

MINUTES of a meeting of the CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 8 JANUARY 2020

Present: Councillor J Houlton (Deputy Chairman)

Councillors D Bigby (Substitute for Councillor R Johnson), A J Bridgen, V Richichi, S Sheahan, D E J Tebbutt and M B Wyatt

Portfolio Holders: Councillors R Ashman and N J Rushton

Officers: Mr A Barton, Mrs T Bingham, M D'Oyly-Watkins, Mr M Murphy, Mrs B Smith, Mrs R Wallace and Miss A Wright

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors E Allman, R Boam, R Johnson and N Smith.

24. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

25. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no public questions.

26. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019.

It was moved by Councillor S Sheahan, seconded by Councillor A Bridgen and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019 be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

27. DRAFT 2020/21 GENERAL FUND AND SPECIAL EXPENSES REVENUE BUDGETS

The report was presented by the Head of Finance and supported by the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

In response to a question from Councillor S Sheahan, the Head of Finance explained that the proposed reduction in rent allowances was due to a lower demand for the benefit. It was agreed to provide further information regarding the allowance to Councillor S Sheahan outside of the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor S Sheahan, the Head of Finance explained that the additional recharges to the Housing Revenue Account and Special Expenses are an accounting transaction, which annually recover the costs of providing corporate services to the Housing Service.

Councillor S Sheahan questioned the Corporate Portfolio Holder on the administration's decision to once again, not increase Council Tax. The Corporate Portfolio Holder stated that this was a policy of the Conservative group and formed part of the election manifesto; there was no intention to change it.

Chairman's initials

Councillor M B Wyatt referred to his previous suggestions to utilise the Coalville Cemetery for additional usage and asked if there were any plans for this in the future. The Head of Finance referred to appendix A of the Cabinet report, which detailed this proposal. She added that it was being investigated as part of the burial review.

In reference to the proposed increase in Council Tax for the Coalville Special Expenses area, Councillor M B Wyatt reiterated the view of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party who were against the proposal. He asked if a higher settlement was agreed nationally, would this be revisited. The Corporate Portfolio Holder stated that the settlement would not change the proposal, as other areas would not be subsidising services required in the Coalville Special Expenses area. He added that a solution to this would be to parish the area.

In response to a question from Councillor D Bigby, the Head of Finance clarified that the consultation referred to within the report was the statutory consultation to parishes. The additional public consultation, a new process for this year, would begin week commencing 13 January 2020 and that comments would be considered by Cabinet when it considers the final budget proposals in February.

In response to a question from Councillor D Bigby in relation to the Council's journey to self-sufficiency, the Head of Finance explained that the figure was a new savings target linked to the Medium Term Financial Plan and was reviewed periodically. The Chief Executive appreciated that Members would be interested in the Self-Sufficiency Programme and it was agreed to include it in the work programme for a future meeting.

Councillor D Bigby asked for assurances that the cost of the substantive review of the Local Plan had been taken into account, as it was essential that it was undertaken properly. The Corporate Portfolio Holder explained that the proposals reflected the programme and included estimated costs. He added that the Council was committed to the Local Plan and the funds for the substantive review remain in place.

Regarding the proposed funds for tree maintenance, Councillor M B Wyatt asked if this would cover the new trees planned for the Coalville Special Expenses area. The Head of Finance confirmed that the existing budget is for tree maintenance across the whole of the district and the additional funds are to extend tree maintenance service in the Coalville Special Expenses area.

28. 2020/21 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET PROPOSALS

The report was presented by the Head of Finance and supported by the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

Councillor M B Wyatt asked officers to look into the use of streetlights as the lights throughout a number of estates were not LED and were on 24 hours a day. The Head of Finance agreed to feed this back to the service, as it was something that could be looked at to save money and as part of the Council's green agenda.

Councillor S Sheahan commented that the increase in funds for car park improvements seemed to be balances brought forward rather than an increase. The Head of Finance confirmed that the proposal was to increase the level of funds over a three-year period and further information would be included in the report to Cabinet in February. Councillor S Sheahan confirmed that he would like to see an increase in funds as it was needed.

In response to a further question regarding estate pilots in a council housing area from Councillor S Sheahan, the Chief Executive explained that the sites for improvement were

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not yet decided but were being considered. Councillor S Sheahan requested the Riverside Estate be considered.

Councillor D Bigby requested that a list of all car parks being considered be shared with the Committee. He also suggested that the installation of electric car charging points be considered as part of the improvements.

In response to a question from Councillor D Bigby, the Head of Finance explained that the tenants involved in the consultation were those on specific tenant groups but there would also be a Council led consultation exercise and media plan to ensure engagement, this includes focus on tenants. She added that all tenants would be written to before any rent increase in accordance with the statutory 28 days' notice period required. The Chief Executive acknowledged that public engagement was something that needed to be improved across the Council, this was why more consultation than ever was being undertaken on the budget for the coming financial year.

The Corporate Portfolio Holder asked the Strategic Director to look into the possibility of utilising the derelict land at the corner of Waterworks Road and Cropston Drive for a community woodland. The Strategic Director agreed to investigate.

29. 2020/21 - 2024/25 DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMMES

The report was presented by the Head of Finance and supported by the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

A discussion was had regarding the allocated funds for new build/new supply of council homes and the amount that had actually been spent to date. Councillor S Sheahan felt that the Council should be doing better at replacing the number of council homes that were being lost to Right to Buy. The Corporate Portfolio Holder agreed and was supportive of purchasing more houses to add to the stock, as there were plenty of properties available in the District. The Chief Executive explained that this was something that the newly appointed Strategic Director would be working on. Councillor S Sheahan requested that this topic be scrutinised in the future.

30. 2020/21 CAPITAL STRATEGY

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members.

In response to a question from Councillor D Bigby regarding developer contributions, the Strategic Finance Manager clarified that the reducing developer contributions in the table detailed at paragraph 3.2 were what the council was spending and not what it was receiving. The Council was spending less because other funds in the HRA budget required spending.

31. 2020 - 2025 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members.

A discussion was had regarding the projections for additional council homes as the report seemed to indicate that there would be none required beyond the next five years. Members raised concerns that the housing stock was declining over the long-term and that there were no future plans to replace them. Officers explained that there was an intention to increase the housing stock beyond five years and agreed to obtain more information from the service area and provide it to Members outside of the meeting. The Head of Finance referred to paragraph 4.6.1 of the report, which provided information on the five-year new supply programme.

32. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2020/21 TO 2022/23

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members.

Councillor M B Wyatt stated that he felt confidence in Coalville businesses was currently very low with lots of units in the town empty. He added that the rent charged for the units was unstable as it changed frequently and this gave businesses uncertainty. He asked that this be looked into. The Chief Executive confirmed that she was aware of this and was something officers were investigating.

Following a question regarding the financing of the new leisure centre from Councillor V Richichi, the Head of Finance gave an overview of how it would be funded and explained that the level of external borrowing was constantly reviewed, and would continue to be until the point of need.

In response to a question regarding the contractor who was building the new leisure centre, the Chief Executive assured Councillor V Richichi that the Council was protected against any cost changes within the legal contract. She agreed to provide further information regarding the contract outside of the meeting if required.

Councillor D Bigby asked that the leisure centre contract be taken to the relevant scrutiny committee. The Chief executive was happy for this to be included in the work programme and offered to also provide quarterly updates.

33. DRAFT INVESTMENT STRATEGY - SERVICE AND COMMERCIAL 2020/21

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members and there were no further comments.

34. CORPORATE PEER REVIEW

The Chief Executive presented the report to Members.

Councillor M B Wyatt referred to the leadership of place as detailed at page 162 of the report. He felt that not enough emphasis was being placed on the regeneration of Coalville and that no one was taking ownership of it. He did not feel that businesses were being engaged and simply issuing surveys did not work. He believed that the leadership required more ambition with more local input. The Chief Executive reminded Members that the regeneration of Coalville was a number one priority for the Council and assured that the Leader of the Council championed it. However, she recognised the need to improve engagement with local people and businesses, and was already looking at ways to introduce a better approach. Councillor M B Wyatt concurred that the Leader of the Council did champion the regeneration of Coalville but would like to see more people behind him as it needed to be a team effort.

Councillor S Sheahan agreed with the positive comments regarding the scrutiny function and took comfort in the fact that there would be a cross party working group used to shape how it would operate going forward.

In response to a question from Councillor V Richichi, the Chief Executive explained that the Peer Review Team had not provided a blue print for the council to adhere to. Rather the process draws on a wide set of experience from across the sector, providing examples of good practice from other authorities to aid in shaping things moving forward.

In response to a question from Councillor D Bigby, the Chief Executive explained that the gaps in the finance service raised during the review are currently being reviewed. Some temporary resource has been agreed and work was underway.

It was moved by Councillor V Richichi, seconded by Councillor S Sheahan and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

35. 2019/20 Q2 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chief Executive presented the report to Members and referred to the replacement page 215 of the report as circulated at the meeting. She informed members that she was hoping to provide information on the Economic Indicators at the meeting but due to its link to the current EU Exit work being undertaken, she would circulate the information by the end of January.

Further to the survey for Parish Council's on their appetite for implementing Neighbourhood Plans, Councillor S Sheahan was aware that a workshop was being held in March to provide further information. He asked if this could be widened for district councillors to attend, as he believed it would be beneficial to join in the conversations with the parishes. The Chief Executives agreed to take that back to the service and for arrangements to be made to include District Councillors.

At the request of Councillor S Sheahan the Chief Executive agreed to provide further information on the sites being investigated for new build council properties, as well as a progress update on the former sheltered housing scheme sites.

Following the discussion on the call centre statistics for the quarter, the Chief Executive agreed to provide Councillor S Sheahan with further information so he could understand what effected the performance not just for this quarter but for the whole year to provide context.

Councillor D Bigby asked for further information about the neighbourhood plan consultation with parishes to be provided to the Local Plan Committee, as it would help in some important decisions in the near future. This was agreed.

It was moved by Councillor A Bridgen, seconded by Councillor V Richichi and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

36. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Following discussions during the meeting, the following items would be added to the work programme:

- Journey to Self-Sufficiency Programme Update
- Leisure Centre Update - Contracts

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.35 pm

Chairman's signature