

## **COUNCILLORS**

Boyd Elliott (Chairman)  
Glynn Gilfoyle (Vice-Chairman)

Steve Carr  
Jim Creamer  
Kate Foale  
Roger Jackson  
Eric Kerry  
Nigel Moxon

John Ogle  
Philip Owen - **apologies**  
Francis Purdue-Horan  
Dave Shaw  
Sam Smith

## **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Jonathan Wheeler (substitute for Councillor Philip Owen)

## **OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT**

Councillor Chris Barnfather	Cabinet Member, Business Management
Councillor Keith Girling	Cabinet Member, Economic Development and Asset Management
Councillor Richard Jackson	Cabinet Member, Finance

## **OFFICERS**

Sara Allmond	Advanced Democratic Services Officer
Martin Elliott	Senior Scrutiny Officer
Nigel Stevenson	Service Director, Finance, Infrastructure and Improvement
Marjorie Toward	Service Director, Customers Governance and Employees

### **1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2023, having been circulated to all Members, were taken as read and confirmed and signed by the Chair.

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

- Councillor Philip Owen (other reasons) was substituted by Councillor Jonathan Wheeler

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None.

#### **4. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT PERIOD 5 2023/24**

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the period five financial monitoring report and advised members that the period six report had just been published so questions could be asked on that as well.

Members of the Committee made comments and asked the following questions:

- In relation to increased costs and pressures on SEND transport, Members were advised that this was a national picture likely caused by the increased number of children with Education and Health Care Plans, provision requirements and general inflation costs that providers were facing and passing on to the Council. It was important to ensure SEND children were able to attend the school that best met their needs and this could mean them travelling a distance to get there.
- In relation to the requirements on departments to find other savings if their proposed savings were not achieved, Members were advised that it was important to ensure that saving targets were met and the revised targets would be still about reducing costs coming in not reducing services. The Council were transparent as financial monitoring reports were published monthly.
- In relation to the target for capital receipts which had reduced, Members were advised that these often slipped due to issues getting sales over the line, however the overall value wasn't reducing, it was just when they could be achieved had changed.
- In relation to the changes to the national minimum wage and the increased cost this would place on the Council, Members were advised that it was hoped that this would increase the Council's ability to recruit, which would be a positive outcome.
- In relation to the Council's debt maturity profile, Members were advised that the Council had not taken on any new borrowing for the previous two years and no new borrowing was anticipated for the next three to four years. It was anticipated that interest rates would fall in the next two to three years and that would improve borrowing rates. For now the Council was borrowing against capital receipts.
- The external funding to carry out further improvements to the bus service was welcomed and Members were advised that the Council needed to be more innovative and consider more on demand services.
- Concern was expressed that departments had reached the limit of where they could cut costs without impacting on services. In response Members were advised that whilst it was getting more difficult to find cost savings there were opportunities in relation to prevention work to keep people healthier and independent for longer, meaning they would need less

support from the Council in later life and a whole system approach, including the NHS, was needed to achieve that.

- In response to a question regarding the Council owned land around Toton, Members were advised that in purchasing the land, the Council had tried to ensure its value wasn't determined by whether or not the HS2 sidings project proceeded and the current value of the land was higher than the purchase price.

## **RESOLVED 2023/016**

That the established processes for monitoring the budget be noted.

## **5. BUDGET UPDATE REPORT**

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which provided an update on the budget process for 2024/25.

Members of the Committee made comments and asked the following questions:

- In relation to the impact the increase in National Living Wage would have on the funding deficit, Members were advised that the Council was still waiting for the settlement figure for 2024/25. The increase in the National Living Wage was higher than had been forecast, but other areas were lower than forecast so there was a trade-off. The increase in the National Living Wage was £5m more than the forecast. The increase the National Living Wage would need to be worked through the rest of the salary grades and considered as part of the national pay bargain discussions for implementation from 1<sup>st</sup> April.
- In relation to the question of a council tax rise, Members were advised that no decision had been made as it depended on the outcome of the financial settlement from Government, the modelling for now was based on 2.9%. The proposals would be taken to Cabinet in December and go to Overview Committee for its consideration in January as part of the budget process.
- In relation to how the Council was lobbying Government for additional funding, Members were advised that the Council was well connected and were always raising issues with Government. The feedback was that Government was listening but that there were wide issues that they had to take into account.
- In relation to the question of the use of reserves, Members were advised that they should be used to make transformational change to meet challenges and the MTFs (Medium Term Financial Strategy) set out the plans to use the reserves.
- In relation to the budget process, it was commented that the budget had already been agreed before it came to scrutiny which made it adversarial, if pre-decision scrutiny could be carried out, it could be more productive.

## **RESOLVED 2023/017**

- 1) That the significant challenges presented by the financial landscape the Council operates within be noted.
- 2) That the process in establishing the Council's budget for 2024/25 be noted.

## **6. PRICE REVIEW OF CHARGES MADE FOR SCHOOL MEALS – CALL-IN REQUEST**

The Chairman introduced the report as required under the Constitution on the call-in requests for the Price Review of Charges made for School Meals decision which was refused. Members were reminded that the report was for noting only.

Members of the Committee made comments and asked the Monitoring Officer questions on technical matters relating to the process:

- In relation to the question regarding an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA), Members were advised that the legal requirement was to satisfy the Council's obligations under the Equalities Act. Socio-economic factors is not a protected characteristic and therefore there was no legal requirement to carry out an EqIA but to consider the impacts of the changes on those with protected characteristics. An EqIA was carried out in advance of the decision being taken and it was published online in advance of the decision therefore there was no flaw in the process as the Council's legal requirements had been met.
- In relation to a question regarding consultation, Members were advised that there was no requirement to consult on this change as it was a charged service provided to schools and the costs to provide the service were considered annually. There was significant engagement and dialogue with schools.
- In relation to questions around the forward plan, members were advised that the decision was on the forward plan for more than 28 days as required.
- Members raised concerns about the call-in process and the position it put officer in, and suggested that it be reviewed.

## **RESOLVED 2023/018**

That Overview Committee notes the call-in requests that were made in relation to the decision taken by the Cabinet Member for Communities on the Price Review of Charges made for School Meals and the reasons of the Monitoring Officer for refusing these requests.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMMES**

The Senior Scrutiny Officer introduced the Committee's current work programme. The work programmes for each of the select committees were also appended to the report.

Members asked that the following item be added to the Overview Committee work programme:-

- Support for former Wilko staff Council Motion, updates on progress

It was reported that reviewing residents parking schemes would be added to the Place Select Committee work programme.

### **RESOLVED 2023/019**

- 1) That the Overview Committee work programme be noted.
- 2) That the work programmes of the three select committees be noted.
- 3) That committee members make any further suggestions for consideration by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for inclusion on the Overview Work Programme, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member(s) and senior officers, subject to the required approval by the Chairman of Overview Committee.

The meeting closed at 12.01pm

**CHAIRMAN**