

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 17 January 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor: Mary McLaren (Chair)

Councillors: Melanie Barrett Jane Gould
Adrian Osborne

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Simon Barrett
Jan Osborne

Officers: Assistant Director - Corporate Resources (KS)
Assistant Manager - Financial Accountant (RH)
Assistant Director – Housing (GF)
Senior Finance Business Partner - HRA And GF Revenue (SC)
Finance Business Partner (JS)
Monitoring Officer (EY)
Senior Governance Officer (HH)
Governance Officer (BW)

Apologies:

Kathryn Grandon (Vice-Chair)

18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None received.

19 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

None received.

20 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

None received.

21 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

None received.

22 BOS/21/01 DRAFT GENERAL FUND (GF) 2022/23 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

- 22.1 Councillor Simon Barrett introduced the report to the committee outlining that the budget had been based on no increase in council tax, however an increase would take place if Cabinet decided it was necessary. In addition to this the emergency reserves held by Babergh would be reduced to 1million as it had not been used over the Covid-19 pandemic so the excess 200,000 would be used in the community. He also stated that the budget had shown a surplus of £403,000.
- 22.2 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned whether the cost for leisure move to green tariff had been cost neutral. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that the council had made the utility payments and Abbeycroft had been reimbursing these costs. The management fee was a separate cost.
- 22.3 Councillor Jane Gould questioned whether the cost of CCTV had been a permanent contribution. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that it was a permanent and ongoing contribution that covered running costs.
- 22.4 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned whether future vehicle costs had been included in the budget. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that the running costs of vehicles had been built into the budget as it was an in-house service.
- 22.5 Councillor Adrian Osborne questioned whether the possibility that central government could remove garden waste charges has been taken into consideration. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that this had been proposed for the next financial year so would be looked at for in the 23/24 budget.
- 22.6 Councillor McLaren questioned whether money for a new fleet of refuse vehicles had been factored in. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that the council had money set aside for replacing most of the fleet and had monitored what vehicles would be needed in the future. Councillor Simon Barrett added that the replacement of vehicles had been set on a cycle as shown in appendix b of the report.
- 22.7 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned where the income for the Strategic Policy, Performance and Insight had come from. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that some of the income had come from Law and Governance, and this had been supplemented by resources from other areas which had been paid for by reserves.
- 22.8 Councillor Jane Gould questioned the reason for the reduction of ICT costs in the future. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that costs had been higher to allow for the replacement of software that would increase the cost for the 22/23 budget.
- 22.9 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned whether the budget covered legal

costs for planning enforcement and appeals. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that these costs had been built into the budget and had been based on previous years.

- 22.10 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned the increase of £41k for the senior leadership team costs and whether this had been based on the previous pay review. The Assistant Director - Corporate Resources responded that it was an allowance for the team for the whole year and had been based on the previous report to Council.
- 22.11 Councillor Jane Gould questioned whether the reserves would be reviewed. Councillor Simon Barrett responded that as the reserve had not been used during the Covid-19 pandemic, the reserve was being reviewed and reduced to 10% of the Council's overall budget.
- 22.12 Councillor Jane Gould questioned whether the Consumer Price Index was being monitored. Councillor Simon Barrett responded that it was being monitored as it affects the HRA accounts and was the basis for rent charges. The Assistant Director – Corporate resources added that for future years an allowance had been built into the budgets for CPI.
- 22.13 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned whether the reduction of reserves would affect the interest gained on them. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that as the interest rate had been low it would have little effect on the budget.
- 22.14 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned the catch up on the pension fund contribution and whether this had an impact. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that to overcome the deficit in the contributions the council had made adjustments in the budget for the next year. There had also been tri-annual evaluations to review these contributions.
- 22.15 Councillor Mary McLaren questioned whether the Council still had any of the Covid fund remaining, and whether this would need to be repaid to central government. Councillor Simon Barrett responded that there had been £70200 remaining in the reserve. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources added that it did not need to be paid back however, there was unlikely to be any more given by the government so it would be needed for upcoming years.
- 22.16 Councillor Mary McLaren sought clarification on the capital fund and how it was managed. Councillor Simon Barrett responded that the capital fund had been allocated to projects that had been budgeted on ongoing assumed borrowing for these. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources added that the capital fund was the approval for this money to be borrowed and was not money in an account.
- 22.17 Councillor Adrian Osborne queried whether the estimated reserves for the Joint Local Plan in the budget were only for Babergh or whether this had

been a shared cost with Mid Suffolk. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that the costs had been separate and that the costs for additional work would not exceed the reserves.

22.18 A short break was taken between 10:43 – 10:51am.

22.19 Councillor Melanie Barrett proposed the recommendations as follows:

- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the General Fund budget 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives a report from Cabinet on the outcomes of the performance framework on a six-month basis.

22.20 Councillor Jane Gould seconded this motion.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the General Fund budget 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook.

1.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives a report from Cabinet on the outcomes of the performance framework on a six-month basis.

23 BOS/21/02 DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) AND FOUR - YEAR OUTLOOK

23.1 Councillor Simon Barrett introduced the report to the committee outlining that HRA account had been in a deficit due to additional spending in building services. This had been due to an increased cost of resources and labour resource had been competitive which lead to an increased use of subcontractors. It had also recommended that there be a rent increase of CPI+1.

23.2 Councillor Melanie Barrett questioned the cause of the overspend in building services. The Assistant Director – Housing responded that the overspend had occurred for a variety of reasons such as the increased cost of materials over the past year. In addition to this there had been additional training for staff in order to decrease the reliance on outside contractors. There had also been costs to replace vehicles and to change the fleet to HVO.

23.3 Councillor Adrian Osborne queried whether anti-social behaviour had any impact on the cost of any additional work. The Assistant Director – Housing responded that as it had been dealt with internally by the housing team.

23.4 Councillor Adrian Osborne queried other income in terms of recovering legal

cost. The Assistant Director – Housing responded that if there had been damage to a property the council may take legal action to get reimbursed for this damage however the council would use insurance provision to fund this.

23.5 Councillor Adrian Osborne queried what renewable heat had been installed in line with the renewable heat incentive. The Assistant Director – Housing responded that the incentive had been installing air source heat pumps and had been seeking grants to install these where possible.

23.6 Councillor Adrian Osborne questioned the social housing resources that the council to lessen the costs of using hotels. The Assistant Director – Housing responded that there had been areas of the housing stock that were able to be used as temporary accommodation, and the council also had units for domestic abuse and are able to lease properties to the county council in order to help care leavers in order to lessen use of hotels as temporary accommodation.

23.7 Councillor Jane Gould questioned whether there were sufficient funds to insulate and retrofit existing properties. The Assistant Director – Housing responded that the council and the energy saving trust had a stock profile of all properties that had enabled the council to prioritize where work is needed. Councillor Jan Osborne added that the Council's design guide would go to Cabinet in spring to set out the aspirations in terms of retrofitting existing properties.

23.8 Councillor Mary McLaren questioned how realistic a central system that kept record of money owed by individual residents. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that this was an ongoing major project however, there had been issues in terms of software. The Assistant Director – Housing added that tenancy officers work with the shared revenue partnership in order see all of what is owed by an individual. Councillor Jan Osborne added that the rent source system had also been in place in order to identify arrears and help residents get support in this area.

23.9 Councillor Melanie Barrett raised that she would like to see a reduction in use of sub-contractors in the future and allow more work to be delivered in house.

23.10 Councillor Jane Gould praised the additional training for surveyors in order to allow for more in house services, however, money spent on retrofitting should be prioritized to insulation.

23.11 Councillor Melanie Barrett proposed the recommendation as follows:

- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the Housing Revenue Account 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny recommends that the Information about the use of sub-contractors be included in the quarterly performance monitoring report.

23.12 Councillor Adrian Osborne seconded this motion.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:-

1.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the Housing Revenue Account 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook.

1.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny recommends that the Information about the use of sub-contractors be included in the quarterly performance monitoring report.

24 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

The Forthcoming Decisions List was noted.

25 BOS/21/03 BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan was noted.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 12:11pm.

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Chair