



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee held at 4:30pm on Monday 23rd January 2023 in the Council Chamber at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE

PRESENT

Councillor Ian Bovingdon (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)
Councillor David Ambrose Smith (Substitute for Councillor David Brown)
Councillor Anna Bailey
Councillor Lorna Dupré
Councillor Mark Goldsack
Councillor Simon Harries
Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Alison Whelan

OFFICERS

Emma Grima – Director Commercial
Maggie Camp – Director Legal & Monitoring Officer
Spencer Clark – Open Spaces & Facilities Manager
Caroline Evans – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Nicole Pema – HR Manager
Ian Smith – Director Finance
Martin Smith – Business Development Manager
Hannah Walker – Trainee Democratic Services Officer

IN ATTENDANCE

2 members of the public.

73. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

74. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Brown and Councillor David Ambrose Smith was acting as Substitute Member.

Due to Councillor Brown's absence, Vice-Chairman Councillor Ian Bovingdon chaired the meeting.

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bovingdon declared an interest on Agenda Item 9, and stated that he would leave the room for the duration of that item.

Councillor Hunt declared that as Asset Champion he had had some informal discussions with the applicant for Agenda Item 10 but he remained open-minded and would participate fully in that item.

76. MINUTES

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2022.

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the Finance and Assets Committee meeting held on 24th November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

77. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

78. 2023/24 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report (X129 previously circulated) containing the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy, the Annual Investment Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision policy statement. The Director Finance highlighted that there was no planned external borrowing for 2023/24 and that the rise in interest rates, coupled with the high cash holdings of the Council at this point, was forecast to generate additional interest receipts which would assist in balancing the 2023/24 Council budget.

The recommendations submitted in the report were moved by Councillor Bovingdon, and seconded by Councillor Bailey.

Referencing paragraph 3.3 of the report, a Member queried whether the total loan facility of £7,500,000 to East Cambs Trading Company (ECTC) was sufficient. The Director Finance confirmed that discussions had been held with the Finance Manager at ECTC and the facility was considered to be appropriate.

It was resolved unanimously to RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL:

That approval be given to:

- i) The 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy**
- ii) The Annual Investment Strategy**
- iii) The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement**
- iv) The Prudential and Treasury Indicators**

79. REVENUE BUDGET, CAPITAL STRATEGY AND COUNCIL TAX 2023/24

The Committee received a report (X130, previously circulated) detailing the Council's proposed revenue budget, capital strategy and required level of Council Tax in 2023/24. The Director Finance highlighted to Members a balanced budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25 with no real changes to the services that the Council would provide in 2023/24. One Parish precept was currently outstanding but would be provided in advance of the Full Council meeting.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Bailey, and seconded by Councillor Hunt.

Members raised questions and responses were given by the Director Finance as follows:

A Member queried whether the forecast budget could be presented alongside the draft 2023/24 budget in Appendix 1A in order to compare more up to date figures. The Director Finance advised that the budget reports historically were presented with the previous year's approved budget rather than the latest forecast.

Referencing paragraph 10.7 of the report, and the £1.7 million not expected to be loaned to ECTC until 2023/24, a Member queried whether the company could still meet their obligations on 31st March 2023. The Director Finance advised Members that the profile of spend assumed that £5.6 million would be drawn down in the current year, with £700,000 of that remaining unrequested by the Company and he had received no information to suggest that this funding level would not be sufficient.

Proposing the motion, Councillor Bailey recorded her thanks to the Director Finance, the finance team and the management staff for the draft budget. She emphasised that 2023/24 would be the 10th year of freezing Council Tax, and recognised the impact of the cost of living crisis residents were faced with in this financial year. She highlighted the balanced budget for two years, that the Council had no external borrowing, and that the general reserves were at 10%. The capital strategy included the purchase of refuse vehicles and black wheeled bins and the loan to ECTC would facilitate the delivery of new homes, including affordable housing on the former MoD site and on the former Paradise Pool site. There was work to do on the surplus savings for years 3 and 4 which was an ongoing process.

Councillor Hunt, speaking as seconder, supported the comments of the proposer and added that most car parking within the District including Ely was still free and appreciated by residents, and no rise was proposed where there was a charge for parking. He thanked the Director Finance and his team for managing the Council's budget and finances.

It was resolved to RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL:

That approval be given to:

- i) The draft revenue budget for 2023/24 and MTFs for 2024/25 to 2026/27, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.**
- ii) The Statement of Reserves, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.**
- iii) The 2023/24 Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendix 3 of the report.**
- iv) The Capital Strategy and financing, as set out in Appendix 4 of the report.**
- v) The extension of Business Rate reliefs (which will be fully funded by the Government through Section 31 grants), as detailed in Sections 6.5 to 6.8 of the report.**

It was further resolved:

That the Director, Finance, in consultation with the Chairman of the Finance & Assets Committee be authorised to adjust the use of the Surplus Savings Reserve in 2023/24 and future years, to ensure that the net budget and Council Tax as detailed in 2.1 of the report remain unchanged (in the event of changes arising, principally in relation to the Final Settlement and / or the NNDR1 return). These changes to be made in advance of the report being presented to Full Council on the 21st February 2023.

80. LITTLEPORT HIGH STREET RENEWAL – CAPITAL GRANT FUND SCHEME

The Committee received a report (X131, previously circulated) detailing the Capital Grant Fund Scheme for Littleport High Street Renewal. The Business Development Manager reminded Members that a similar scheme for Ely had been considered by the committee on 4th October 2022 on a slightly larger scale.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Ambrose Smith, and seconded by Councillor Bovingdon.

Members asked for confirmation that applications would be processed only after the fund closing date as detailed in criterion 10 in Appendix 1, rather than as detailed in paragraph 4.5 of the report. The Business Development Manager advised Members that he would amend paragraph 4.5 to be in agreement with the Grant Funding Criteria and Application Form (Appendix 1).

A Member asked whether there would be another chance for applications to be received at a later stage, without requiring further approval from the Committee, if not enough bids were received before the closing date. The Business Development Manager explained that the funding had been provided by the Combined Authority and the indications were that the programme was likely to

close in March 2023 with all spending required to be completed by March 2024. The Director Commercial emphasised the need to work collectively to encourage applications before the deadline. Should funds remain then a second round could be possible if time permitted. Members agreed that it was important to promote the fund and gain applications from the people of Littleport.

It was resolved unanimously:

- i) That the scheme eligibility criteria and application form at Appendix 1 of the report be approved, and
- ii) That delegated authority be given to the Business Development Manager, in consultation with the Chairman of the Finance & Assets Committee and subject to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority approving the allocation as per 3.2 of the report, to open the fund on Monday 6th February 2023 and close it on Friday 10th March 2023.

4:55pm: Councillor Bovington left the meeting for the duration of the following item.

81. SOHAM HIGH STREET RENEWAL – CAPITAL GRANT FUND SCHEME

Due to the absence of a Chairman, the Director Commercial called for nominations for a Chairman for this item. Councillor Huffer was nominated by Councillor Bailey, seconded by Councillor David Ambrose Smith, and with no further nominations, was duly elected and assumed the Chair.

The Committee received a report (X132, previously circulated) containing the Capital Grant Fund Scheme eligibility criteria and application form for the Soham High Street Renewal.

Members queried whether it would be possible for a single applicant to apply and be allocated the total fund of £20,000, even though potential bids could start at £500.

The Business Development Manager and Director Commercial explained that the bidding bracket was the same as for the other schemes, and emphasised that this would be the second bidding round for Soham. The upper limit of £20,000 could be reduced if Members desired but had been set to maintain consistency with the other schemes and to maximise the potential for the fund to be fully utilised. Officers were not yet aware of any particular scheme that intended to bid for the total amount. Several Members spoke in support of maintaining the £20,000 upper limit in order to maximise the attractiveness of the scheme since the funds had not been fully allocated in the first round of bidding. A Member asked that a third round be undertaken, time-permitting, if the full £20,000 was not spent in this second round.

As for the previous item, a Member questioned the discrepancy between criterion 10 of Appendix 1 and recommendation 2.1ii. There was general agreement that the second sentence of recommendation 2.1ii should be

removed in order to match criterion 10, in order to not restrict any bids that may be received before the fund close date.

The recommendations submitted in the report, as amended, were moved by Councillor Goldsack, and seconded by Councillor Ambrose Smith.

It was resolved unanimously:

- i) That the scheme eligibility criteria and application form at Appendix 1 of the report be approved, and
- ii) That the fund be opened on Monday 6th February 2023 and closed on Friday 10th March 2023.

5:05pm: Councillor Bovingdon returned to the meeting and resumed the Chair.

82. LAND AT WILLOW WALK, ELY

The Committee received a report (X133, previously circulated) detailing the request received from Cathedral View Childcare Ltd for a licence of Council owned land in Willow Walk, Ely, to set up a “forest school” to teach children to respect and conserve the environment. The Director Legal explained that the Council had received a request to use the land, which had not been used for many years, for a forest school for young children. The site included large trees and a grass area to the front.

Councillor Bovingdon proposed the following motion, a revision of the Officer’s recommendation, seconded by Councillor Goldsack:

- (i) Agree the grant of a licence to Cathedral View Childcare Ltd of the land at Willow Walk, Ely on the terms detailed in paragraph 3.5 of the report save that the words “at a monthly rental of £500 (no VAT)” are substituted with “a monthly rental to be assessed by an independent valuation”; and
- (ii) Authorise the Director Legal & Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Chairman) to proceed accordingly.

A Member asked who would be responsible for fencing on the site and the Director Legal clarified that the fencing maintenance would be the responsibility of Cathedral View Childcare Ltd.

A Member queried the reference to the use of that piece of land for parking. The Director Legal advised that the land had previously been used for parking for occasional events such as Aquafest, and the Council wished to retain that right.

Members emphasised their support for forest schools and recognised the staffing and safeguarding skills required for their successful operation. They considered that this scheme would be a positive use of unused land and Members wished the applicants well.

It was resolved unanimously:

- i) That the grant of a licence to Cathedral View Childcare Ltd of the land at Willow Walk, Ely on the terms detailed in paragraph 3.5 of the report save that the words “at a monthly rental of £500 (no VAT)” are substituted with “a monthly rental to be assessed by an independent valuation” be agreed; and
- ii) That the Director Legal & Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Chairman) be authorised to proceed accordingly.

83. FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received a report (X134, previously circulated) detailing Budget monitoring information for services within the remit of this Committee and for the Council as a whole. The Director Finance highlighted a net underspend of £191k due to spend variations in a number of service areas, as shown in Table 3.6 of the report.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the following be noted:

- That the Finance & Assets Committee has a projected yearend underspend of £380,400 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £5,607,728.
- That overall the Council has a projected yearend underspend of £191,100 when compared to its approved revenue budget of £14,937,774.
- That the overall position for the Council on Capital is a projected outturn of £8,947,988, this is an underspend of £1,887,013 when compared to the revised budget.

84. ASSETS UPDATE

The Committee received a report (X135, previously circulated) containing an update on Council-owned assets. The Open Spaces & Facilities Manager advised Members that the Depot improvements were going well, and they had replaced seven concrete street lights with modern steel street lights for improved safety. The associated costs had been assigned to ‘other’ spend in Appendix 1 of the report but would be moved to ‘street lighting’ spend in future.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the update on Council-owned assets and the Expenditure Tracking Sheet at Appendix 1 to the submitted report, be noted.

85. FORWARD AGENDA PLAN

The Committee received the revised Forward Agenda Plan. A Member asked when the Crematorium plans would take place, the Director Commercial advised that responsibility had transferred to the Director Operations who was finalising the cost refresh exercise and would update Members in due course.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted.

86. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS

It was resolved unanimously:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1, 2 & 3 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

87. ECTC BOARD MEETING MINUTES

The Committee received the Minutes of the East Cambridgeshire Trading Company Board meeting held on 21st September 2022.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21st September 2022 be noted.

88. APPOINTMENTS, TRANSFERS & RESIGNATIONS

The Committee considered a report (X136, previously circulated) containing the Appointments, Transfers and Resignations for the period 1st June to 31st December 2022, and a summary of Exit Questionnaire responses.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5:33pm.

Chairman:.....

Date: