

THE MINUTE RELATING TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET FROM THE BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 20 JANUARY 2020

BOS/19/5 DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 202/21 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

- 15.1 Councillor Ward, Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report and summarised the main points in the report.
- 15.2 He provided Members with the following updates:
- The surplus had increased from £542,000 to £584,000
 - Acquisitions were now at £1.125M.
 - The Transformation Fund were nearer to £900,000 due to the increase in the surplus.
- 15.3 Councillor McCraw commented on the improved lay-out and structure of the report.
- 15.4 Councillor McLaren asked for clarification of the increase for the Council Tax and asked that in the future the explanation in the press were made more accessible to the public.
- 15.5 Councillor Ward explained that the Council Tax was shared between the Council, Suffolk District Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner. The £5 increase was for a Council Tax Band D property and was equivalent of 3.1% increase for the total amount of the Council tax bill. This was all explained on the annual Council Tax bill.
- 15.6 Councillor Ward would investigate how to provide better information to Parish Councils and residents.
- 15.7 Councillor McLaren enquired if there was any training available for Parish Councillors and Councillor Ward informed that Suffolk Association for Local Councillors (SALC) could provide support for such issues.
- 15.8 Councillor Jan Osborne, Cabinet Member for Housing, who were attending the meeting, said the Councillor Adrian Osborne, as the Council's representative, could bring this issue to the attention of SALC.
- 15.9 Councillor Adrian Osborne enquired if it was possible to bring forward the Parish precepts to allow parishes to plan their annual budget. The Assistant Director for Corporate Recourses responded that the Council would struggle to provide the precepts earlier, as tight deadlines existed because the information was being provided by Central Government.
- 15.10 Councillor McCraw referred to the New Homes Bonus Scheme, which was being phased out and asked whether any new schemes would be introduced to replace this income.
- 15.11 The Assistant Director for Corporate Resources explained that currently there was no information from the Government regarding replacement for the New Homes Bonus. She thought that any new schemes were likely to be linked with planning applications.

- 15.12 Councillor Ward assured the Committee that Members were lobbying Government for a replacement of the New Homes Bonus Scheme as the income was needed by the Council and was an incentivised bonus for new and completed developments.
- 15.13 The Assistant Director explained that the New Homes Bonus Scheme was currently split into 80% for the Council and 20% for Suffolk County Council. The Local Government Association (LGA) were working with the Government and represented both councils and it may be that this split would change.
- 15.14 Councillor McCraw queried the changes to the Empty Homes Discounts and what the rationale was behind the change.
- 15.15 Councillor Ward explained that the Council wanted to bring empty homes back into use as quickly as possible.
- 15.16 Councillor McCraw continued questioning and asked how often the Council connected with owners of unoccupied properties.
- 15.17 The Assistant Director for Housing outlined the process for contacting owners of unoccupied properties, who were contacted by letter in the first instance. The Housing department employed three officers to oversee the private sector rental market for the Council. The Council supported Landlords in the process in getting the property occupied, which was often caused by bereavement. Further advice would be organised later this year to support landlords.
- 15.18 Councillor Jan Osborne added that the Shared Revenues Partnership was very proactive in this area and received regular reports for unoccupied properties.
- 15.19 Councillor Dawson asked if the figures included Council owned, unoccupied buildings and building projects, which were commenced but not completed.
- 15.20 Councillor Ward outlined Council Tax reductions and discounts and that properties were all subject to the same discounts.
- 15.21 In response to Councillor Dawson's further question regarding Angle Court, Councillor Ward stated that unoccupied and uncompleted properties were not included in the budget.
- 15.22 Councillor Adrian Osborne proposed that the Committee endorsed the budget to Cabinet as outlined in recommendation 3.1 to 3.3, and that the Finance Team be thanked for the work undertaken for the General Fund Budget, which was seconded by Councillor McCraw.

By a unanimous vote

It was Resolved: -

- 1.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed Recommendations 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 in the report to Cabinet.**
- 1.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee complimented the Finance Team on the work undertaken for the General Fund Budget and Four-year Outlook.**