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EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 16 November 2023 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building

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

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, S. Young, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, G. Ferguson and W. Rourke

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

EXB49 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2023 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB50 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 – 2026/27 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27.

The MTFS sets out a three-year projection of the Council's resources and spending and was based on information that was currently available. The most recent Public Sector Spending Review was published at the end of October 2021 and covered the next three financial years. It was noted that details of the 2024/25 Local Government Finance Settlement were expected to be released in December 2023 on a provisional basis, with a final settlement expected in January 2024.

The Board was advised that the delay and uncertainty regarding 2024/25 financial resources meant the financial

information included within the MTFS was based on a large number of assumptions and best estimates. The financial forecast would be updated as and when further information was known. Appendix 1 therefore detailed the MTFS from 2024/25 – 2026/27 using a prudent estimate of the financial conditions over the course of the next three years. Appendix 2 presented the Reserves and Balances Strategy.

Reason for Decision

To seek approval for the Council's MTFS for 2024/25 to 2026/27.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The alternative option of not maintaining a MTFS has been considered. However, this would not follow good financial management practice, as the Medium Term Financial Strategy is a key element in informing the Council's financial planning and budget setting processes.

Implementation date

The MTFS 2024/25 will be implemented from 1 April 2024.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved;
- 2) the 2024/25 base budget be prepared on the basis of the underlying assumptions set out in the Strategy;
- 3) the Reserves and Balances Strategy be approved; and
- 4) the award of Council Tax Support for 2024/25 remains at the 2023/24 level of 21.55%

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB51 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, advising of the Council's overall revenue and capital net spending position as at 30 September 2023, together with a forecast outturn position.

Appendix 1 presented a summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 30 September 2023 and Appendix 2 provided detailed figures for each individual Department. It was reported that in overall terms the outturn forecast for the year showed that net spend

would be over the approved budget by £3.572m. Appendix 3 presented the Capital Programme as at 30 September 2023, highlighting the schemes which had been revised.

It was noted that the biggest pressure on the budget continued to be within the Children & Families Department, where forecast net spend for the year had increased by £0.681m over the past three months. This was predominantly as a result of increased spend against agency staff and staffing costs. Whilst considerable work was ongoing to support recruitment and retention of permanent staff, the impact was not yet being felt of any major reduction to agency numbers. Therefore, it was essential that all Departments ensured spending continued to be restricted to only essential items throughout the remainder of the financial year.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continue to be limited to only absolutely essential items;
- 2) Executive Directors continue to take urgent action to reduce or defer spending for the remainder of the current financial year, or secure additional funding;
- 3) progress with implementation of the three years approved budget savings outlined in Appendix 4, be noted; and
- 4) Council be requested to approve the revisions to the Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 3.20.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB52 TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2023-24 HALF YEAR UPDATE

The Board considered a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the Treasury Management Half Year Report as at 30 September 2023.

These reports updated Members on the activities undertaken on the investment and borrowing activities undertaken during the first half of the financial year to 30 September 2023, as required by the Treasury Management Policy.

The report provided supporting information on the economic outlook, interest rate forecast, short term borrowing rates, longer term borrowing rates, borrowing and investments, budget monitoring, new long term borrowing,

policy guidelines and treasury management indicators. It was noted that no debt rescheduling had been undertaken during the quarter.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB53 DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2024/25

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, on the requirement for the Council to determine the Council Tax Base for its area and the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes.

The Council Tax Base was the measure used for calculating Council Tax and was used by both the billing authority (the Council) and the major precepting authorities (Cheshire Fire Authority, Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority), in the calculation of their Council Tax requirements. It was arrived at in accordance with a prescribed formula which represented the estimated full year number of chargeable dwellings in the Borough expressed in terms of the equivalent Band 'D' dwellings.

Taking account of all the relevant information and applying a 97% collection rate, the calculation for 2024/25 gave a base figure of 36,409 for the Borough as a whole. The Council Tax Base figure for each of the Parishes was noted.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve:

Operational
Director - Finance

- 1) setting the 2024/25 Council Tax Base at 36,409 for the Borough and that the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the Environment Agency be so notified; and
- 2) setting the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes as follows:

Parish	Tax Base
Hale	667
Halebank	534
Daresbury	212
Moore	341
Preston Brook	370
Sandymoor	1,606

N.B. Councillors J. Lowe declared a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item of business as a family member works at St Lukes.

EXB54 DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORTS FOR QUARTER 2 2023 - 2024

The Board considered a report of the Chief Executive, on progress against key objectives/milestones and performance targets for the second quarter period to 30 September 2023, for the Chief Executives and Children and Young People Directorates.

The Board was advised that the Directorate Performance Overview Report provided a strategic summary of key issues arising from the relevant quarter for each Directorate and was aligned to Council priorities or functional areas. The Board noted that such information was key to the Council's performance management arrangements and Executive Board had a key role in monitoring performance and strengthening accountability. Performance Management would continue to be important in the demonstration of value for money and strengthening accountability.

RESOLVED: That the report, progress and performance information be noted.

EXB55 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director: Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, which provided an update on the progress made within the Council's Transformation Programme. Appendix A to the report set out the Transformation projects for each of the Directorates, as well as the associated delivery plans, which would provide a framework to assess project feasibility.

The Board noted that engagement with employees continued to be a focus in the programme ensuring staff views and ideas were heard in the planning stage of the project. Project themed 'chats about change' sessions had begun in October with Adult Social Care and Customer Journey focused sessions.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board noted the contents of the update; and
- 2) individual project delivery plans are to be submitted to the relevant Policy and Performance Boards for their

Corporate
Director - Chief
Executive's
Delivery Unit

consideration and monitoring.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

N.B. Councillors Thompson and Wharton declared a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item of business as members of the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board.

EXB56 MERSEYLINK – AUTHORISED HIGHWAY FUNCTIONS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment and Regeneration, that outlined a request from Merseylink Limited, for the renewal of the Authorisation Period for the delegated Highway Functions, from 27 March 2024, for a period of ten years. Under the terms of the Mersey Gateway Bridge Project Agreement (Section, Part 2 of Schedule 18) there was set of defined Authorised Highways Functions which were delegated to the Project Company (Merseylink Ltd).

The Mersey Gateway Project Agreement defined that this arrangement was limited until the duration of the Authorised Period (ten years from Financial Close) and Merseylink were required to seek renewal of the authorisation period by up to a further ten years on or before the expiry of the Authorisation Period, which would be 27 March 2024. It was reported that Merseylink had provided the necessary written request to the Council and the Mersey Crossings Board had confirmed that they considered there was no reason not to confirm the renewal and this should be for the full ten year period.

RESOLVED: That the request from Merseylink Limited, for the renewal of the Authorisation Period for the delegated Highway Functions, from 27 March 2024 for a period of ten years, be approved.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EXB57 WAIVER REQUEST FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A NAMED SUB-CONTRACTOR TO CARRY OUT SPECIALIST RESTORATION OF RAILINGS AT BIRCHFIELD GARDENS, WIDNES

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval for a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of Part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders, to appoint Lost Art Ltd as a Named Sub-Contractor for the refurbishment of historic park railings at Birchfield Gardens, Widnes.

The Environment Services Division was currently tendering a package of works for the refurbishment of Birchfield Gardens and the pre tender estimate value for the project was £500k. The majority of the refurbishment works would be undertaken by a Principal Contractor and their domestic sub-contractors, however the restoration of the historic boundary railings element would require a specialist sub-contractor.

It was noted that Lost Art Ltd had been commissioned to undertake a survey of the railing and had provided a quotation for the works of £110,091.50. It was proposed that Lost Art Ltd would be appointed as Named Sub-Contractor to be used by the Principal Contractor due to cost certainty and the quality and workmanship they could provide.

RESOLVED: That the Board gives delegated authority to the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Member for the Environment and Urban Renewal, to approve the waiver, ref: 134W23, to appoint Lost Art Ltd as the Named Sub-Contractor to undertake the restoration of historic park railing as part of the wider refurbishment project at Birchfield Gardens, Widnes.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EXB58 EAST RUNCORN CONNECTIVITY SCHEME

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval to accept the funding to complete the full business case in support of the East Runcorn Connectivity Scheme (ERC) project elements that were deliverable within the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) 1 period (ending March 2027). These proposals comprised two of the four elements that constitute the ERC and are:

- A56 major maintenance – A558 Junction to M56 Junction 11;
- ERC Active travel routes
- Silver Jubilee Bridge to Shopping City
- Runcorn East Station Access
- Chester Road (A56) to Daresbury Park
- Halton Brow, Main Street and Norton Lane
- Bridge Street to Windmill Hill Avenue North
- Leira Way Connectivity Upgrades/Cycle Loop

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the funding from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement be accepted and the Council be

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

recommended to amend the Capital Programme accordingly;

- 2) Mott MacDonald Ltd are retained as external consultant for the project up to a value of £1.61m, via the Warrington Consultancy Framework; and
- 3) the Operational Director – Policy, Planning and Transportation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, Environment and Urban Renewal, be delegated to procure and implement the necessary works to deliver the A56 East Runcorn Connectivity (ERC) Scheme and active travel routes within funding deadlines.

EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS, AND COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB59 VARIATION OF NON STATUTORY FEES OF HALTON REGISTRATION SERVICE FROM 1 APRIL 2025

The Board considered a report which sought approval to vary the non-statutory fees offered by Halton Registration Service from 1 April 2025. The proposed fee structure for 2025/26 had been determined by taking into account inflationary increases and these were set out in Appendix 1. The early setting of the fees was necessary as ceremonies were arranged up to two years in advance. A published fee structure would provide customers with the amount payable and allow the Service to forward plan more effectively to achieve its income targets.

RESOLVED: That the variations to the non-statutory fees of Halton Registration Service as set out in Appendix 1 be approved.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

MINUTES ISSUED: 21 November 2023

CALL-IN: 28 November 2023 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 28 November 2023.

Meeting ended at 2.25 p.m.