resources and Support Services, Jan Willis and her team were thanked for the work that had been put into the preparation of the Budget. In addition the Cabinet members and members of the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee were thanked for their work.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraph 4.5 of the report, the Borough Growth Fund which set out four areas that were important to the residents of the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, Councillor Stephen Sweeney seconded the recommendations and thanked officers for their hard work in preparing the budget.

Councillor Sweeney drew Members attention to paragraph 2.1 of the report regarding the £485,000 variance against the 2018/29 budget as at the end of quarter three and advised that savings had been identified from repairs and renewals, disused Council assets and digital delivery. In addition, grants had been received. Councillor Sweeney stated that the above grants and savings went a long way towards addressing the variance and that there was still time left to find the remainder. Recent senior management appointments would reduce pressure on the revenue budget arising from the use of interims, saving the Council in the region of £240,000 a year.

The budget allowed for the introduction of the new recycling service, refurbishment and re-opening of Kidsgrove Sports Centre, upgraded CCTV, new parking machines and the provision of an electricity supply to market stalls to allow for evening trading.

A proposed amendment was tabled at the meeting and was shown on pages 109 – 110 of the supplementary agenda. It was proposed by Councillor Stubbs and seconded by Councillor Jones.

Councillor Stubbs spoke on his amendment stating that the Council could work alongside other organisations to create a local economy that shared wealth and power more equally.

The Interim Head of Resources and Support Services – Jan Willis and the wider finance team were thanked for their work on the budget. Councillor Stubbs stated that it was a balanced budget which protected the most vulnerable.

The proposed amendment sought to look into Community Wealth Building which could redirect wealth back into the local economy.

Councillor Jones seconded the proposed amendment stating that the amendment sought to highlight the social value of the money administered by the Council.

The amendment was not accepted.

Councillor Sweeney stated that he would not be supporting the amendment having researched the Preston model referred to in the amendment.

Members debated the amendment. Councillor Hutton referred to 'social value' stating that the Council already did this as part of the Procurement Procedures.

Councillor Proctor asked why the Leader had not been approached at an earlier stage to discuss the issues contained within the amendment which could have been addressed. There had also been opportunity to raise concerns at the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Robinson stated that the proposals put forward in the amendment were reasonable and would give the Council extra protection on how money was spent.

Councillor Holland stated that the amendment did not contain anything that would enhance the work of the Council and Councillor Fear added that the amendment was trying to subvert the budget.

The Leader stated that he had listened to and agreed with all the points raised against the amendment and urged all Members to vote against it.

A vote was taken on the proposed amendment:

For: 17

Against: 21

Abstentions: 2

The amendment was defeated.

Members debated the budget as submitted.

Members welcomed the budget. Councillor Proctor was pleased that new staff members were in place. In addition, the success of the capital receipts and the strategy to increase the Council's reserves were also welcomed by Councillors' Hutton and Jennifer Cooper.

Councillor Holland stated the budget consultation had brought in three times the number of responses of previous years and showed that the proposals contained within the budget were clearly in line with what residents wanted.

Councillor Shenton had concerns about the recommendations, stating that some required explanation.

In summing up, the Leader stated that the budget invested in the rejuvenation of the Market, car parking fees had been reduced after 1pm in the town centre and there would be an improved recycling service.

A named vote was then taken in respect of the proposed budget:

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|--------------------|---|------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| BURGESS | N | JONES | N | SHENTON | N |
| BURNETT | Y | KEARON | N | STUBBS | N |
| COOPER. MRS | Y | LAWLEY | N | SWEENEY | Y |
| COOPER MR | Y | MAXFIELD | Y | TAGG J | Y |
| COOPER MISS | Y | MOFFAT | NOT PRESENT | TAGG S | Y |
| DYMOND | N | NORTHCOTT | Y | WALKLATE | Y |
| FEAR | Y | OLSZEWSKI | N | WARING J | Y |
| FOX-HEWITT | N | OWEN | Y | WARING P | Y |
| GARDNER | N | PANTER | Y | WHITE G | Y |
| GROCOTT | N | PARKER | Y | WHITE S | Y |
| HEESOM | Y | PICKUP | N | WILKES | NOT PRESENT |

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|-----------|---|----------|----------------|------------|---|
| HOLLAND | Y | PROCTOR | Y | WILLIAMS G | N |
| HUTTON | Y | REDDISH | Y | WILLIAMS J | N |
| JOHNSON B | N | ROBINSON | N | WRIGHT | N |
| JOHNSON T | Y | ROUT | NOT PRESENT | | |

In Favour (Y)- 24

Against (N)- 17

Abstain – 0

Resolved: That recommendations a to o, as set out in Appendix 'A' of the agenda report be approved.

6. PUBLICATION OF A PAY POLICY STATEMENT FOR 2020/21

The Leader introduced a report seeking Council's approval of the Pay Policy Statement for 2020/21.

This was an annual requirement of the Localism Act, 2011 setting out the remuneration of chief officers and the lowest paid employees. The Leader added that the Council now had a Monitoring Officer and a new Executive Director in place.

Resolved: That the Pay Policy Statement, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

7. APPOINTMENTS TO THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Leader introduced a report seeking approval to appoint an Independent Remuneration Panel to consider the Members Allowance Scheme.

The Panel needed to be appointed first and the recommendations of the Panel would be debated at a later date.

Councillor Shenton stated that the Members Allowance Scheme as set out in the Council's Constitution was out of date and the Constitution and Member Support Working Group had agreed to meet to make updates prior to the Independent Remuneration Panel's meetings.

Councillor Holland stated that the Scheme as set out in the Constitution had outdated language.

Resolved: That the following be appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel:-

- Phil Butters – Director Keele University
- Jackie Wheeler – Facilities Manager VAST
- Eddie Leligdowicz – Director LEMACA Ltd and Chairman of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Business Improvement District

8. CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Leader introduced a report advising Members of changes to committee membership following a change in political group membership.

Councillor Ian Wilkes had moved from the Liberal Democrat Group to the Conservatives which resulted in a change of proportionality for places on committees. The Conservative Group gained one seat and the Liberal Democrats lost one.

Councillor Wilkes was both a member and Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and therefore the seat was transferred over to the Conservative Group to balance the proportionality. Furthermore, as the change was simply a cross over, and having taken advice from the Monitoring Officer, there was no requirement to elect a new Chair to the Scrutiny Committee.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the change in the allocation of committee seats to the political groups to reflect updated proportionality requirements, namely the reduction of one Liberal Democrat seat on the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee and the increase of one Conservative seat on the same committee, be noted.
 - (ii) That Councillor Ian Wilkes be appointed to the newly allocated Conservative seat on the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

9. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Questions to the Mayor, Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs could be found on page 111 of the supplementary agenda.

Councillor Parker asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing what measures the Council was taking to deal with the possible threat of the Corona Virus in the Borough.

Councillor Helena Maxfield advised that there was no need for alarm.

In terms of business continuity at the Council, there was a cascade mechanism to provide cover. Hand sanitisers had been installed within Castle House and posters put up around the building providing advice for people who had recently returned from China.

There were no reports of anyone local having contracted the virus but this would continue to be monitored by officers.

Councillor Graham Hutton, asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth if the Council would take legal action to have buildings built without planning permission removed.

Councillor Paul Northcott stated that the answer was a caveated yes. The Council would investigate the matter, undertake the expediency test, invite an application if appropriate and, if the application was refused or no application made, enforcement action would be considered in light of the seven exemptions in the legislation. If none of those applied, officers would commence the steady but ruthless process of enforcement action to secure demolition of the building and the restoration of the site to its former use and appearance.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked the Leader to update members on what investigations had been undertaken relating to recent complaints of staff ill health to rule out potential links with mould spores or poor air quality.

The Leader advised that a small number of officers had complained of headaches which could possibly be linked to the air handling units and glare.

Two strategies were in place; to make sure that the units were operating as they should and the installation of darker blinds where officers had reported their workspace as too bright giving glare off computer screens for example.

A company (BISRA) had been brought in to undertake tests to monitor noise and temperature levels and the results would be received within the next few weeks. Occupational Health would monitor officers who had reported ill health.

The mould spores issue was a separate matter. These had been discovered during works to repair a leak and this had been isolated to the two meeting rooms / Registrars area on the ground floor. This area had now had a deep cleanse and there had been no reported health issues relating to that.

Newcastle was working with Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council to improve air quality across the area but officers had advised that the area around Castle House was not of any concern.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt stated that in previous air samples taken in 2010 and 2017 there had been fractions of fine particulate matters. The Leader was asked if he could advise of levels of Nitrogen Dioxide and fragments both inside and outside of Castle House.

The Leader advised that he would send a written response to the above question to all Members.

10. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions submitted.

11. STANDING ORDER 18 - URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR SIMON WHITE
Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.20 pm