

CHARTER TRUSTEES FOR THE CITY OF DURHAM

At the **Meeting** of the **Charter Trustees for the City of Durham** held in Committee Room 1A , County Hall, Durham, on Wednesday 6 December 2023 at 11.30 am

Present: The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Durham, Councillor L Mavin (in the Chair) and Councillors J Blakey, J Elmer, C Fletcher, D Freeman, O Gunn, A Hopgood, L Hovvels, G Hutchinson, E Mavin, M McKeon, M Simmons, P Taylor, M Wilkes and M Wilson

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Mayor sadly reported the death of former Mayor of Durham, Alderman John George Cowper who was Mayor in 2001/2002 and served on Durham City Council from 1991 until 2009.

Trustees stood for a moments silence as a mark of respect.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Brown, J Chaplow, D Hall, D Nicholls, A Simpson and D Stoker.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 External Audit Annual Review of the Return for the year ended 31 March 2023

Charter Trustees considered a report of the Treasurer that presented the External Auditors (PKF Littlejohn LLP) Annual Review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for the financial year ended 31 March 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Treasurer reported that there were three exceptions highlighted by the auditors and advised that actions would be taken to ensure that the exceptions were addressed before the 2023/24 return was completed.

The Treasurer referred to a date error in paragraph 10 of the report and confirmed that the risk assessment would be presented to Charter Trustees at the meeting in March 2024.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2023 including the External Auditor's Report and Certificate 2022/23 (attached at Appendix 2) be approved;
- (ii) That the actions to be taken to address the issues highlighted by the external auditors in the 2022/23 return be noted.

5 2024/25 Budget

Charter Trustees considered a report of the Treasurer that provided information to enable Charter Trustees to determine the appropriate budget requirement for the Charter Trust for 2024/25 and the basic level of council tax required for 2024/25 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Treasurer reported that Charter Trustees had previously agreed a strategy of £2.00 precept to be applied for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 and also agreed that this position would be kept under review on an annual basis. It was noted that the annual inflation rate, annual pay award, reduction in the Local Council Tax Support Scheme Grant and a decrease in the council tax base had been built into the budget assumptions for 2024/25.

The Treasurer advised that taking into account the latest projected outturn position for 2023/24 and the proposed transfer from reserves of £19,085 to balance the 2024/25 budget, the total level of reserves was estimated to reduce to £44,167 as at 31 March 2025.

In response to a query, the Treasurer explained that interest rates had been inflated during the previous 12 months and the interest base rate was forecasted to reduce from Autumn 2024. Therefore with the forecasted cash balances and lower interest rates, the bank interest rate was a reasonable estimate.

Resolved:

- (i) That the forecast of outturn position for 2023/24 be noted;
- (ii) That the council tax requirement of £53,806 and a £2.00 precept for 2024/25 be agreed;
- (iii) That the deadline for agreeing the precept for 2024/25 be noted;
- (iv) That the requirement to keep the agreed precept of £2.00 for 2023/24 to 2025/26 under review on an annual basis be noted.