



# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Broadland District Council, held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on 31 January 2023 at 10.00 am when there were present:

**Committee Members Present:** Councillor: M Murrell (Chairman), T Adams, N Brennan, P Bulman, S Catchpole, S Clancy, J Davis, N Harpley, S Holland, C Karimi-Ghovanlou.

**Apologies for absence:** Councillors: K Kelly, K Leggett, G Nurden and S Riley.

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillors: J Emsell, J Leggett, T Mancini-Boyle and F Whymark.

**Officers in Attendance:** The Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Chief of Staff (Monitoring Officer) (E Hodds), the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Assistant Director for Finance (R Fincham), the Capital and Treasury Accountant (D Slowther), the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager (R Dunsire), the Health and Wellbeing Partnership Officer (A Langley) and the Democratic Services Officer (J Overy)

## CABINET REPORTS

### 98 COUNCIL TAX ASSISTANCE SCHEME 2023/24

The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager introduced the proposed Council Tax Assistance Scheme 2023/24, which would reduce Council Tax bills to more affordable levels for low-income households. The Council was required by the Government to review the scheme on an annual basis.

He advised the meeting that there were no changes proposed for 2023/24, as a comprehensive review had been undertaken last year to increase the efficiency of the assessment and to ensure that those in most need were

targeted for assistance.

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that there had been no negative feedback in respect of the scheme. Members were advised that the Council also had a discretionary fund which it could use to help people in financial hardship and that this pot was proposed to be increased for 2023/24.

Following a show of hands, it was unanimously

### **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

That Cabinet **Recommends to Council** the proposal and approves the Council Tax Assistance scheme for 2023/24.

## **99 REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2023/24**

The Assistant Director for Finance introduced the report, which set out the proposed Revenue Budget and Council Tax for 2023/24.

The Committee was reminded that the Council faced a number of inflationary pressures in areas such as staffing costs, waste collection, energy prices and temporary accommodation, which had seen a significant increase.

However, the Government settlement had been slightly better than expected with all councils receiving an increase of at least three percent in their core spending power (provided they increased Council Tax). Even so, this would not be enough to keep up with inflation at its current level.

Despite these pressures the efficiencies being implemented by the Council would ensure that no draw on general fund reserves was required for a balanced budget and Council Tax could be kept at the current level of £129.91. It was also proposed that there be no change in special expenses for street lighting for 2023/24.

In an update to the report the Committee was advised that the Police were proposing to increase their precept by £15. This would be subject to ratification by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

In answer to a question about the savings from joint working with South Norfolk, it was confirmed that these were included in the quarterly Strategic Performance and Finance reports and were monitored as part of the Council's Transformation Programme, which had identified that savings were necessary to ensure that the Council continued to deliver balanced budgets going forward.

A member highlighted paragraph 8.8 in the report, which stated the strong argument for Council Tax increases to protect the taxbase and address the future predicted funding gap in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). She

noted that although there was no predicted draw on reserves for 2023/24, there would be in future years without an increase in Council Tax. She, therefore, asked the Assistant Director for Finance if he was confident that the Council could afford a Council Tax freeze for 2023/24?

In response the Assistant Director for Finance confirmed that it was affordable in the short-term not to increase Council Tax, although for every year that it was not increased £0.25m was lost in Council income. Savings, therefore, needed to be delivered and it was considered that they could be found as part of the transformation process. He added that any increase in Council Tax remained a political decision, but at this stage he did not as the S151 Officer consider it imprudent not to increase Council Tax. It was confirmed that the recommended minimum level of reserves was £1.2m.

A member noted that there were a number of areas of concern, such as the failure to sell Thorpe Lodge by September 2023, income lost through nutrient neutrality and a reduction in the New Homes Bonus. He asked if these issues had been stress-tested.

In response, the Assistant Director for Finance directed members to paragraph 6.5 in the report, which illustrated some scenarios that could increase and decrease the funding gap in the MTFP. This stress-testing exercise would be developed over future years to quantify the financial risks being faced by the Council in the short to medium term.

A member noted that overall, the budget was sound, with no draw on reserves or increase in Council Tax and although further savings would be needed the Council had had a funding gap in the MTFP for a long time but had always managed to address this issue in the past. He commended the budget to members.

A member noted the increase in investment income that had resulted from the increase in interest rates, which had helped the Council's finances significantly and that this was for the benefit of all residents in the District.

In respect of staff pay, members were advised that each one percent increase was equivalent to £75,000 in the budget. Negotiations with UNISON on staff pay would be commencing later today.

The Committee was informed that a £1 increase in Council Tax would equate to an additional £50,000 in the budget.

The Chairman congratulated Portfolio Holders and the Assistant Director for Finance and his Team for an excellent budget.

Following a show of hands, it was unanimously

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

That Cabinet **recommends to Council**:

1. The approval of the 2023/24 base budget; subject to confirmation of the finalised Local Government Finance Settlement figures which may necessitate an adjustment through the General Revenue Reserve to maintain a balanced budget. Authority to make any such change to be delegated to the Assistant Director of Finance.
2. That the Council's demand on the Collection Fund for 2023/24 for General Expenditure shall be £6,252,179, and for Special Expenditure shall be £121,962.
3. That the Band D level of Council Tax be £129.91 for General Expenditure, and £2.53 for Special Expenditure.
4. Changes to the proposed fees and charges as set out in section 5.

That Cabinet notes:

1. The advice of the Section 151 Officer with regard to section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, contained in section 10 of this report.
2. The Medium Term Financial Strategy projections.

### **100 CAPITAL STRATEGY AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 TO 2027/28**

The Capital and Treasury Accountant introduced the report, which detailed the Council's proposed Capital Budget for 2023/24 and the Capital Programme 2027/28.

The Capital Programme totalled £25.3m over the next five years. Expenditure for the programme would be funded from reserves, grant funding and capital receipts. There would be no requirement to borrow to fund the programme.

Budgets included works to the waste depot, the purchase of properties for temporary accommodation and £7m for loans to Broadland Growth Ltd to fund developments.

It was confirmed that the funds for Broadland Growth Ltd would be retained by the Council until projects were approved.

Following a show of hands, it was unanimously

### RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

Cabinet is asked to **recommend to Council** the Capital Strategy (**Appendix A**) and the Capital Programme for 2023/24-2027/28 (**Appendix B**).

#### 101 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2023/24

The Capital and Treasury Accountant introduced the report, which set out the Council's approach to the management of its borrowings, investments and cash flows.

The Strategic Statement was required to be approved annually by Council. There had been no major changes for 2023/24, but revised Treasury Management and Prudential codes published by the Chartered Institution of Public Finance and Accountancy had been incorporated for the first time.

The new codes emphasised that any authority borrowing should be for local projects, rather than for purely commercial ventures. This was not an issue for the Council currently, as no borrowing would be required to fund the Capital Programme.

Members were advised that the three key treasury management principles remained security, liquidity and yield.

Following a show of hands, it was unanimously

### RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

Cabinet is recommended to approve the following and **recommend these to Council**:

1. This Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023/24
2. The Treasury Management Policy Statement 2023/24 (**Appendix 1**)
3. The Annual Investment Strategy 2023/24 (**Appendix 2**)
4. The Treasury Management Practice (TMP1) (**Appendix 3**)
5. The Treasury Management Scheme of Delegation (**Appendix 4**)
6. The Prudential Indicators (**Appendix 5**)
7. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement (**Appendix 6**).

#### 102 HEALTH AND WELLBEING PARTNERSHIPS FUNDING DELEGATIONS

The Health and Wellbeing Partnership Officer introduced the report, which proposed approval of delegations to accept and distribute funding for the Broadland Health and Wellbeing Partnership.

The Broadland Health and Wellbeing Partnership was part of the structure of the Integrated Care System that had been established in 2022. The Partnership was chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Housing and Planning and brought together colleagues from local government, health services, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations and other partners, to focus on improving the health and wellbeing of residents in the District.

Norfolk County Council had provided £300,950 in Covid Recovery Funding for the Partnership. Delegation of this funding had already been given to the Director of People and Communities and the relevant Portfolio Holder, under existing COVID delegations and this money had been allocated to a number of wellbeing initiatives by the Partnership.

In addition, Adult Social Care had now allocated £82,000 of recurring funding from the Better Care Fund to further its wellbeing objectives. However, before this money could be released delegated authority was required for the Director of People and Communities, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to spend and allocate the funding, as intended.

A further finding stream of £204,750 across two years from Norfolk Public Health was expected for the Partnership in April 2023.

It was emphasised that the Council was only the holder of this funding pot, which was allocated by the Partnership.

In answer to a query about how many people were being helped by the Partnership, the Committee was informed that tracking data was still being collated and a report would be brought to members on the initiatives in the near future. One example of this was a women's accommodation project that had helped 11 women so far.

In response to a question about the Mindful Towns and Villages project and if the cost of hiring rooms and refreshments etc. was covered by this initiative, the Health and Wellbeing Partnership Officer confirmed that she would consult with a colleague who was dealing with the matter and provide a response following the meeting.

Another member suggested that the Committee should receive reports on the Partnership, as there were issues regarding the effective use of the funding and how well isolated rural areas would be helped.

The Chairman suggested that an item be placed on the Work Programme for the Committee to receive an update.

Members generally concurred with this view and the following additional recommendation to Cabinet was proposed seconded and agreed:

3. Subject to regular reports on the activities and spending of the Health and Wellbeing Partnership being reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Following a show of hands, it was unanimously

### **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

1. To delegate authority to accept moneys offered to Broadland District Council by the Health and Wellbeing Partnerships to the Director of People and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.
2. To delegate the spend of any Health and Wellbeing Partnership money allocated to Broadland District Council to the Director of People and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Housing and Planning.
3. *Subject to regular reports on the activities and spending of the Health and Wellbeing Partnership being reported back to the Council.*

(The meeting concluded at 10.43am)

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Chairman