

MINUTES of a meeting of the CABINET held in the Abbey Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on TUESDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2023

Present: Councillor R Blunt (Chair)

Councillors M B Wyatt, T Gillard, K Merrie MBE, A C Saffell and A C Woodman

In Attendance: Councillors P Lees, S Lambeth, D Everitt, T Eynon, J Geary, J Legrys and S Sheahan

Officers: Mrs A Thomas, Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Miss E Warhurst, Mr P Stone, Mrs C Hammond and Mr T Devonshire

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor N Rushton.

39. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

40. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Mr G. Tyers asked the following question:

“I am concerned about the amount of money being spent on ‘Coalville Special Expenses’, especially relating to Grounds Maintenance. The Grounds Maintenance budget for this year, excluding Broomleys Cemetery, is £296,600. Since only £4,000 is allocated to flower bed planting and £27,000 to grass cutting, I decided to submit a Freedom of Information request in July this year (ref no 1125) to try to establish where the remaining budget allocation was being spent. I have been refused this information and have just been given a list of functions without any monetary allocation.

Could the portfolio holder please explain why the information was refused and the justification for spending over a quarter of a million pounds annually, on the remaining functions (as listed in your reply to my FOI request) - trimming bushes, clearing litter, spraying, street furniture, various inspections/tests, locking/unlocking and line markings?”

Councillor T. Gillard referred to the following response:

Whilst we apologise to Mr Tyers for not providing the level of detail he requested, I can assure him that this is due to us not having that required level of detail. The cost to Coalville Special Expenses of the Grounds Maintenance Function doesn't have a specific financial amount attached to each area or task, it is based on the number of staff that have been historically allocated to delivering the service. Currently this is just slightly over four full-time members of staff, although the fluidity of the service dictates that this isn't always the same members of staff. The average hourly rate for a Grounds Maintenance Operative is £49.30 and, therefore, the total cost for these staff over the year is £160,160, and this covers their salary, national insurance and pension contributions. In addition to this, there are Operational Overheads which total £56,350 and this cost covers elements such as vehicle costs, operational equipment, fuel, servicing, tipping fees, staff training, personal protective equipment, and a contribution towards the running of the depot at Coalville Park which includes elements such as business rates, electricity, service contracts, refuse collection and insurance.

On top of these are two further costs. The first is a cost of £32,630 Management and Admin Overheads which is a contribution towards the cost of the Parks and Open Spaces Team Leader, the Parks and Open Spaces Development Officer, the Grounds

Chairman's initials

Maintenance Supervisor, and the Parks and Open Spaces Admin Assistant, to cover a proportion of their salaries, national insurance and pension contributions. The final element is a cost of £47,460 towards Service Management Costs. This is a contribution towards the salary, national insurance and pension contributions of the Leisure Services Team Manager, the Head of Community Services, and the Strategic Director, as well as a contribution towards the other internal Council services that support the delivery of the service such as Human Resources, Payroll, Finance, Communications, Information and Communication Technology, Legal Services, and Customer Services in line with normal council accounting practises.

The total of all these elements is £296,600.

Whilst we are not able to allocate costs to the specific functions across the Coalville Special Expense area or sites, it should be noted that these costs are based on the amount of time the operatives spend on site at a total cost of £160,160 a year, and do not include the £56,350 cost for Operational Overheads, the £32,630 for Management and Admin Overheads, or the £47,460 for Service Management Costs. The £160,160 covers the functions as previously highlighted to Mr Tyers and include grass cutting, play area inspections, locking and unlocking of sites, statutory checks, emptying of bins, tree surveys, litter picking, weed spraying, shrub maintenance, hedge maintenance, the management of street furniture, line marking of pitches, the maintenance of the bowls green at Scotlands Recreation Ground, tree works, the management of sports pavilions, routine maintenance, and other related tasks.

This work covers the sites also highlighted to Mr Tyers of which there are 21. Whilst costs across all sites will differ due to the nature of them, this equates to an average of £7,627 per site per annum. Considering a Grounds Maintenance Operative's average hourly rate of £49.30, this equates to an average site visit of just over six hours per month for two members of staff, or 90 minutes weekly. This covers the main weekly tasks of emptying bins, litter picking, undertaking visual inspections of play area equipment, undertaking statutory inspections, and undertaking routine maintenance which, including travel time, would normally take two members of staff at least 1 hour. This obviously doesn't take into account some sites which are visited more frequently than weekly and the other highlighted tasks which are undertaken less frequently but take considerably longer to deliver.

As a supplementary question, Mr G Tyers outlined some of the things he felt had been inadequately detailed in the response he received, and he therefore reiterated his original question.

Councillor T Gillard asked the Strategic Director responsible for Communities for further information. It was agreed that the Strategic Director would arrange a meeting with Mr Tyers and the relevant Officers to privately discuss matters which could not be immediately explained.

The Chair expressed sympathy with Mr Tyers and assured him that the Cabinet would endeavour to provide a satisfactory answer in due course.

41. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2023 were considered.

It was moved by Councillor T Gillard, seconded by Councillor M Wyatt and

RESOLVED THAT:

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The minutes of the meeting on 19 September 2023 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

42. COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

The Infrastructure Portfolio Holder presented the report.

In response to a written submission, the Chair invited Councillor S Lambeth to provide comments on the report on behalf of the Labour Group.

Councillor S Lambeth discussed the key criticisms that the Labour Group had of the Delivery Plan, as set out in the document circulated at the meeting. He suggested that the administration's plan lacked ambition, had created a serious financial issue in the long term, failed to address the impact of inflation on reserves in the current year and future years and consequently meant that the real value of the reserves was being reduced. The result was the deterioration of services, the potential need for service cutbacks, and declining employment conditions for Council staff. There was a failure to do prudent long term planning. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were, he added, insufficient and failed to provide the appropriate metrics to scrutinise performance.

Councillor K Merrie refuted these criticisms. He noted that there had been a recent update in the process of reporting on the budget and explained what this entailed. He also outlined that the in-year position for 2023-24 will be reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

In terms of Council Tax increases, he explained that this will be considered as part of the approach to setting the budget for 2024-25 alongside a range of budget options and after consideration of the funding announcements from the Government's Autumn Statement and the Local Government Finance Settlement.

He also explained that the Council has a timetable for its budget setting process which will examine a range of budget options in support of setting a balanced budget for 2024-25. All Councillors are scheduled to be briefed on the budget options on 12 December 2023.

He added that the Council Delivery Plan reflected an attempt to bring in all stakeholders including the opposition, and the Scrutiny comments lacked specific, direct suggestions of how the Delivery Plan should be reshaped. Nevertheless, Officers and the Alliance had tried to accommodate Scrutiny comments where possible, and more so than in previous Delivery Plan drafting processes. These comments were captured in Appendix 5 of the report. He also had a conception of how KPIs should operate which was different to the conception of KPIs held by the Labour Group.

The Chair said the KPIs as existed reflected the Portfolio Holders private industry experience, though he accepted there was still work to be done. The Opposition still had a constructive role to play.

Councillor S Lambeth advised the Cabinet that he had a lot of experience of setting appropriate KPIs and wanted to work with the administration on the KPIs in the Delivery Plan.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Lambeth's input going forwards.

Councillor K Merrie confirmed that he would engage with Councillor S Lambeth again during the next stage of the process.

It was moved by Councillor K Merrie, seconded by Councillor M Wyatt, and

RESOLVED THAT:

Chairman's initials

The Council Delivery Plan be noted by prior to its progress to Council.

Reason for Decision: To progress the Council Delivery Plan to the next stage which is consideration by full Council.

43. INVESTMENT PROPERTY LEASEHOLD DISPOSALS

The Housing and Property Portfolio Holder presented the report.

It was moved by Councillor A Woodman, seconded by Councillor K Merrie, and

RESOLVED THAT:

The grant of leases detailed in Table 2.1 be approved.

Reason for Decision: to enable the letting of council commercial properties to proceed and rental income to be generated.

44. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor T Gillard, 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.

Reason for decision: To enable the consideration of exempt information.

45. EXEMPTION FROM THE COUNCIL'S CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES - PROCUREMENT SERVICE

The Leader of the Council presented the report.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor K Merrie, and

RESOLVED THAT:

The recommendations within the report be approved.

Reason for Decision: the council's Financial and Contract Procedures require that exemptions be reported to Cabinet.

46. EAST MIDLANDS DEVELOPMENT COMPANY LIMITED

The Infrastructure Portfolio Holder presented the report.

It was moved by Councillor K Merrie, seconded by Councillor R Blunt, and

RESOLVED THAT:

The recommendations within the report be approved.

Reason for Decision: to enable the Council to respond to the “Funding Notice” request for 2023/24 from East Midlands Development Company.

47. UNIFORM IDOX SOFTWARE AND LICENCING CONTRACT RENEWAL

The Leader of the Council presented the report.

It was moved by Councillor R Blunt, seconded by Councillor A Woodman and

RESOLVED THAT:

The recommendations within the report be approved.

Reason for Decision: the level of expenditure on the proposed contract exceeds the authority level in the Scheme of Delegation.

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 5.29 pm