

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 17 February 2022 in the Council Chamber - Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Wharton (Chair), Dennett, Harris, M. Lloyd Jones, J. Lowe, T. McInerney, Nelson, Nolan, Thompson and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, I. Leivesley, M. Vasic, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, S. Wallace-Bonner and A. Jones

Also in attendance: 20 members of the public, one member of the press and Councillors C. and N. Plumpton Walsh

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
EXB64 MINUTES	
<p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2022 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO	
EXB65 DISCRETIONARY NON DOMESTIC BUSINESS RATE RELIEF	
<p>The Board considered a report from the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, which presented two applications for discretionary non-domestic rate relief, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.</p>	
<p>The report outlined details of the applications from NMO Spectrum UK and the Cathie Stankevitch Foundation, in respect of their premises. Appended to the report was the potential annual cost to the Council of granting discretionary rate relief to each organisation.</p>	

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the request for 15% discretionary rate relief from NMO Spectrum UK in respect of premises at D1, 1st Floor Centre Point, Victoria Square, Widnes, from 1 January 2022, be approved; and
- 2) the request for 15% discretionary rate relief from the Cathie Stankevitch Foundation in respect of premises at Unit 2, Ditton Court, Widnes, from 17 June 2021, be approved.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

EXB66 COVID ADDITIONAL BUSINESS RATE RELIEF FUND
2021/22

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, which requested approval for a discretionary business rate scheme for the distribution of Government financial support for businesses affected by the Covid pandemic, but were ineligible for existing support linked to business rates.

Members were advised that on 15 December 2021 Government announced that they would provide additional relief to businesses that did not qualify for any previous reliefs announced as part of the response to Covid-19. The new Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) was £1.5 billion and the amount allocated to Halton was £3,087,468. The CARF support would be provided to businesses through rate relief to their 2021/22 business rate accounts, rather than via a grant payment.

Appended to the report was the *Covid Additional Relief Fund Policy*, which outlined the Scheme's scope and eligibility, application process and how award amounts would be calculated.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Discretionary Covid Business Rate Additional Relief Policy included at Appendix A be approved; and
- 2) approval be given to the Operational Director – Finance, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, to amend the Covid Business Rate Additional Relief Policy, to ensure the Council distributes the full amount of Government grant funding allocated for the Scheme.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

EXB67 REVENUE SPENDING AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which reported the Council's overall revenue net spending position as at 31 December 2021 together with a forecast outturn position; and reported the financial impact of Covid-19 which included a summary of Government funding made available to the Council to date.

A summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 31 December 2021 was presented in Appendix 1, and Appendix 2 provided detailed figures for each individual Department. In overall terms the outturn forecast for the year showed that net spend would be over the approved budget by £2.998m. It was noted that this represented a significantly improved position on the forecast provided in quarter 2, where the forecast outturn was an overspend of up to £5.843m; the report outlined the reasons for the improved position. The revisions to the Capital Programme were listed in the report and the revised Capital Programme was attached at Appendix 3.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to only absolutely essential items;
- 2) Strategic Directors take urgent action to identify areas where spending could be reduced or suspended for the remainder of the current financial year; and
- 3) Council be requested to approve the revisions to the Capital Programme as set out in paragraph 3.18.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB68 BUDGET 2022/23

The Board considered a report from the Operational Director, Finance, which outlined a recommendation to Council in respect of the Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2022/23.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was approved at the Executive Board meeting on 18 November 2021. It was reported that there were funding gaps of around £12.0m in 2022/23, £4.2m in 2023/24 and £2.6m in 2024/25. The Strategy had the following objectives:

- Deliver a balanced and sustainable budget;
- Prioritise spending towards the Council's priority areas;

- Avoid excessive Council Tax rises;
- Achieve significant cashable efficiency gains;
- Protect essential front line services and vulnerable members of the community; and
- Deliver improved procurement.

In terms of consultation, it was noted that the Council used various methods to listen to the views of the public, and Members own experiences through their Ward work was an important part of that process. Individual consultations had taken place in respect of specific budget proposals and equality impact assessments would be completed where necessary.

The proposed revenue budget for 2022/23 totalled £113.891m; the departmental analysis of this was shown in Appendix C and the major reasons for change from the current budget were shown in Appendix D. Further to the £1.783m savings approved by Council on 8 December 2021, Appendix B presented further proposed budget savings for 2022/23 of £0.504m.

The Board was advised the final Local Government Finance Settlement figures were awaited, along with confirmation of some 2022/23 grant allocations including the Public Health grant. It was confirmed that the Council would continue to participate in the pilot of the 100% Business Rates Retention Scheme, as part of the Liverpool City Region (LCR).

Further information was provided on the budget outlook, Halton's Council Tax, Parish precepts, Police, Fire and Liverpool City Region Mayor precepts, the Capital Programme, Prudential Code and School Budgets.

It was noted that Members' had received copies of letters from Derek Twigg MP and Mike Amesbury MP, opposing the closure of Runcorn Swimming Pool, as part of the budget savings for 2022/23. Members of the public had also made their objections known to the proposed closure of the pool. Following the Board's consideration of the matter the Leader proposed an amendment to the recommendation. This was seconded and agreed by the Board.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Council be recommended to adopt the resolution set out in Appendix A, which includes setting the budget at £113.891m, the Council Tax requirement of

Operational
Director - Finance

£57.174m (before Parish, Police, Fire and LCR Combined Authority precepts) and the Band D council Tax for Halton of £1,595.67;

- 2) the recommendations in the report relating to the setting of the 2022/23 budget, set out in Appendix B and Capital Programme set out in Appendix F, be supported and recommended to Full Council for approval, with the exception of the proposal contained therein in relation to the closure of Runcorn Swimming Pool;
- 3) the proposal to close Runcorn Swimming Pool be put on hold for a period, no longer than six months, to allow time to see if an alternative delivery model can be identified by giving the opportunity for a third party to come forward with a costed and sustainable business plan to take over the running of the baths. That opportunity would be widely advertised to attract potential interest;
- 4) any proposal must cover both the capital and revenue costs of running the pool in the future;
- 5) if no such proposal is submitted that meets the above criteria within that six month period then the closure of the pool would proceed at that point; and
- 6) the subsequent gap this causes in the budget currently recommended by officers be met by increasing the amount of reserves and balances being utilised to set a legal budget for 2022/23.

EXB69 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2022-23

The Board received the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, (TMSS) which incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Strategy for 2022/23.

The TMSS was appended to the report and detailed the expected activities of the treasury function in the forthcoming financial year (2022/23). Its production and submission to Council was a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

The Local Government Act 2003 required the Council to have regard to the Prudential Code and to set Prudential

Indicators for the next three years, to ensure that the Council's capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable.

The Act therefore required the Council to set out its treasury strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy (AIS), which set out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments. Government guidance notes stated that authorities could combine the TMSS and the AIS into one report, which the Council had done and was included in Section 4.

Members noted that the production of a Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement was required and a formal statement for approval was contained within the report at paragraph 2.3, with the full policy shown in Appendix A.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to adopt the policies, strategies, statements, prudential and treasury indicators outlined in the report.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB70 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2022-23

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, on the Council's Capital Strategy for 2022/23.

It was reported that all councils were required to produce a Capital Strategy annually, the aim of which was to ensure that the Council understood the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

Members were advised that the Capital Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, included on the same agenda; this detailed the expected activities of the treasury management function and incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy for 2022/23. It was noted that the successful delivery of the Capital Strategy would assist the Council in planning and funding its capital expenditure over the next three years.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the 2022/23 Capital Strategy, as presented in the Appendix attached to the report.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB71 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2022-23

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, which set out the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the 2022/23 Municipal Year, which was appended to the report for information.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the Calendar of meetings for the 2022/23 Municipal Year, as appended to the report.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

ADULT SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

EXB72 HALTON SUPPORT AT HOME SERVICE

The Board considered a report from the Strategic Director – People, which sought a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of Part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders, to grant a direct award for the delivery of the ‘Halton Support at Home Service’, to be delivered by the British Red Cross, from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025.

Members were advised that the British Red Cross were currently commissioned to provide a Support at Home Service until 31 March 2022, which supported people for a short period of time during the difficult transition from hospital to home, as well as providing support in the community to prevent hospital admission. The service was an important part of the discharge management process, helping to alleviate the pressure on hospital beds as well as offering practical support and emotional support to people when they were at their most vulnerable. A list of services which may be provided to individuals was provided in the report.

The report described the rationale behind the waiver request and the costs involved over the duration of the contract.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Board

- 1) note the contents of the report; and
- 2) agree to the waiver of Part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders, in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv, and approve a direct award to British Red Cross for the provision of a Halton Support at Home Service from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025.

Director of Adult
Social Services

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL, HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND CLIMATE CHANGE PORTFOLIOS

EXB73 DECARBONISING EXISTING HOMES IN HALTON

The Board received a report from the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, which set out the approach for the local delivery of a number of UK Government funding and finance initiatives, to improve the energy efficiency and performance of existing residential properties.

It was reported that based on the evidence of the scale of the challenge and opportunity in Halton, a strategic approach was required to guide the implementation of the programme. This would be achieved through partnership working and would prioritise the least energy efficient homes and those households experiencing or at risk of fuel poverty.

The report described in detail the initiatives and funding schemes available in relation to reducing carbon emissions from UK homes, under the following headings:

- UK Government policy and funding;
- Halton and Liverpool City Region perspective;
- Energy Company Obligation;
- Challenges and opportunities in Halton;
- Delivery in Halton; and
- Strategic approach to delivery.

It was noted that although that these schemes and initiatives dealt with improving the energy performance of existing homes in Halton, the Council were also committed and developing a strategy to improve the energy efficiency of new build housing. This would outline opportunities to accelerate delivery of Net Zero homes within the Borough ahead of UK Government targets and introduction of new Future Homes Standards.

RESOLVED: That Executive Board

- 1) recognised the progress being made to support the decarbonisation of homes in Halton;
- 2) approves the strategic approach to delivery of decarbonising homes in Halton, as outlined in paragraph 3.26, to guide Council activity;
- 3) provides delegated authority to the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, in

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, to enter the Council into collaboration agreements with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, to deliver housing energy retrofit grant schemes;

- 4) provides delegated authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing and Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, to approve future revisions to ECO Flex criteria for Halton;
- 5) agrees that The Energy Projects Plus are engaged via the existing Service Level Agreement to provide ongoing advice and support to the Council to target delivery of energy retrofit grant schemes and subject to future review; and
- 6) agrees that future targets and monitoring in relation to decarbonising existing homes forms part of the Halton Climate Change Action Plan and Boroughwide Carbon Reduction Strategy.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB74 PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES FOR STREET LIGHTING ENERGY PROCUREMENT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, which sought approval for the Council to utilise Dukefield Energy (formerly Utilities Procurement Group UPG), as specialist energy advisor for the Council's un-metered electricity supply contract for street lighting, utilising the 'National Public Sector Energy Framework' in accordance with Procurement Standing Order 1.4.1 and to record that the anticipated expenditure was likely to be over £1m per annum.

The report provided some information in respect of Dukefield, who were energy procurement specialists to the public sector. They had procured energy for the Council since 2002; the companies awarded since then were listed, with SEE Energy being the current provider until 31 March 2022. Approval was sought for Dukefield to invite tenders on the Council's behalf for the supply of energy from April 2022 onwards, for a period of between 12 and 36 months, as recommended.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board endorse the use of the 'National Public Sector Energy Framework' for the purchase of un-metered energy in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.4.1;
- 2) it be recorded that the expenditure was anticipated to be in excess of £1m per annum; and
- 3) Dukefield Energy continue to be used to manage the Council's street lighting energy provision.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

CLIMATE CHANGE PORTFOLIO

EXB75 HALTON SMART MICRO GRID

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, which presented proposals for the development of a Smart Micro Grid.

Further to the completion of a 1 MW Solar Farm on the former St Michael's Golf Course, further feasibility work had been undertaken to see if there was scope to extend the Solar Farm and create a Micro Grid connecting the Municipal Building, Lowerhouse Lane Depot and the new Leisure Centre in Moor Lane.

Members were presented with the business case, which included outline budget estimates for the scheme. The report described how this proposal would benefit the Council with its ambitions to decarbonise Council buildings electricity, and heating and transport, via the culmination of several technologies.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Board approves a funding allocation of £250,000 to allow a technical consultant to be appointed to support the Project, including seeking a planning permission and to develop the required documentation to allow tenders to be invited for a Design, Build and Maintenance contract.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

EXB76 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 1) whether members of the press and public should be

excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and

- 2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business, in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

With prior permission from the Leader, Councillors Carol and Norman Plumpton Walsh remained to observe the following item.

EXB77 ACQUISITION OF ST PAUL'S MEWS, RUNCORN

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources, requesting approval to the acquisition of the freehold property of 1-4 St Pauls Mews, Runcorn.

Supporting information and financial implications in respect of the proposal were outlined in the report.

RESOLVED: That Executive Board

- 1) approves the acquisition and of the freehold interest in 1-4 St Pauls Mews, Runcorn, as reported in paragraph 3.4;

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

- 2) authorises the Operational Director for Economy, Enterprise and Property, to arrange for all required documentation for the transactions to be completed to the satisfaction of the Operational Director for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services; and
- 3) requests that full Council amend the Capital Programme to accommodate this purchase.

MINUTES ISSUED: 22 February 2022

CALL- IN: 1 March 2022 at 5.00 pm

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 1 March 2022.

Meeting ended at 3.10 p.m.