

## **FINANCE, ASSETS & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Monday, 13th December, 2021  
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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- Present:** Councillor Mark Holland (Chair)
- Councillors:** Andrew Fear                      David Grocott                      Andrew Parker  
Graham Hutton                      Sarah Pickup  
Paul Waring                      Mike Stubbs
- Apologies:** Councillors Bert Proctor, Gillian Burnett and Tony Kearon
- Substitutes:** Councillor John Cooper (In place of Councillor Bert Proctor)  
Councillor Barry Panter (In place of Deputy Mayor - Councillor Gillian Burnett)
- Officers:** Denise French                      Democratic Services Team Leader  
Sarah Wilkes                      Head of Finance / S151 Officer  
Georgina Evans                      Head of People and Organisational Development  
Martin Hamilton                      Chief Executive  
Craig Turner                      Finance Manager
- Also in attendance:** Councillor Stephen Sweeney                      Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - Finance, Town Centres and Growth

### 20. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Holland declared an interest in item 4 Revenue & Capital budget 2022/23 – First Draft Savings Plan - on the grounds that he was a Director of the Trust that ran the New Vic Theatre.

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### 21. **MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### 22. **REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2022/23 - FIRST DRAFT SAVINGS PLAN**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres & Growth introduced the first draft savings plan for balancing the Revenue budget 2022/23 and the proposed Capital programme for 2022/23 – 23/24.

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The Head of Finance advised that the local government finance settlement was still to be confirmed; good housekeeping efficiencies had now been exhausted and the council was looking to the One Council Programme to generate future savings.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and raise issues as follows:

- Did the draft budget assume a council tax rise of 1.99%? This was confirmed
- More detail was sought about the lifesaving detection system to be implemented at J2 and Members were given reassurances about the lifeguard cover that would continue to be provided at J2
- A letter had been sent from the New Vic about the proposed reduction in grant award and the Committee was advised this had been received and a meeting would be arranged with theatre representatives; the New Vic also received grant funding from Stoke on Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council and support from local councils was important in the theatre's bid for Arts Council funding.

It was also noted that the Committee would meet on 20 January 2022 to give further scrutiny to the budget proposals.

**Resolved:** that the first draft budget proposals as set out in Appendices A and B to the report be noted.

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### **23. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW REPORT - SECOND QUARTER (JULY - SEPTEMBER) 2021-22**

The Committee considered the financial and performance review report for the second quarter, July – September 2021.

Members asked questions and raised the following points:

- Was there confidence that the council would be reimbursed £0.360m in lost income as stated in the report? The Head of Finance explained that the information had been compiled and submitted to the Government to reclaim this lost income
- Could CCTV be connected to other locations and areas including parks where there were occurrences of anti-social behaviour? The Portfolio Holder agreed to provide an update on CCTV provision to the next meeting of the Committee in January 2022.
- Could an update be given on rough sleepers? Members were advised there were few rough sleepers although there were more rough sitters. The Covid Welcome Back marshals were engaging with rough sitters and people who were begging.

**Resolved:** that the report be noted.

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### **24. ONE COUNCIL PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members considered a presentation on the One Council programme.

The following questions and issues were raised:

- Waiting times were long for phone calls to be answered; what data did the council have about waiting times and abandoned call rates? An update providing this information would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- A number of people never used the internet and would continue to need a phone or face to face service.
- The provision of customer service in Kidsgrove was inferior to that offered in Newcastle with one morning a week offered in Kidsgrove for appointments only. Could there be better use of facilities at Kidsgrove Town Hall? The Chief Executive explained that appointments were the best use of resources but the hub approach would be assessed and reviewed as required.
- When would the new licensing self-serve system go live; in response the Committee was advised this was scheduled to be live by Easter 2022.
- Could Welcome Back ambassadors also visit Kidsgrove? Members were told that the ambassadors' role was to work across centres which would mean they would be more widely available.
- Did the measures to provide customer service mean increased costs or reduced savings? The Committee was advised that the overall programme would generate significant savings over the next few years and ongoing.

**Resolved:** that:

- (a) the presentation be received; and
- (b) an update be provided to the next meeting on call wait times and abandonment rates.

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25. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the work programme.

The next meeting in January would include information on call wait times and abandonment rates and also options for CCTV cameras at locations other than town centres.

**Resolved:** that

- (a) The meeting on 20 January 2022 include the draft budget; an update on wait times and abandonment rates to the Customer Hub; and options for CCTV installation at a wider range of locations; and
- (b) The update on the Procurement Strategy to the March meeting include the effectiveness of the strategy in achieving its aims.

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26. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

27. **URGENT BUSINESS**

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There was no urgent business.

28. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 20 JANUARY 2022**

**Councillor Mark Holland  
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.11 pm