

Councillor Phillip A Leason MBE JP (Mayor)

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

Councillors:

C A Baron	R Kenney
J A Barron	A M Loughran
R J Barron	B McKeown
F Beatty	D McNaughton
R P Cooke	A Nixon
A G Cooper	J A Nixon
B M Cross	L Nixon
M G Dodson	G P K Pardesi
P M M Farrington	A N Pearce
A T A Godfrey	J M Pert
A S Harp	M Phillips
A D Hobbs	J K Price
J Hood	P Roycroft
R A James	R M Smith
E G R Jones	R M Sutherland
P W Jones	C V Trowbridge
W J Kemp	M J Winnington

Officers in attendance:-

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

Prior to commencing proceedings, the Mayor invited all present to join him in observing a minutes silence in memory of the late former Member of the Council Peter Bruce

C37 Minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 November and 6 December 2022 were submitted and signed.

C38 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A R G Brown, A P Edgeller, I D Fordham, M Green and M V Holmes.

C39 Announcements

The Mayor detailed the following events for Members to note:-

- Mayor's Charity Appeal - Quiz Night - Thursday 2 February 2023;
- Mayor's Charity Appeal - Valuation Evening by Charles Hanson - Wednesday 8 March 2023. Invitations to be sent out shortly

C40 General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2023-26

Considered the report of the Section 151 Officer (**V1** 13/01/2023).

Councillor R M Smith introduced the report before reading the following prepared statement:-

"Well here we are, my last budget proposals to this council. I think most of you know that 12 months ago I decided this would be my last year as a Councillor and I think its fair to say that the traumatic events that happened to me last summer have justified that decision. I have to say had it not been for some very clever and skillful people who I am eternally grateful to I would not be standing here today.

The first draft of this budget was approved by Cabinet in early December and that report has been to all Scrutiny Committees.

Then just a few days before Christmas we received the Governments settlement which contained some good news for us and for local government in general in that the concern over a business rates reset has been postponed once again. We know because of Stafford's success in attracting new business in recent years that a reset would be more damaging to us than to those councils with a poor record of attracting new business.

At the same time our new homes bonus had been calculated to give us more than expected and while we know that inflation is bad for everyone the one plus is that we have significantly more investment income because of higher interest rates

You will recall that despite identifying £876k in savings in December we predicted a deficit of around £900k for the forthcoming year.

You can see from this report produced by our new Section 151 Officer that while most of his predecessors predictions were accurate he was unable to predict that the Government would make two new substantial grants.

The two new grants which it has to be stressed, like last year's grants, are one offs. They are a funding guarantee grant of £1,594m and a core spending power grant of £110k; like Members opposite I am disappointed that yet again we only have certainty for one year.

Nevertheless these two grants have virtually eliminated the deficit of approx £900k predicted just one month ago for the end of 2023/24 (see table 2 on page 10 of the agenda) and they have enabled us to set a new reserve so that the borrowing requirement to support the Future High Street fund project is removed. That said the identified savings are still required fully justifying the path we have taken in respect of a shared Management Team to deliver more shared services.

So in delivering this budget, despite inflation at above 10%, we have increased some charges by only 5% but have frozen a number of charges; in particular parking charges, the brown bin fee, taxi licenses and markets.

Not only that we are assisting 1700 of our least well-off residents by removing their requirement to pay any council tax at all.

Then if you look at the Capital Programme you can see commitments to Westbridge park in Stone, the Station Gateway project and improvements to the town centre via the Future High street fund which as I have said we do not now have the need to borrow to fund our share.

All this positive news Mr Mayor with just a 1.9% increase in council tax, or just 6p a week and I am proud to say that we have now kept our promise of keeping council tax increases of below inflation for 20 years. and they say politicians can't be trusted! In fact the only thing wrong with the budget is that it should say we are reducing the tax by 1.9%.

Had the council tax gone up by the rate of inflation it would now be £249.59 instead of £168.52, or to put it another way over 20 years inflation has gone up 80% and our council tax by just 35%

To summarise the report, we have successfully navigated our way through the Covid-19 pandemic and are now working through the cost-of-living crisis. High inflation and rising interest rates are bringing fresh challenges to both the Council and its residents, but through prudent management of our resources we are presenting a budget which seeks to minimise the impact on residents in terms of increasing their costs from the Council whilst still delivering services. Yes, we are having to make savings, but the overall financial position of the Council is healthy. Even if future local government finance is uncertain, the Borough is well placed to build on its solid position and indeed thrive over the longer term. Those are not just my words but words you will hear from our peer group and our external auditors.

Mr Mayor in my 20 years as a Cabinet Member we have delivered major projects, two new Leisure centres £2m towards the Western Access road, three destination parks plus the refurbishment of Victoria Park admittedly with some Section 106 money and grants but with substantial sums of our own. And of course we established Stafford and Rural Homes relieving the Council of a £12m black hole it had at the time. All done by continually improving efficiencies while keeping council tax substantially below inflation and I hope my successors will continue with that good work".

Councillor Smith concluded his comments by recommending that the proposals as set out in Paragraph 2 of the report be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor J M Pert.

During the ensuing discussion, the following amendment was proposed by Councillor R P Cooke, seconded by Councillor A T A Godfrey:-

“That the sum referring to concessionary parking not be removed from the 2023/24 budget and the £15,000 cost be taken from the £25,000 to be transferred to balances in 2022/23”.

Members discussed the amendment as provided by paragraph 15 of the Council Procedure Rules and at the conclusion of the debate voted on said amendment, which was declared to have fallen.

Members subsequently voted on the proposals as set out in the report, which on being put to the vote were declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that

- (a) the Budget Requirement for the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2023-24 be set at £16.199 million;
- (b) the indicative General Fund Revenue Budgets be set at £15.095 million for 2024-25 and £15.826 million for 2025-26;
- (c) the budget pressures, savings and income generation as set out in paragraphs 5.5 - 5.6 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 2023-24 be increased by 1.9% to £168.52;
- (g) the Council's Tax Base be set at 48,863.55 (as determined by the Head of Finance);
- (h) it be noted that the inflation parameter for fees and charges for 2023-24 was generally set at 5%.

Members of the Council paid tribute to the Cabinet Member, Resources Portfolio and his associated Officers for their efforts in preparing the report and associated budget.

C41 Stafford Station Gateway - Updated Strategic Regeneration Framework

Considered the report of the Interim Head of Development (V1 13/01/2023).

Councillor F Beatty introduced the report before reading the following prepared statement:-

“This major brownfield restoration is a vision for the future, our ambitious plan to bring back to life this part of Stafford’s former industrial heartland. This transformation will attract even more investment to the many millions of pounds already being brought into the Borough, for the benefit of our towns, villages and rural areas, to Stafford town itself.

The project will maximize the economic benefits of HS2, promises a vibrant mix of decent, well-designed and long-lasting homes fit for the needs of our century and beyond, good jobs, all of these within a restored landscape to protect wildlife and waterscapes.

The paper was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 19 January 2023 and is submitted to Council for approval. The report updates Members on the consultation feedback and the subsequent revisions made, includes the Consultation Statement and a revised version of the SRF and agrees the process for minor amendments.

Many citizens have contributed to the plan at the exhibitions and in writing and we thank them for that. Over 200 representations were received during the consultation period – some raised concerns around the existing biodiversity within the site, the scale and density of housing, the impact on the town centre and limited focus on employment opportunities. There was support for the scheme, recognising the need for regeneration in this area, creating jobs and attracting highly skilled people to the town which will help to support new and existing businesses within the town centre. Revisions have been made in response.

The SRF is the vision, the illustrative masterplan and set of design and development principles which will guide the future development of the Gateway. The purpose is to formalise the development proposals for the Stafford Station Gateway and to guide its development in line with the emerging new Local Plan. The aim is to encourage high-quality mixed-use development to support the economic growth of Stafford and the wider Borough, provide new employment and leisure opportunities, alongside aspirational housing to retain and attract new talent. Sustainability is a key component. Green spaces, designs to encourage more cycling and foot journeys.

The SRF is alert to the changes to the way in which we live and work. It sets clear expectations on future developers to bring forward planning applications that appeal to new business start-ups, to families and young professionals, that respect and revitalise the community through well

designed, constructed homes to live in for the future. it incorporates climate change, enables nature restoration, and opens opportunities for sustainable economic growth. Businesses will be attracted by the facilities, amenities and location, more jobs all on the doorstep of the railway station.

Since publication of the draft SRF a planning application has been submitted in respect of the proposed Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group Institute of Technology within the Palmbourne Industrial Estate area of the site. Whilst the planning application is under consideration the proposals are not reflected in any detail within the SRF. For this reason, Cabinet approved a delegation to Officers to enable an update of the relevant sections of the SRF once the planning application has been decided. The IOT is yet another example of the confidence the Government and college has in Stafford being the place to invest and deliver world class facilities.

Paragraph 5.15 on page 63 of the agenda originally received stated no TPOs were in place across the site, however this missed the Order at The Hollies.

As the Strategic Regeneration Framework sets out an indicative vision for the site there are no decisions being made on final layouts, design or parking and along with trees these issues will be fully considered as part of any future planning applications”.

The Cabinet Member concluded her comments by moving that the recommendations as set out in Paragraph 2 of the report be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor C V Trowbridge.

Members of the Council then voted on the proposals as set out, which were declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that:-

- (a) the analysis of and commentary on the consultation process and the views presented on the draft SRF be noted;
- (b) the Consultation Statement and updated SRF be endorsed and adopted.
- (c) authority be delegated to the Head of Development (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning) to update the adopted SRF to make minor amendments to the text and images within the final document to accurately reflect updated information.

C42 Joint Appointments Committee

Considered the report of the Head of Law and Administration (V1 10/01/1023).

Councillor P M M Farrington introduced the report detailing the content of the associated appendix before concluding his comments by recommending that the proposal as set out in Paragraph 2 be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor A T A Godfrey.

Members of the Council voted on the proposal as set out, which was declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that:-

- (a) a Joint Appointments Committee be set up in accordance with the terms of reference set out in the appendix to the report.
- (b) the following Members be appointed to the Committee in accordance with the agreed terms of reference.

Councillor P M M Farrington

Councillor J M Pert

Councillor R P Cooke

- (c) it be agreed that any Members of the senior management team employed by the Council be placed at the disposal of Cannock Chase District Council for the purpose of carrying out any functions agreed under shared service arrangements.
- (d) "a person employed as a Head of Service" be added to the list of persons identified as Chief Officers in paragraph 3.1 of the Councils Officer Employment Procedure Rules in Section 10 of the Constitution.

MAYOR