

FINANCE, ASSETS & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 20th January, 2022
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present:	Councillor Mark Holland (Chair)		
Councillors:	Gillian Burnett Andrew Fear	Graham Hutton Paul Waring	Tony Kearon Sarah Pickup
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Bert Proctor, David Grocott and Mike Stubbs		
Substitutes:	Councillor Andrew Parker (In place of Councillor Bert Proctor)		
Officers:	Daniel Dickinson Denise French Sarah Wilkes Martin Hamilton Craig Turner	Head of Legal & Governance /Monitoring Officer Democratic Services Team Leader Head of Finance / S151 Officer Chief Executive Finance Manager	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Stephen Sweeney Councillor Simon Tagg	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - Finance, Town Centres and Growth Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - One Council, People and Partnerships	

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

30. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader of the Council updated on 2 points raised at the last meeting:

- CCTV – this was not a statutory service but the Council had adopted a partnership approach and was happy to discuss how CCTV could be introduced with Town and Parish Councils
- Call wait times – average wait times were just over 2 minutes, there was a message while waiting that encouraged callers to check if their query could be answered online. Call abandonment rates were 20% but this would include customers who had decided to hang up and look to resolve their query online. Call wait times had increased in November and December due to items including the Local Plan consultation and subscriptions for the green waste service.

A Member raised a query about difficulty in locating a form online for landlords to report empty properties.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

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31. **REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET AND STRATEGIES 2022/23**

The Committee considered the Revenue and Capital Budget and strategies - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022/23 to 2026/27; Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy; draft Capital Strategy; draft Treasury Management Strategy; and draft Investment Strategy.

The results of the budget consultation would be reported to Cabinet on 2 February 2022.

The following queries and issues were raised:

- Savings of £14k were identified through the introduction of a digital booking system; how were savings achieved when there were no staff redundancies? The Committee was advised that there would be staff reduction through natural wastage but some staff would be able to focus on other roles and tasks or progress onto different roles within the Council. The salary savings were across the Council and would partly result from realignment of staff and roles.
- What was the insurance and risk perspective on the electronic lifeguard system? This would be discussed with the insurers and be included on the Council's risk management systems
- Were there savings that could be achieved through working from home and was this likely to continue? The Council acknowledged the continued role of home working but also recognised the importance of working together in a face to face environment and how the open plan aspect at Castle House helped with team spirit.
- IT costs were high and had alternative options such as open source software, been explored? In response, it was explained that all elements of the budget had been scrutinised through the Council's Efficiency Board and, although there were options for some software, there were many licences that were specialist provision.
- How much confidence was there that inflationary pressures could be managed? The Committee was informed that much work had been undertaken on the impact of inflation, costs were fixed where possible, inflationary factors were built into the budget, for energy costs the Council was currently still within a contract but the Procurement Officer was monitoring the situation. Inflation would also impact the Capital Programme but for example, the contract for Kidsgrove Sports Centre required the contractor to keep within contract prices and the project remained on budget.
- The MTFS identified a gap of £628k and it appeared this was to be met from Good Housekeeping and the Health and Social Care levy; was this correct and could this gap be closed? Members were advised that the headings were not an exhaustive list and other income streams would be included to ensure the gap could be met.

Resolved: That:

1. The progress on the completion of the Revenue (Appendix 1) and Capital Budgets (Appendix 4) for 2022/23 be noted.
2. The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27 (Appendix 2) be noted.
3. The strategy for ensuring a balanced revenue outturn position for 2021/22 be noted.
4. The mid-year estimate of capital expenditure be noted (Appendix 4).
5. The calculation of the Council Tax base and the Council Tax increase to be proposed for 2022/23 of 1.99% per Band D equivalent property be noted.
6. The risk assessment at Appendix 3 and S151 Officer's recommendation on the level of reserves and contingencies provisionally required to be maintained in 2022/23 be noted.
7. The draft Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy (Appendix 6) for 2022/23 be noted.
8. The draft Capital Strategy (Appendix 7) for 2022/32 be noted.
9. The draft Treasury Management Strategy (Appendix 8) for 2022/23 be noted.
10. The draft Investment Strategy (Appendix 9) for 2022/23 be noted.

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32. SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES 2022/23

The Committee considered the proposed list of fees and charges. The Committee was informed that the Medium Term Financial Strategy assumed an average increase of 3% across all fees and charges but some charges would not increase including car parking for which charges were frozen to encourage Town Centre growth.

Members discussed whether future reports could include some comparator information of fees and charges from previous years. It was also noted that some fees and charges, eg elections, were set nationally and whether this should be made clear in the documents.

Resolved: that the schedule of fees and charges be noted.

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33. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

Resolved: that the Work Programme be received.

34. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

35. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

36. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

Resolved: that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following matter because it is likely that there will be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

37. SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES 2022/23 - CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX

Resolved: that the report be noted.

38. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 24 MARCH 2022

**Councillor Mark Holland
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 7.45 pm