

CABINET

Date and Time: Thursday 2 February 2023 at 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present:

Neighbour (Leader), Radley (Deputy Leader), Bailey, Clarke, Cockarill, Oliver and Quarterman

In attendance:

Officers:

Graeme Clark	Executive Director, Corporate Services & S151 Officer
Joanne Rayne	Finance Manager
Sharon Black	Committee Services Manager

100 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of 5 January, including the exempt minutes, were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Proposed by Cllr Neighbour; Seconded by Cllr Radley

101 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

Cllr Collins was attending virtually and therefore would not be able to vote on any of the agenda items.

Cllr Radley advised that Cllr Clarke would be slightly late in arriving.

102 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Farmer declared a non-pecuniary interest in the item on the Budget as he was voluntary Chairman of Hart Swimming Club, which hired facilities at the leisure centre.

103 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements.

104 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (ITEMS PERTAINING TO THE AGENDA)

There was none.

105 BUDGET REPORT 2023/24

This item was to consider the draft 2023/24 Revenue Budget, Capital programme, and Council Tax Proposal prior to and make a recommendation to Council.

(Cllr Clarke arrived at 7.04 during this item)

Cabinet noted:

- The budget had been set in a challenging time economically
- The savings made from senior leadership level and Tier 2 savings had contributed to a balanced budget being made
- No major changes to the way in which the Council delivered services to residents were being proposed, although it was recognised that things were likely to be fluid during the year
- The budget book would be available for Members to view before Council considered the Budget on 23 February
- There would be a drop in session held via Teams for Members to ask questions of the finance team if they wished

A Member queried how a balanced budget had been achieved given the additional income through Government funding, revenue income and council tax income. It was explained that whilst previous figures presented to Overview & Scrutiny in November had shown a deficit, and there had been a significant increase in government grant, there had also been other items (notably debt charges and leisure centre management fees) which had not been favourable and caused a material swing in the other direction. These latter issues are referred to in the budget book and had accounted for most of the change in position. Figures would be available to view in the budget book.

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr Radley; seconded by Cllr Neighbour.

Thanks were given to the finance team for their work in producing a balanced budget in what were exceptionally difficult economic times.

The recommendation was agreed unanimously and would therefore be put to full Council at the end of February.

DECISION

Cabinet agreed to recommend to Council to:

- i. agree a 2.99% increase in Hart District Council's Band D Council Tax Charge for 2023/24,
- ii. agree not to change the Council's existing Council Tax Support Scheme other than the required statutory uprating,

- iii. agree to make changes to fees and charges for 2023/24 in line with the principles set out in this report, with full details being reported to full Council,
- iv. approve the draft Revenue Budget for 2023/24 as summarised in paragraph 10.1 and Appendix 3, incorporating the baseline net service cost variations included at Appendix 4,
- v. approve the new Capital Bids as detailed in Appendix 1,
- vi. request the S151 Officer to undertake a comprehensive review of reserves, provisions and SANG funds, as detailed in section 7 of this report, in Spring 2023 when the 2022/23 outturn is known and a more accurate assessment of economic conditions and business rate provisions can be made,
- vii. approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendix 2,
- viii. note the emerging pressures and risks set out in the report and the S151 Officer's intention to undertake a mid-year review of detailed budgets, and
- ix. approve the capital receipt flexibility strategy detailed in the report under the Direction issued by the Government early in 2022.

106 DRAFT TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT

This item was to consider the draft Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy 2023/24 which incorporates the Annual Investment Strategy and Prudential and Treasury Indicators.

Cabinet noted:

- This was a technical paper that had been reviewed at Overview and Scrutiny, and covered several changes in regulatory frameworks
- That O&S had held a discussion around ethical investment policies and the investment priorities section had been updated to include an aspect about how the Council could weave ESG (Environmental and Social Government) into its investments, which had addressed the concerns from O&S
- There was a requirement now for a report on investments to be given to O&S four times a year (from 2023/24) rather than twice a year as previous.

Proposed by Cllr Radley; seconded by Cllr Neighbour.

DECISION

Cabinet agreed to recommend that Council:

- I. approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023/24 and the revised Minimum Revenue Provision policy contained within it,

- II. approve the Annual Investment Strategy for 2023/24 noting the changes to the counterparty financial limits and ESG criteria and approach, and;
- III. approve and draft Capital Strategy 2023/24.

107 REVIEW OF FINANCE REGS AND CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS

This item was to review draft updates of Financial Regulations and Contracts Standing Orders

Cabinet noted:

- This was a review of the documents to incorporate good practice and should not need to be done for another 2-4 years
- The items formed part of the Council's constitution, which would therefore need to be updated

A Member queried whether in the light of the recent internal audit investigation, any changes had been made to the documents? It was confirmed that the procurement rules and guidance had been specifically reviewed and amended and the approach to project management changed too. It was also noted that the Terms of Reference for the Project Board were being reviewed to give a greater emphasis on financial monitoring.

Proposed by Cllr Radley; Seconded by Cllr Neighbour

DECISION

Cabinet agreed the proposed updates to the Council's Financial Regulations, as set out in Appendix 1, and the Council's Contract Standing Orders, as set out in Appendix 2 ahead of Council adoption in February.

108 CORPORATE PLAN

The purpose of this report was for Cabinet to consider the comments received to the draft Corporate Plan and to make a recommendation for debate at February's Full Council.

Cabinet noted:

- The comments received from those who had responded to the consultation had been reviewed and incorporated where appropriate
- Consultation responses had been positive on a 3:1 ratio
- The most voiced criticism was around the "Planet" section in that responders felt that the Council should be concentrating on Hart rather than more globally. However, it was recognised by the Working Group

looking at the responses that everyone had a part to play in climate change and that all organisations should do what they could

- A further criticism was that the Plan lacked targets and greater detail although that was not the purpose of that document
- There had been some misunderstanding about the proposed settlement capacity study. This was not a change of policy but an additional action

An updated version of the draft document would be circulated as soon as possible.

A Member stated that they felt that it would have been useful for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to have been able to see the responses from residents, but it was clarified that as the Corporate Plan was owned by full Council, O&S had been asked to contribute as a stakeholder.

Proposed by Cllr Quarterman; Seconded by Cllr Neighbour

Cabinet debated:

- That climate change was a bigger issue than just within Hart so it was right that the Plan covered Planet rather than just the District
- Whether to include an additional point under “Building a Resilient Council” about reviewing current shared and outsourced services to ensure that they are effective along with the intention to work closer with our neighbouring partner authorities. This was agreed.
- Whether the level of responses was in keeping with previous Corporate plans
- How future consultations could be communicated better to residents

DECISION

Cabinet agreed that the adjusted version of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027 attached at Appendix 1 be recommended to Council for adoption.

109 CORONATION CELEBRATION COMMUNITY GRANT

To seek Cabinet approval for the use of a Councillor Community Grant ward-based approach to funding local community projects to celebrate King Charles’ Coronation in May. The approach recommended is identical to that agreed by Cabinet in 2021 for the Platinum Jubilee.

Cabinet noted:

- That the proposal built on the success of the scheme used for the Platinum Jubilee
- The funding would be at the same level as for the previous scheme - £1000 per ward, which can be applied for by individual Councillors at £333 each, or collectively

- Whilst the money allocated was a modest amount, in many areas it had prompted other organisations to come together to organise events – there had been a great sense of community engagement

A Member questioned on what basis the funding had been calculated? It was noted that this was the same funding as used for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations and feedback from the Wards was that they had found this helpful.

Cabinet questioned:

- What the take up for the funding was for the Platinum Jubilee. A written answer would be provided for this question as the information was not readily to hand
- Whether there were any funds left from the Platinum Jubilee and whether these could be rolled forward into the Coronation fund. Again, a written response from the S151 Officer would be given.

Proposed by Cllr Neighbour; Seconded by Cllr Quarterman

DECISION

Cabinet agreed that a Councillor Community Grant ward-based approach to funding local community projects to celebrate King Charles' Coronation be arranged in accordance with the principles as set out in Appendix 1.

110 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme as circulated with the agenda paperwork was discussed.

It was noted that there was no date against the climate change action plan due to resourcing issues. However, a resource action plan for Climate Change would be brought to Cabinet at the March meeting.

Meeting closed at 7.44 pm