

Electoral division(s) affected:

All

Purpose of the Report

To provide information to the Council on issues considered by the Cabinet at its meetings held on 12 and 26 July and 29 August 2023 to enable Members to ask related questions by no later than midday 3 working days before the day of the meeting

Contents

12 July 2023

Item 1 – Medium Term Financial Plan(14), 2024/25 – 2027/28, Review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Discretionary Discounts and Premiums Policy Key Decision: CORP/R/23/01

Item 2 -Review of Customer Access Point Service Offer Key Decision: CORP/R/23/06

Item 3 - Community Engagement Review

Item 4 - 2022/23 Final Outturn for the General Fund and Collection Fund

Item 5 - Council House Delivery Programme Update

Item 6 - Digital Strategy for County Durham

Item 7 - Council Employment Services – Future Delivery

26 July 2023

Item 1 - Office Accommodation Strategy Update [Key Decision: REG/03/2023]

29 August 2023

Item 1 - Amendments to the Charitable Scheme Brandon Colliery Miners' Welfare Hall

12 July 2023

1 Medium Term Financial Plan(14), 2024/25 – 2027/28, Review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Discretionary Discounts and Premiums Policy – Councillor Richard Bell, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Councillor Amanda Hopgood, Leader of the Council [Key Decision: CORP/R/23/01]

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on the development of the 2024/25 budget and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP(14)) covering the period 2024/25 to 2027/28. The report also considered a review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 and proposed changes to the Council Tax Discretionary Discounts and Premiums Policy.

Decision:

We:

- (a) noted the savings attached at Appendix 2 which were previously approved in MTFP(13);
- (b) noted and approved that consultation progresses on the new savings proposals developed for MTFP(14) as set out at Appendix 3, alongside the equality impact assessments contained at Appendix 5;
- (c) approved that consultation begin on the implementation of additional council tax flexibilities for empty and second homes as set out in the report;
- (d) approved that consultation begins in relation to proposed reductions in grant support for Town and Parish Councils;
- (e) noted the updated MTFP forecasts and the requirement to identify additional savings of £56.014 million for the period 2024/25 to 2027/28 but also note that this forecast could change significantly based upon decisions on council tax, the outcome of future government funding settlements, the Fair Funding Review and the ongoing impact of demand for services and inflationary pressures upon the council;
- (f) noted that at this stage it was forecast that additional savings of £12.135 million were required to balance the 2024/25 budget;
- (g) agreed the high level MTFP(14) and 2024/25 budget setting timetable contained in the report;
- (h) agreed the approach outlined for consultation on the 2024/25 budget and MTFP(14);
- (i) agreed the proposals to build equalities considerations into decision making; and
- (j) agreed that Cabinet recommend to Full Council that the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme should remain unchanged for

2024/25. d to: (a) note the savings attached at Appendix 2 which were previously approved in MTFP(13);

2. Review of Customer Access Point Service Offer - Councillor Susan McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Customer Services [Key Decision No. CORP/R/23/06]

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which outlined proposals to consider adjustment to the face-to-face service offer in four of our least used Customer Access points (CAPs) considering reduced demand and in line with preserving channel choice. The report also set out the consultation and equalities impact assessment (EIA) on the proposals, which were linked to the achievement of savings targets included in MTFP(13).

Decision:

We:

- (a) Noted the content of the report and the information contained within; and
- (b) Approved the proposed demand led adjustment to service offer across Barnard Castle, Chester le Street, Consett and Stanley CAPs with effect from 1 October 2023.

3. Community Engagement Review - Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an update on the findings from the countywide public consultation on ERS consultant's proposals for the council's community engagement function sought agreement to the recommendations for a revised function.

Decision:

We

- (a) noted the outcomes from the countywide consultation exercise;
- (b) agreed the proposed new Local Network model as the council's main community engagement function;
- (c) agreed the proposed timescales for phased implementation and transitional arrangements; and
- (d) agreed to receive an update on delivery progress including new governance arrangements and terms of reference in September 2024.

4. 2022/23 Final Outturn for the General Fund and Collection Fund - Councillor Richard Bell, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided information on the final revenue and capital outturn for the General Fund for 2022/23, the final outturn for the Council's Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Fund for 2022/23, the use of and contributions to earmarked, cash limit and general reserves in year and at year end together with the closing position regarding balances held at 31 March 2023 and achievement of Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) (12) savings targets in 2022/23.

Decision:

We noted:

- (a) the final revenue outturn overspend of £5.366 million which represents 1.05% of the revised net expenditure budget of £510.986 million;
- (b) the net decrease in the cash limit reserves of £3.509 million during 2022/23 with closing cash limit reserves of £8.056 million. These sums would continue to be held as earmarked reserves and be available for Service Groupings to manage their budgets effectively;
- (c) the closing general reserve balance of £26.017 million (£20.532 million prior to transfer from MTFP Support Reserve), which was within the council's general reserves policy of retaining a balance of between 5% and 7.5% of the net budget requirement (£26 to £38 million);
- (d) the closing balance on earmarked reserves (excluding cash limit and schools' reserves) of £188.482 million – an in year reduction of £35.482 million;
- (e) the closing balance on DSG / schools related reserves of £28.463 million – an in year reduction of £2.756 million;
- (f) the outturn position for the Collection Funds in respect of Council Tax and Business Rates.
- (g) the amount of savings delivered during 2022/23 of the MTFP (12) period.
- (h) the inflationary pressures that had been managed within contingencies and via the Budget Support Reserve during 2022/23 and the requirement to manage via reserves and service cash limits going forward.

We agreed:

- (a) that the capital budget underspend of £22.024 million be carried forward into 2023/24;
- (b) that service groupings continue to regularly review capital profiles throughout 2023/24, reporting any proposed revisions to Cabinet as necessary.

5. Council House Delivery Programme Update – Councillor James Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an update on work undertaken to develop a viable council house delivery programme since initial approval was given by Cabinet in October 2020 to deliver 500 council homes by 2026. The report provided information on how the Council had responded to a number of challenges, including inflationary pressures in the construction sector, rising interest rates, and the quality and size of some of the allocated sites in Phases 1 and 2, which had presented additional challenges for the delivery of the programme.

The report provided an updated business case for the delivery of both general needs and bungalow accommodation, provided an updated business plan model and outlined new governance and delivery arrangements and sought approval for the development of three sites to commence the programme

Decision:

We

- (a) approved the Council House Delivery Programme Business Case, encompassing strategic, economic, financial and management considerations as set out at paragraphs 21 to 72 of the report;
- (b) approved the Council House Delivery Programme as set out at paragraphs 73 to 74, which reconfirms the progression of sites contained in Phase 1 and 2 of the Programme, subject to viability considerations;
- (c) approved the Council House Delivery Programme Governance Approach as set out at paragraph 72 and Appendix 5 and to agreed delegated powers to:
 - i. the Head of Corporate Finance & Commercial Services and the Head of Planning and Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, Investment and Assets (acting as the Council House Delivery Operational Programme Board) to approve sites for delivery that are viable; and
 - ii. the Corporate Director for Regeneration and Economic Growth and the Corporate Director for Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, Investment and Assets (acting as the Council House Delivery Oversight and Approvals Board) to approve sites for delivery that are not viable;
- (d) approved the Council House Delivery Programme procurement strategy, as set out at paragraphs 82 to 85, to award a framework agreement following an initial restricted procurement process. The framework will have a minimum of three suppliers appointed and will

- have both direct award and further competition call off mechanisms permitted;
- (e) approved the Rural Delivery Framework as set out paragraphs 75 to 77 and at Appendix 6, which sets out a specific range of delivery approaches on the basis that the Council does not have suitable land holdings in the rural west of the County; and
 - (f) approved the consideration of non-viable sites as long as the overall HRA remains viable in line with the governance approach set out at paragraph 81 and Appendix 5.

6. Digital Strategy for County Durham – Councillor Susan McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Digital, Customer Services and Procurement

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which sought approval and adoption of a new and updated Digital Strategy for the county.

Decision:

We

- (a) approved the adoption of the updated digital strategy; and
- (b) approved the publication of the updated digital strategy on the Council's website as an interactive document.

7. Council Employment Services – Future Delivery – Councillor Ted Henderson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services and Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Partnerships

We considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Growth which provided an update on issues surrounding the approaching project end date for Council delivered employment services funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). Specifically, the report:

- (a) Highlighted the anticipated reduction/shift in service provision countywide from January 2024.
- (b) Identified the scale of the financial implications as European funded employment projects come to an end including the impact upon targeted cohorts, it will also identify potential future programmes, alongside structures required to deliver best value.
- (c) Identified the proposal to increase core council funding by £1million, to support improving progression activities, partially mitigate the impact of the end of ESF, and to ensure the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations and support for identified 15–25-year-old cohorts.

- (d) Explored opportunities and funding required to continue the delivery of Employment Services alongside the new expectations attached to UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Funding).

Decision:

We

- (a) Supported the inclusion of a Base Budget pressure of £1m in the 2024/25 budget to provide additional core funding to the Employability Service.
- (b) Noted proposals to the County Durham Economic Partnership Plus board for the council to be commissioned to deliver £4.9m of UK SPF funding to deliver employability support projects.
- (c) Noted the requirement to restructure employment support services within the significantly reduced budget

26 July 2023

1. **Office Accommodation Strategy Update – Councillor James Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investments and Assets and Councillor Richard Bell, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance [Key Decision: REG/03/2023]**

We considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and the Corporate Director of Resources which set out a specific option for the council to meet its accommodation needs and deliver best value.

Decision:

We resolved that the recommendations in the report be approved.

29 August 2023

1. **Amendments to the Charitable Scheme Brandon Colliery Miners' Welfare Hall**

Acting in its role as Trustee of the Charitable Scheme known as Brandon Colliery Miners' Welfare Hall we considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Growth and Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which sought approval to approach the Charity Commission to alter the scheme and to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Growth to complete the actions needed to alter the scheme.

Decision:

As Trustees of the Brandon Colliery Miners' Welfare Hall Scheme we agreed that delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Growth, Corporate Director of Resources and relevant Portfolio Holder(s) to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that Brandon Community Association receive a legal interest in Brandon Village Hall.

Background Papers

Cabinet Agenda and Reports

[Cabinet Agenda and Reports - 12 July 2023](#)

[Special Cabinet and Reports - 26 July 2023](#)

[Special Cabinet and Reports - 29 August 2023](#)

Councillor A Hopgood,
Leader of the Council
12 September 2023