

Chairman - Councillor Tony Nixon (Mayor)

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

C A Baron	P W Jones
R J Barron	W J Kemp
F Beatty	R Kenney
A R G Brown	P A Leason
R P Cooke	A M Loughran
A G Cooper	G P K Pardesi
B M Cross	A N Pearce
M G Dodson	J M Pert
A P Edgeller	M Phillips
P M M Farrington	J K Price
A T A Godfrey	P Roycroft
A S Harp	R M Smith
A D Hobbs	R M Sutherland
D Holbrook-Summers	C V Trowbridge
J Hood	M J Winnington
R A James	

Officers in attendance:-

Mr T Clegg	-	Chief Executive
Mr I Curran	-	Head of Law and Administration
Mr T Willis	-	Interim Head of Finance
Mr W Conaghan	-	Press and Communication Manager
Mr J Dean	-	Democratic Services Officer

C48 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2022 were agreed as a true and correct record.

C49 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J A Barron, I D Fordham, M Green, M V Holmes, B McKeown, J A Nixon and L Nixon.

C50 Announcements

The Mayor reported with sadness the passing of three former Members of the Council, Harry Brunt, Leonard Bloomer and William Whalley, and asked that all present join him in standing and observing a minutes silence in their memory.

C51 Councillor Session

Councillor A N Pearce had submitted the following questions in accordance with Paragraph 12.3(a) of the Council Procedure Rules:

Question to the Cabinet Member of Environment:

(a) "The establishment by the Council of a volunteer panel of citizens concerned about the climate and biodiversity emergencies is very welcome.

I would welcome clarification from the Cabinet member for the Environment on the following issues:

- A) What are the terms of reference of the panel?
- B) When will the first and subsequent meetings be held?
- C) Who will convene the meetings?
- D) Who will chair the meetings?
- E) Will there be any councillor involvement in the meetings?"

Councillor J K Price, Cabinet Member - Environment Portfolio, responded as follows:-

"The community panel has now been set up and the first meeting of the panel has been set for February and the terms of reference have been written and will be agreed by the panel when they meet. However, the purpose of the group will be *'To support Stafford Borough Council to develop initiatives that raise awareness of climate change and green recovery and to identify opportunities to implement sustainable initiatives in communities and promote community action on reducing carbon emissions and increasing green recovery efforts'*.

Arrangements for chairing the meetings will be discussed at the inaugural meeting and the panel will be supported by colleagues from Corporate Business and Partnerships, who will convene the meetings.

The meetings are predominantly for community representatives, however, the panel will need to engage, and collaborate with members in relation to identifying opportunities for projects and initiatives in ward areas".

Councillor Pearce asked the following supplementary question:-

"What is the proposed frequency of the meetings, and the level of Member involvement?"

Councillor Price stated that the frequency of the meetings was a matter for the Chairman of the Board to decide, and that it was in the gift on the Panel to ascertain the level of Member involvement.

Councillor A T A Godfrey requested that any minutes resulting from said meetings be made available to Members; Councillor Price noted that publication of any minutes was a matter for the Panel to decide.

Question to the Cabinet Member of Environment:

(b) "To mark her Platinum Jubilee, the Queen has called on individuals, organisations and public bodies to plant trees. What plans does the Council have to plant trees to mark the Queens Platinum Jubilee?"

Councillor J K Price, Cabinet Member - Environment Portfolio, responded as follows:-

"The Council recognise the contribution of planting trees in our efforts towards carbon reduction as well as marking special events such as the Queens Platinum Jubilee.

We have plans in place for tree planting and one example of this is our plan to work in partnership with the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee and Severn Trent Water to include hundreds of trees on site at the new Local Nature Reserve at Fairway. This will give us the perfect opportunity to recognise the Queen as the Head of the Commonwealth and dedicate a section of the trees to the celebration of the Queens Platinum Jubilee. The Council is committed to tree planting where need and suitability is strategically identified and also to the associated planning and ongoing maintenance requirements of planting trees".

Councillor Pearce raised the following points in responding to Councillor Price:-

"tree planting was already taking place in the new local nature reserve, it was disappointing a separate scheme planting scheme was not envisaged;

it would be beneficial to involve young people in any planting projects."

Councillor Price confirmed there was a separate section of trees, as referred to, and noted the other planning schemes as detailed at previous meetings of the Council. The Council was working with local schools on specific planting schemes, and acknowledged the valid point raised by Councillor Pearce.

Question to the Leader of the Council:

(c) "At the September meeting of the Council, the following motion was proposed by myself and seconded by Cllr Godfrey: Whilst carbon reduction is given equal priority within the Council's Business Plan with other objectives, it

is clear that the amount of resource allocated to it within the budget is very different. For example, Economic Growth and Strategic Projects has a budget of £406,980 this year whereas there does not appear to be a specific budget for carbon reduction. This is borne out in the proposed plan for carbon reduction where almost all actions are to be sourced from within existing resources. This Council resolves to redress this when drawing up the budget for the coming financial year?

Under the revised rules of procedure, the motion was referred, without discussion to the Cabinet for consideration of the financial implications. There have been 4 meetings of the Cabinet since September and the motion has not been considered at any of them. Can the Leader explain why this is?

Councillor P M M Farrington, Leader of the Council responded as follows:-

“A draft Climate Change and Green Recovery Delivery Plan has been formulated by officers for 2022/23 onwards. The next step for the draft plan is for it to be assessed against corporate priorities and for feasibility of delivery. It will need to be costed and the outcomes defined, to inform prioritisation of the proposed actions contained in the plan, and prioritisation against other projects currently being undertaken by the Council.

In tandem with this, the 2022-23 Budget has been developed and is on the agenda tonight to be agreed by this Council. Now that a draft delivery plan has been produced and once the budget has been agreed, Cabinet will be in a position to respond to the motion from Council, in the near future”.

Councillor Pearce noted that he hoped this was a genuine effort to explore the associated costs of carbon reduction.

C52 Notice of Motion

Councillors A N Pearce R P Cooke had given the following Notice of Motion in pursuant of Paragraph 13.1 of the Council Procedure Rules:-

“This Council notes that:

- The Glasgow Pact is a significant deal, signalling the end of coal, oil and gas and it's wide agreement by leaders to "keep 1.5C alive";
- The moral authority shown by climate activists, based on climate science, has been clear in setting this higher ambition;
- However the Glasgow Pact did not secure National Determined Contributions (NDCs) to stay within 1.5C so will be only a game changer if we get our act together over the coming year, which depends on what the UK does with its continued presidency of COP, and the wider actions and leadership across the UK.

This Council further notes that:

- The most climate - vulnerable countries are calling for natural justice, for the rich countries to pay for current losses and damages based on historic greenhouse gas emissions; and

- That the world's governments must accept we are now in climate emergency mode and come back next year with plans and pledges that at least halve carbon emissions this decade and set carbon budgets that stay well within the 1.5C limit.

Therefore this Council calls on the UK government to:

1. Reverse Official Development Assistance (ODA, "aid") budget cuts
2. Conduct an independent review into UK fossil fuel subsidies and set out a plan and timetable to phase these out.
3. Put climate change at the heart of all future trade deals, and call for an end to the investor-state dispute settlement (so called "corporate courts") that allow companies to sue governments for taking climate action (see www.globaljustice.org.uk).
4. Commit to no more coal, oil (je or gas) extraction in the UK, or through UK investments overseas.
5. Commit to no airport expansion across the UK, and for international aviation and shipping decarbonisation to be included in NDCs, and in future trade deals.
6. Cancel the UK's current road building programme and divert spending to local council zero carbon transport plans.
7. Commit that UK international climate finance is provided in addition to existing official development assistance (ODA) as agreed at the Copenhagen and Paris climate summits and for this to include funds for climate mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage payments.

The Borough Council further notes that

- Staffordshire County Council Pension fund has around £200m invested in fossil fuels via the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- The United Nations Paris 2015 Agreement commits our governments to keep the global temperature increase to under 2 degrees and aim for 1.5 degrees. Carbon budgets produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, United Nations and the International Energy Agency show that preventing two degrees of warming relies on not burning 60- 80% of all proven fossil fuels.

- There is increased emphasis by the UK government on showing global climate leadership, especially in relation to finance. Divesting our pension is a clear and meaningful action that can be taken at a local government level.
- Fossil fuel investments are financially risky as a result of both the Covid19 pandemic and the global transition to a more sustainable economic and environmental model. They are now being consistently out-performed by renewables.
- Former Bank of England Governor Mark Carney warned in December 2019 that fossil fuel investments risk becoming “stranded assets” (i.e., worthless) as investors exit the sector. “A question for every company, every financial institution, every asset manager, pension fund or insurer – what’s your plan?”
- As continued investments in fossil fuels pose material financial risks to portfolios, funds have fiduciary duties to consider the benefits of decarbonising as part of their investment strategies. Fiduciary duty is defined by the Law Commission as ‘ensuring that pensions can be paid, ensuring that this is undertaken at the best possible value’.
- As continued investments in fossil fuels pose material financial risks to portfolios, funds have fiduciary duties to consider the benefits of decarbonising as part of their investment strategies. Fiduciary duty is defined by the Law Commission as ‘ensuring that pensions can be paid, ensuring that this is undertaken at the best possible value’.
- Pension funds have a legal duty to treat members “fairly as between them”. That means taking seriously the longer-term interests of younger members who may well be affected more by the climate transition.

This Council therefore agrees:

1. To review its Investment Strategy and develop and implement a Responsible Investment Policy which rules out new investments in fossil fuel companies.
2. Call on Staffordshire County Council pension fund to divest from fossil fuels and the development and adoption of responsible investment policies which:
 - a. Immediately freeze any new investment in the top 200 publicly-traded fossil fuel companies.
 - b. Divest from direct ownership and any commingled funds that include fossil fuel public equities and corporate bonds within 5 years
 - c. Set out an approach to quantify and address climate change risks affecting all other investments.
 - d. Actively seek to invest in companies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and minimise climate risk.

3. Recognise that fossil fuel investments should be considered as part of the council's 'carbon footprint' and divesting our pension fund is one of the most impactful steps we can take to reduce our impact on our community and the world."

The Notice of Motion was moved by Councillor A N Pearce and Seconded by Councillor R P Cooke.

As provided for in Paragraph 13.5 of the Council's Constitution the proposal to review the Council's investment strategy was referred to the Cabinet without debate

On being put to the vote, the remaining proposals were declared to have fallen

The Interim Head of Finance left the room during consideration of the next item of business.

C53 Appointment of Interim Section 151 Officer

Considered the report of the Leader of the Council.

The Leader of the Council noted that the post of Section 151 Officer was a statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 1972 and concluded his comments by moving that the recommendation as set out in paragraph 2 of the report be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor R M Smith.

On being put to the vote the proposal was declared to be unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:- that Tim Willis, Interim Head of Finance, Cannock Chase District Council be appointed as the Section 151 Officer for Stafford Borough Council.

The Interim Head of Finance re-joined the meeting at this point.

C54 General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2022-25

Considered the report of the Interim Head of Finance.

The Deputy Leader introduced the report and reported on the decision of the Cabinet at its meeting on 13 January 2022 (Minute No CAB42/22 refers).

Councillor Smith noted that although some detail had been provided uncertainty remained regarding the future of Local Government funding and the inevitable impact on the Council's finances. It was pleasing however to report Council Tax remained below inflation, services were maintained and

the Council was debt free and continued to invest in capital schemes across the Borough

After detailing the challenges of budget setting in the current climate the Deputy Leader proposed that the Council approve the recommendations of the Cabinet as follows:

(a) the Budget Requirement for the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2022-23 be set at £14.304 million;

(b) the indicative General Fund Revenue Budgets be set at £15.290 million for 2023-24 and £15.878 million for 2024-25;

(c) that the detailed portfolio budgets as set out in appendix 1 of the report be approved;

(d) set the General Fund working balance at a minimum of £1.0 million;

(e) the detailed capital programme as set out in appendix 2 of the report be approved;

(f) that the Council Tax for 2022-23 be increased by 1.9% to £165.38;

(g) the Council's Tax Base be set at 48,490.39 (as determined by the Head of Finance);

(h) note that the inflation parameter for fees and charges for 2022-23 was generally set at 3% as approved by Cabinet on 4 November 2021.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor P M M Farrington.

Councillor Smith reminded Members of the previous consideration of the budget report by the Resources Scrutiny Committee and was pleased to afford Members the opportunity to raise any points relating to the budget, where specific reference was made to:

- Garden waste collection service;
- Continued uncertainty surrounding New Homes Bonus and Business Rates retention;
- 'Reliance' on fees and charges

to which the associated Cabinet Members responded accordingly.

At the conclusion of the debate Members voted on the recommendation which was declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that (a) the Budget Requirement for the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2022-23 be set at £14.304 million;

(b) the indicative General Fund Revenue Budgets be set at £15.290 million for 2023-24 and £15.878 million for 2024-25;

(c) the detailed portfolio budgets as set out in appendix 1 of the report be approved;

(d) the General Fund working balance be set at a minimum of £1.0 million;

(e) the detailed capital programme as set out in appendix 2 of the report be approved;

(f) the Council Tax for 2022-23 be increased by 1.9% to £165.38;

(g) the Council's Tax Base be set at 48,490.39 (as determined by the Head of Finance);

(h) it be noted that the inflation parameter for fees and charges for 2022-23 was generally set at 3% as approved by Cabinet on 4 November 2021.

Members paid tribute to the Interim Head of Finance and his colleagues in the Finance Department for their efforts in preparing the budget report.

C55 Annual Treasury Management Report 2020/21

Considered the report of the Interim Head of Finance.

The Deputy Leader introduced the report noting its consideration by the Audit and Accounts Committee on 18 January 2022 before moving that the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2 be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor R A James.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was declared to be carried.

- RESOLVED:- that
- (a) the annual treasury management report for 2020/21 be noted;
 - (b) the actual 2020/21 prudential and treasury indicators set out in the appendix to the report be approved.

C56 Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, Annual Investment Strategy 2022/23

Considered the report of the Interim Head of Finance.

The Deputy Leader introduced the report noting its consideration by Cabinet on 13 January 2022 and the Audit and Accounts Committee on 18 January 2022 before moving that the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2 be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor R A James.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that (a) the following be approved:-

- (i) The Prudential and Treasury indicators;
- (ii) The MRP Policy Statement;
- (iii) The Treasury Management Policy;
- (iv) The Annual Investment Strategy for 2022/23;

- (b) it be noted that indicators may change in accordance with the final recommendations from Cabinet to Council in relation to both the General Fund Revenue Budget and the Capital Programme.

Members paid tribute to the Interim Head of Finance and his colleagues in the Finance Department for their efforts in preparing the report.

C57 Charitable Collections Policy 2021 (House to House Collections and Street Collections in Stafford Borough)

Considered the report of the Head of Operations.

Councillor J K Price introduced the report, noting the detail in paragraph 3 before concluding his comments by moving that the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2 be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor J M Pert.

On being put to the vote the proposal was declared to be unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:- that (a) the Policy be approved and implemented on 2 February 2022;

- (b) delegation be granted to the Head of Operations (in consultation with the Head of Law and Administration and Cabinet Member for the

Environment) to make minor modifications to reflect changes in legislation or case law or to promote efficient administration in the licensing function without any other consultation if appropriate.

MAYOR