



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023

## **BUDGET SCRUTINY**

**23 January 2023 at 2.00 p.m.**

### **Present:**

Councillors Boyd, Brasted, Callison, Goodwin, Holland, Lindley, Sandford, Shutt, Silvester, Smith, K Swinburn and Wescott.

### **Officers in Attendance:**

- Sharon Wroot (Executive Director for Place and Resources)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law and Governance)
- Helen Isaacs (Assistant Chief Executive)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Director for Economy, Environment and Infrastructure)
- Janice Spencer (Interim Director of Children's Services)
- Katie Brown (Director of Adult Services)
- Zoe Campbell (Senior Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

### **Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Phillip Jackson - Leader of the Council
- Councillor Stan Shreeve - Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care
- Councillor Stewart Swinburn - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport
- Councillor Margaret Cracknell - Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
- Councillor Ron Shepherd - Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities
- Councillor Stephen Harness – Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets

## **SPBS.1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

RESOLVED – That Councillor Silvester be appointed as the Chair for this meeting.

COUNCILLOR SILVESTER IN THE CHAIR

## **SPBS.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence for this meeting.

## **SPBS.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest for this meeting

## **SPBS.4 BUDGET, FINANCE AND COMMISSIONING PLAN 2023/24 – 2025/26**

Members received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets outlining how the Council plans to deliver its agreed financial strategy over the coming three-year period.

Councillor Jackson, Leader of the Council, introduced the report and members were then invited to ask any questions on the draft budget, medium-term financial plan, the draft business plans and the capital programme.

### Medium Term Financial Plan

Members expressed their concern over the recommendation to increase council tax by 2.98% and the adult social care precept by 2%. They felt that this would add further financial pressures to residents at this time.

Referring to the disposal of property assets, a member queried if these sales were excessive or normal business. Ms Wroot explained that she was not aware of any comparison. She highlighted that capital receipts were essential and to achieve the reduction in carbon emissions the sale of surplus to requirements properties and land would make it easier to achieve because of reduction in maintenance and energy costs. A member requested that officers provide further information on potential assets which may be considered for disposal. Councillor Jackson confirmed that the council owned properties that were under performing and cost money. The council should be saving money from the sale of these assets.

There was a query about the impact on the final budget of not receiving levelling up funding for Grimsby. Councillor Shreeve explained that the council would continue with the redevelopment of Grimsby town centre without the levelling up fund offer, and it would not affect the budget.

A member was concerned about the costings for out of area high cost placements and queried if it was possible to have a breakdown of those. Councillor Cracknell explained that a piece of work was being undertaken by officers to understand the needs of children who were living out of area and how they could, where safely possible, bring them to live back in area on the basis that outcomes for these children would

improve and this would also reduce the cost of out of area placements. She noted that a breakdown could be provided.

Referring to the public health grant allocations, a member queried when this amount would be confirmed. Councillor Shreeve explained there was no timetable and that they were waiting for central government to confirm and then it would be included in the final budget.

Clarification was sought around vacancy management with regard to how many posts had been frozen this year, what was the financial impact, and what was the impact on future years. Ms Wroot confirmed that she would come back to members with that information.

Members were concerned about the children's service budget and queried if the budget envelope was based on the current number of children in care and was there contingency built into the budget if the number of children in care increased. Councillor Cracknell explained that there was a lot of work going on across the service and working with partners to reduce the number of children needing to go into care through prevention work and early intervention to improve the outcomes for families and keep children safe. The council had recently recruited 33 social workers from South Africa to help reduce the case load and at the same time focus on preventative work.

Members queried the level of corporate reserves that were forecast to increase considerably over the next 4 years and asked if this was justifiable. Ms Wroot confirmed it was good for the council to build up a level of reserves.

### **Resources**

Councillor Jackson responded to a query about resourcing of the border control post.

There was a query regarding whether the anticipated reduction in the number of children in care would impact on support services budgets, such as legal services, and whether this had been factored in. Ms Wroot confirmed that it had been factored into the budget if extra services were needed to bring in wrap around support.

### **Environment**

Referring to the Doughty Road Depot redevelopment, there was a query about the impact on budgets of services, such as the MOT station, not being available. Councillor Swinburn confirmed there had been no impact on the budget, and this had been reflected in the medium term financial plan.

A query was raised by a member around the income from the purchase of Freshney Place Shopping Centre and had there been any thought to

ring fencing any of the income. Councillor Jackson explained that he was not aware it would be ring fenced.

### **Economy and Growth**

A member queried if Meridian Point could be used all year round to generate additional income. Councillor Jackson suggested that this question be referred to Councillor Furneaux in his absence for consideration.

### **Children and Family Services**

Members were concerned about the out of area placement costs for children and young people and asked what was being done to reduce these costs. Councillor Cracknell confirmed that officers were looking at maximising the use of current homes and looking at education provision across the borough. She explained that there was an application submitted for a free school that would have 100 to 150 places if we could secure it, which would enable children to stay in education locally. She highlighted that any new schools being built would need to include a SEND provision. There was also an improvement in foster placements, which would help bring children back into area, if required and where safe to do so.

### **Public Health and Wellbeing**

There were no questions raised by members.

### **Adult Services**

Members were concerned about the dependency on the NHS to meet the demand on additional winter pressures. Councillor Shreeve explained that with help from health colleagues and partners they were trying to reduce the impact of winter pressures within hospitals to enable people to return home or into respite care. He confirmed that locally we were good at this and, as a representative on the Integrated Care Board, he assured members that there was attention and focus on the finances at this present time.

### **Capital Programme**

There were no questions raised by members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the minutes of this meeting be included as part of the response to the consultation on the proposals.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 3.10 p.m.