

MINUTES of a meeting of the CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Remote Meeting using Microsoft Teams on WEDNESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2020

Present: Councillor R Boam (Chairman)

Councillors J Hoult, E G C Allman, A J Bridgen, G Hoult, R Johnson, S Sheahan, N Smith and M B Wyatt

Portfolio Holders: Councillors R D Bayliss and N J Rushton

Officers: Mr A Barton, E Tomlinson, Miss A Wright, Mrs T Bingham, Mr C Lambert, Mr P Sanders, Mr P Wheatley, C Colvin and Mrs R Wallace

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Tebbutt.

11. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor S Sheahan declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 – Items for Inclusion in Future Work Programme and Item 7 – Budget Proposals 2021/22 as a Leicestershire County Councillor and a property owner affected by HS2. He confirmed that if any discussion took place regarding HS2 he would leave the meeting.

Councillor M B Wyatt declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 7 – Budget Proposals 2021/22 as a Coalville business owner. He confirmed he would leave the meeting if discussions were had on anything directly related to his businesses.

12. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

None.

13. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2010.

It was moved by Councillor J Hoult, seconded by Councillor E Allman and by affirmation of the meeting was

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

14. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman referred Members to the Committee's Work Programme and the Cabinet's Executive Decision Notice.

Members were invited to make requests for additional items to be included. No comments were made.

The Strategic Director informed Members that as the December meeting had only one item scheduled, it had been agreed by the Chairman to cancel this meeting and defer the item to the January meeting.

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By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The Future Work Programme be received and noted.

15. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was moved by Councillor J Hoult, seconded by Councillor N Smith and

RESOLVED THAT:

In pursuance of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that the business to be transacted involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act and that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

16. BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22

The Corporate Portfolio Holder advised Members that for the second year, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee were being asked to have an early input into the draft budget proposals and all comments would be fed back to individual portfolio holders prior to consideration by Cabinet in December. He thanked the Head of Finance and her team for the hard work undertaken on the budget proposals under very difficult national circumstances.

Members were reminded that in accordance with the usual budget setting process, a further budget report would be brought to committee for more detailed scrutiny in January.

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members. She explained that the report reflected the budget changes for the next financial year but was still very much in draft as there was a lot of work still ongoing in relation to staffing, value of small (below £5,000) budget changes, general fund funding position and the impact of capital grants on revenue. The Head of Finance referred Members to an error in Appendix B of the report in relation to the self-sufficiency fund, there should be no change at all from last year and should not be included.

The following responses were given to a number of questions from Councillor S Sheahan:

- The allocation of £100,000 from the self-sufficiency reserve for engaging external expertise to assist in the delivery of savings was questioned; as it was felt it could be put to better use elsewhere. The Portfolio Holder explained that this allocation fell under the 'invest to save' banner and as NWLDC was a small local authority with lots of pressures, it would be beneficial for an external view to help generate the savings missed out on this year. The Head of Finance also stressed the benefits of external expertise. She explained that it would also assist with officer capacity, as there had been a shift in focus in response to the national issues.
- In relation to the proposed investments in both Marlborough Square and Memorial Square, it was asked what benefits the community would receive, as there was little detail. The Interim Regeneration Project Manager explained that the investment formed part of a bid that if successful would bring £18million to the area. Members were reminded that the full project plan had been to Cabinet and was available if required. It was added that more plans were subject to Cabinet approval and a further report would be considered in the near future. The Portfolio Holder was very hopeful

Chairman's initials

that the bid would be a success and believed it could be a turning point for Coalville. He stressed that the regeneration of Coalville was a priority and he felt that the project was aspirational.

- The decision to fund the Breedon Gate installation was questioned due to the high level of expenditure on an asset not owned by the Council. The Portfolio Holder was closely involved in the issue as it fell under his County Council constituency. He explained that there was many issues in the area, especially anti-social behaviour and the installation of the gate would assist immensely. Although it seemed a large investment, the installation was a very technical process and involved the department of transport, highway works and many legalities such as gating orders, information of which could be provided if necessary. He added that the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council was also heavily involved and that the investment was necessary. The Head of Community Services added that this area was an area of extreme concern as regards anti-social behaviour for which the council has a statutory responsibility.
- In response to questions in relation to the HRA Zero Carbon Programme and Green Grant Funding, the Head of Housing explained that 65 percent of the housing stock had an EPC rating between D and G, and the intention was to apply for funding. Due to the introduction of Universal Credit, details to assess if tenants were suffering from fuel poverty was not available, however the Head of Housing assured Members that there were other methods of obtaining information and officers were looking into the matter further.
- In relation to the Home Improvement Programme, it was asked if the increase in allocation was intended to improve or maintain the standard. The Head of Housing explained that housing stock components were continuously measured using a formula to determine lifecycles and this was used to put together the improvement programme. It was confirmed that following a stock survey the allocation proposed was required to undertake the works to maintain the current standard.
- In relation to the delay in the Sheltered Housing Improvement Programme, the Head of Housing explained that the delay was to improve the quality of the offer to the tenants in the remaining schemes. He advised that a number of assessments and consultations were still required, which would form part of the asset management strategy in quarter 4.
- Regarding the plans for off street charging points for electric vehicles, the Head of Community Services reported that it was an ongoing piece of work and therefore it was difficult to provide numbers and locations. However, he confirmed that lots of work was being undertaken in relation to the Council's carbon footprint and vehicles, with officers working on applying for a grant worth £100,000. When plans had been developed further, it would be reported back to Members including Community Scrutiny in the New Year.
- In reference to the savings as a result of the reduction in customer services staff, assurances in the continuing standard in service were sought. The Head of Finance confirmed that robust assessments had been undertaken and assurance from the Head of Service had been received.

Councillor S Sheahan spoke in support of the food waste pilot. He also asked for the installation of better cameras to assist in the detection of fly tipping, he was aware that officers were looking into options but asked that this be supported by Cabinet, as it was an important matter. The Portfolio Holder concurred with Councillor S Sheahan and agreed to take this suggestion forward to Cabinet.

Councillor M B Wyatt was in full support of the additional officer to manage the increasing rent arrears in response to Covid-19. He also supported the proposals for the fleet replacement programme but did not feel like it was being tackled quickly enough. He added that it seemed like the Council were not taking the climate change matter seriously, as there had been little movement since the initial discussions last year.

Councillor M B Wyatt questioned the reduction in the climate change reserve. He also expressed concern regarding the lack of data available to demonstrate what had been achieved and how much the carbon footprint had been reduced to date. The Portfolio Holder assured Members that Cabinet were in full support of the reduction of the Council's carbon footprint and was disappointed that it had not been possible to achieve more this year. He agreed to highlight the point to Cabinet, as he was keen to see it move forward, especially the vehicle replacement. The Head of Finance clarified that the climate change reserve was a one off fund as part of the carbon reduction agenda and due to the consequential way of budgeting, would naturally move into the mainstream budget, it would not disappear as such, but instead be featured within carbon neutral measures incorporated into the main budget. The Head of Community Services assured Members that there was lots of work being undertaken in relation to carbon reduction but it was still in the early stages as the action plan had only been agreed in March 2020, just before the national lockdown. He informed Members that an officer dedicated to this work was now in post and therefore the matter would start to move forward. He expected a report to be brought to scrutiny with more details by April/May.

In response to a question from Councillor R Johnson, the Head of Finance confirmed that if the new homes bonus assumptions were incorrect, it would make a significant difference to the budget, but that currently the only commitment from government was that the scheme would reduce to legacy-only payments from April next year. She reported that the Chancellor was expected to make an announcement in relation to this later in the month.

In response to a question regarding income from business rates and the effect of Covid-19, the Head of Finance confirmed that there was still growth due to the number of new businesses moving into the District but it was being constantly monitored, as there were risks due to the larger businesses not using their sites in full.

Councillor R Johnson questioned the reduced budget for advertising and asked what the plans were going forward to ensure the community were aware of matters such as planning applications. It was agreed that the information was to be provided by the Finance Team Manager outside of the meeting.

Councillor J Hoult expressed concerns regarding the investment in the installation of electric vehicle charging points around the District as technology was moving forward so quickly, they could be outdated before they were used. The Portfolio Holder took the comment on board and agreed that it needed to be monitored. The Head of Community Services confirmed that it was constantly reviewed.

It was moved by Councillor J Hoult, seconded by Councillor N Smith and by affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The comments made by the Committee on the early budgetary proposals be taken forward as part of the developing 2021/22 budget.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.56 pm

Chairman's signature