

Chairman - Councillor P M M Farrington

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

J M Pert	Deputy Leader and Community Portfolio
J K Price	Climate Change Portfolio
R M Smith	Resources Portfolio
C V Trowbridge	Leisure Portfolio
M J Winnington	Environment Portfolio

Officers in attendance:-

Mr T Clegg	Chief Executive
Mr T Willis	Interim Head of Finance
Mrs J Aupers	Head of Governance
Mr N Clifton	Interim Head of Operations
Mr C Jordan	Interim Head of Development
Dr T Redpath	Interim Head of Corporate Business and Partnerships
Mr W Conaghan	Press and Communication Manager
Miss M Smith	Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager
Mr J Dean	Democratic Services Officer

CAB41 Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2022 as published on 25 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

CAB42 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor F Beatty.

CAB43 General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2023-26

Considered a report proposing to the Council the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2023-24, the updated Capital Programme 2023-26 and indicative budgets for 2024-25 to 2025-26.

The Cabinet Member, Resources Portfolio, noted that although some detail had been provided much uncertainty remained regarding the future of Local Government finances, and the inevitable impact this had on the

Council's financial planning; further detail was expected in the forthcoming Local Government Finance Statement.

Councillor Smith was pleased however to report Council Tax remained below inflation in line with Council policy, and several fees and charges had been frozen to minimise the continued cost of living crisis. Through prudent management of the Council's finances services were maintained and the Council was debt free and continued to invest in capital schemes across the Borough.

The Portfolio holder noted a predicted small underspend which had been set aside to support the 2023/24 budget, with a report providing further detail to be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

In concluding his comments the Portfolio holder highlighted that the Council's finances were in a favourable position and the authority was well placed to thrive in the longer term before moving the proposals as set out in paragraph 2 of the report.

In seconding the motion to approve the recommendations the Leader of the Council paid tribute to Councillor Smith for his report which had been prepared under continuing global issues of recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic, the continuing war in Ukraine and the world wide cost of living crisis.

The Cabinet subsequently voted on the recommendation, which was declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that the proposals of the Cabinet Member, Resources Portfolio be approved as follows:

That the following be recommended to Council for approval:-

- (a) the Budget Requirement for the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2023- 24 be set at £15.137 million;
- (b) the indicative General Fund Revenue Budgets be set at £14.890 million for 2024-25 and £15.614 million for 2025-26;
- (c) the budget pressures, savings and income generation set out in paragraphs 5.5 - 5.7 of the report be approved;
- (d) the General Fund working balance be set at a minimum of £1.0 million;
- (e) the detailed capital programme as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved;

- (f) that the Council Tax for 2023-24 be increased by 1.9% to £168.52;
- (g) the Council's Tax Base be set at 48,863.55 (as determined by the Head of Finance);
- (h) it be noted that the inflation parameter for fees and charges for 2023-24 was generally set at 5%.

Members of the Cabinet extended their thanks to the interim Head of Finance and his colleagues for their efforts in this area of work.

THIS ITEM IS NOT SUBJECT TO CALL IN AND WILL BE REFERRED TO RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON 3 JANUARY 2023 AND COUNCIL ON 24 JANUARY 2023.

CAB44 Revenues and Benefits Collection Report - Quarter 2 - Part Confidential

Considered a part confidential report informing Cabinet of the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Service as regards:

- collections of Council Tax during the first half of the financial year;
- collections of Business Rates during the first half of the financial year;
- the recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit during the first half of the financial year;

and seeking approval to write off of the arrears listed in the confidential appendices to the report.

Councillor R M Smith detailed the collection rates as set out in paragraph 3 of the report before highlighting the proposals as set out in paragraph 2.

The Cabinet subsequently voted on the recommendation, which was declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that the proposals of the Cabinet Member, Resources Portfolio be approved as follows:

That:-

- (a) the information regarding collections be noted;
- (b) the arrears listed in the confidential appendices to the report be written off.

CAB45 Freedom Leisure Contract - Part Confidential

Considered a part confidential report allowing Cabinet to consider options relating to:-

- delivery of the Shakespeare production for 2023; and
- the financial implications of the exceptional increase in energy costs.

The Cabinet Member, Leisure Portfolio introduced the report by detailing the content of Paragraphs 3 and 5 reiterating the significant impact of increasing energy costs on leisure providers and the associated financial forecast. The Council was a strong supporter of leisure and culture and the resulting health and wellbeing benefits to its residents were acknowledged. Councillor Trowbridge concluding her comments by recommending that the proposals as set out in Paragraph 2 be approved.

Councillor R M Smith noted the challenging financial situation as referred to earlier in proceedings caused by rising inflation and the cost of living crisis and that the Council would continue with its 'open-book' arrangements as regards the contract with Freedom Leisure.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that the Council would continue to support Freedom Leisure to the best of its abilities, noting that some local authorities had been forced to close their leisure facilities due to financial constraints.

The Cabinet subsequently voted on the recommendation, which was declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that the proposals of the Cabinet Member, Leisure Portfolio be approved as follows:

That:-

- (a) as a result of the direct impact of the exceptional increase in energy costs on the Freedom Leisure contract, the provision of financial support for the balance of the current (2022/3) and next (2023/4) financial years (funded from council reserves as an exceptional cost, on the basis set out in the confidential appendix to the report) be agreed;
- (b) Officers continue to work with Freedom Leisure with the dual aims of minimising the level of financial support referred to and improving the sustainability of the overall contract;
- (c) due to the significant cost and financial risks of holding the annual Shakespeare production at

Stafford Castle, its relocation to The Gatehouse Theatre for 2023 be approved.

CHAIR