

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Date: 2 December 2013

Venue: East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

Time: 7.30 pm

Present: Councillors:-

Richard Lewis	(Chairman)
Glenvil Greenwood-Smith	(Vice-Chairman)
Steven North	(Leader of the Council)
Glenn Harwood MBE	(Deputy Leader of the Council)

Peter Baden	Sue Homer
David Brackenbury	Andy Mercer
Wendy Brackenbury	Rupert Reichhold
Dudley Hughes JP	Jeremy Taylor

266. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of the word 'Bill.' at the end of the second paragraph of minute 246.

267. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors John Farrar and Roger Glithero JP.

268. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared interests in the items as shown below. Where members or officers considered the nature of their Other Interest to be of such significance that it prevented them being involved in a discussion or vote on an item, a note is detailed under each item in the minutes below highlighting that the member or officer left the room for the consideration and voting on the items.

Councillor/ Officer	Item	Nature of Interest	DPI	Other Interest
Richard Lewis	6 – Voluntary Sector Grants 2014-17	Trustee of Rushden MIND		Yes
Rupert Reichhold	6 – Voluntary Sector Grants 2014-17	Appointed as an observer to the Serve Management Board		Yes

269. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

There were no questions received.

270. MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES AND WORKING PARTIES

(a) Finance Sub-Committee – 18 November 2013

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee held on 18 November 2013 were received (see pages 329 to 333) and the recommendation for full Council detailed within minute 10 was considered.

R.9 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:

Minute 10 – Asset Management – Sale of Land and Buildings Progress Update

That the sale of Herne Park, Oundle (including the car park site and bungalow), despite it not being sold via auction or through a competitive process, be approved.

(b) Personnel Sub-Committee – 25 November 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2013 were received (see pages 334 to 337) and the recommendation within minute 7 was considered.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendation in the minute indicated, as set out below, be approved:-

Minute 7 – Pension Auto-Enrolment

1. That pension auto-enrolment for any staff eligible before 1 February 2014 be delayed until 1 October 2017.
2. That staff be written to offering the option of joining the pension scheme before 1 October 2017 if they wish to do so.

(c) Welfare Reform Sub-Committee – 27 November 2013

The minutes of the meeting of Welfare Reform Sub-Committee Party held on 27 November 2013 were received (see pages 338 to 340) and the recommendation detailed within minute 5 was considered.

R.10 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:

Minute 5 – Council Tax Support Scheme

1. That the local Council Tax Support Scheme for East Northamptonshire for 2013/14 be adopted for 2014/15 with an amendment to the effect that the scheme be based on 87.5% of the annual Council Tax liability.
2. That the scheme be reviewed during 2014/15 to ensure that a financially sustainable scheme is in place for 2015/16.

271. VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS 2014-17

The committee considered a report which sought approval of the recommendations from the Voluntary Sector Grants Panel in respect of the award of grants from 2014 to 2017.

The authority provides voluntary sector grants across three thematic areas – advice and information, counselling and support and community transport. The committee had previously given approval for the application process to cover the period from April 2014 until March 2017, which would be based on the current annual funding allocation.

The panel had recommended the award of grants for the themes as follows:

- Advice & Information – Community Law Service (Northampton & County) – £50,000 per annum
- Counselling & Support – Service Six – £20,000 per annum
- Community Transport – Serve Consortium (with Volunteer Action Oundle) – £20,000 per annum

RESOLVED:

1. That the evaluation process undertaken by the Voluntary Sector Grants Panel be endorsed.
2. That the award of Voluntary Sector Grants for the period from April 2014 to March 2017 be approved as outlined above.

(Councillor Richard Lewis left the room during the discussion and vote on the Counselling and Support theme.)

272. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES ENFORCEMENT POLICY REVIEW

The committee considered a report which detailed the outcome of a review which consolidated all of the Environmental Services Enforcement Policies into one document.

The review had included the update of policies to ensure that they reflected all of the relevant regulation and also referred to best practice in enforcement activity. The authority had previously had twelve separate enforcement policies and these had been consolidated into one. The policies were the subject of public consultation for twelve weeks and it was reported that no comments were received.

RESOLVED:

That the Environmental Services Enforcement Policy be approved.

273. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business because exempt information, as defined under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, may be disclosed.

274. MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES & WORKING PARTIES

(a) Leisure Contracts Working Group – 8 November 2013

The minutes of the Leisure Contracts Working Group held on 8 November 2013 were received.

Chairman



Finance Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 18 November 2013 at 7.30pm, Kasen Room, East Northamptonshire House, Thrapston

Present: Councillors: Peter Baden
 Roger Glithero JP
 Glenvil Greenwood-Smith
 Richard Lewis
 Steven North - Chairman

Officers: David Oliver (Chief Executive)
 Glenn Hammons (Chief Finance Officer)
 Katy Everitt (Head of Resources and Organisational Development)
 Kelly Watson (Finance Manager)

1.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Brackenbury and Glenn Harwood MBE.

2.0 MINUTES

2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee held on 11 September 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 The following interests were declared in the Agenda items specified below:

Councillor	Agenda item	Nature of Interest	DPI	Other Interest
Roger Glithero	Treasury Management Report - Quarter 2 2013/14	Shareholder in Lloyds Bank		Yes
Richard Lewis	Treasury Management Report - Quarter 2 2013/14	Shareholder in Lloyds Bank		Yes

4.0 QUESTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

4.1 There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.3.

5.0 BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 2 2013/14

- 5.1 The Finance Manager presented a report to the Sub-Committee detailing the Council's expenditure to the end of quarter 2 (30 September 2013) against the approved revenue and capital budgets for 2013/14. The report highlighted any significant under or overspend greater than £10,000 and identified the impact on the end of year position.
- 5.2 Since the setting of the Council's budget in February 2013, the total budget had been revised to £10,164,857. The estimated outturn for the year was an under-spend of £220,000 which would increase the contribution to Revenue Reserves in 2013/14 to £471,000.
- 5.3 The 2013/14 forecast outturn on Capital Expenditure was £390,000 below budget, comprised of £153,000 underspend and £237,000 slippage into future years.

RESOLVED:

That the current budget monitoring position be noted.

(Reason – this is an information/monitoring report – no decision required)

6.0 TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 2 2013/14

- 6.1 The Finance Manager presented a report to the Sub-Committee which provided an update on the activity of the Treasury Management function for the second quarter of 2013/14. The report also set out the likely performance for the remainder of the financial year.
- 6.2 The Sub-Committee noted that the 2013/14 Treasury Management Strategy had been approved as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy in February 2013 and was underpinned by the adoption of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Code of Practice. The Code recommended that members be informed of treasury management activities at least twice a year.

7.0 DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

- 7.1 The Chief Finance Officer presented a report setting out the Council's Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2014/15 to 2017/18, outlining the Draft Revenue Budget 2014/15, the Draft Capital Programme 2014/15 to 2013/24 and the Draft Treasury Management Strategy 2014/15. This refreshed the MTFS 2014/15 to 2016/17 which had been approved by Council in February 2013.
- 7.2 It was noted that, over the medium term, the Council would need to increase income and / or deliver savings to meet the anticipated funding gap. A number of options to do this were currently being explored and developed and these were outlined in the report.
- 7.3 A number of key assumptions had been made in preparing the MTFS and these were set out in the report, together with the impact of options for setting the Council Tax for 2014/15. In response to a question from a Member, the Chief Finance Officer informed the Sub-Committee that the maximum permitted increase in the level of Council Tax for 2013/14 without holding a Referendum would have been £5 per

property per annum and the impact on the Council of freezing Council Tax at 2012/13 levels was a reduction in income of £140,000. This would also impact in future years as this sum was not included in the Council Tax Base.

- 7.4 The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that pension costs to the Council would increase and a 2% year-on-year increase had been factored into the MTFS.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, specifically the:

- Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
- Draft Revenue Budget 2014/15
- Draft Capital Programme for 2014/15-2023/24 (subject to the on-going review of schemes within that programme)

(Reason: To ensure that the Sub-Committee is aware of the forecast financial position so that, in due course, the Council complies with its constitution in setting its Budget)

8.0 DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2013-2019

- 8.1 Further to the report considered by the Sub-Committee on 24 June 2013, a draft Asset Management Plan for 2013 to 2019 had been prepared and was submitted to the Sub-Committee for consideration. The Plan sought to commit the Council to a strategic approach to the financial management of its physical assets.
- 8.2 The Head of Resources and Organisational Development stressed that the costs included within the Plan were broad estimates only and would be subject to expert review, and therefore might change significantly. Inclusion of projects in the Council's Development Pool within the Capital Programme would not commit the Council to any expenditure at that stage.
- 8.3 It was noted that the Stanwick Lakes site was not included in the Plan as the length of the lease did not, from a technical point of view, make the site a Council asset. However, funding for the works to be carried out was included in the Capital Programme Development Pool.
- 8.4 The Head of Resources and Organisational Development identified that a number of actions were included within the Plan to develop it over the next 12 months.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Asset Management Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes, be noted

(Reason - to ensure that adequate financial provision is made to ensure that the Council's assets are maintained to an adequate standard.)

9.0 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because exempt information, as defined under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972, may be disclosed.

10.0 ASSET MANAGEMENT – SALE OF LAND AND BUILDINGS PROGRESS UPDATE

- 10.1 The Head of Resources and Organisational Development provided the Sub-Committee with an update on progress made in relation to the sale of Council owned land and buildings.
- 10.2 It was noted that contracts were almost ready for signing for the sale of the Rushden depot, recycling centre and car park. A planning application would then need to be submitted by the Developer.
- 10.3 At its meeting on 6 November 2013, the Development Control Committee had approved the planning application in respect of the site at Barrington Road/Newton Road, Rushden subject to a Section 106 Agreement being signed within six months of the committee decision.
- 10.4 With regard to the site at Herne Park, Oundle, it was noted that this proposed sale would need to be approved by Council as a competitive process for the sale had not been undertaken. The Sub-Committee was reminded of the process which had been followed whereby a number of potential interested parties were contacted by the Council's land Agent, Martin Pendered, but none of them registered any formal interest in purchasing the site. Mr. Pendered was subsequently contacted direct by someone interested in purchasing the site and the Council sought a valuation from the District Valuer.
- 10.5 It was noted that the offer received for the purchase of this site was close to the valuation received from the District Valuer and, in addition, the prospective purchaser offered to deal with a number of complexities associated with the site. This included a long lease of the car park and bungalow to interested parties, which could have delayed a sale being made. Mr. Pendered confirmed in writing that he felt the sale represented good value for money and this was agreed by individuals approved by Finance Sub-Committee (25 June 2012) to agree the sale of sites – namely Councillor Richard Lewis, the Chief Executive, Head of Resources and Organisational Development and Section 151 Officer.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:

That Council approves the sale of Herne Park, Oundle (including the car park site and bungalow) despite it not being sold via auction or through a competitive process.

(Reason - to ensure the sale of Herne Park can progress as soon as possible to support delivery of the Capital Programme)

Chairman



Personnel Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on 25 November 2013 at East Northamptonshire House, Thrapston

Present: Councillors	Roger Glithero JP (Chairman)
	Wendy Brackenbury (from item under minute 10 onwards)
	Glenn Harwood MBE
	Steven North
	Jeremy Taylor
	David Oliver Chief Executive
	Sharn Matthews Executive Director
	Katy Everitt Head of Resources and Organisational Development
	Lisa Hyde Head of Customer and Community Services
	David Reed Head of Planning Services
	Aime Armstrong Human Resources Manager
	Karen Britton Planning Policy and Conservation Manager

1.0 MINUTES

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

2.0 APOLOGIES

2.1 No apologies for absence had been received.

3.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 No declarations of interest were made.

4.0 QUESTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

4.1 There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.3

5.0 WORKFORCE STATISTICS

5.1 The Sub-Committee reviewed data concerning staff sickness, turnover and the number of staff employed.

- 5.2 It was noted that there had been a slight increase in the rolling 12 month overall sickness absence levels since the last report to the Sub-Committee and the Corporate Management Team would focus absence management on short-term sickness absence..

6.0 VACANT POSTS UPDATE

- 6.1 The Sub-Committee received a report on:-

- (a) Vacant posts
- (b) New posts created on the establishment
- (c) Posts temporarily vacant
- (d) Budget savings, and
- (e) Empty posts/hours still on establishment but with no budget.

- 6.2 Members were apprised of progress made in the recruitment of the Head of ICT and it was also noted that the vacancy for the post of Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager had recently been advertised.

7.0 PENSION AUTO-ENROLMENT

- 7.1 The Human Resources Manager presented a report on the implications for the Council arising from the statutory requirement to auto-enrol staff into the Local Government Pension Scheme.

- 7.2 The Council had been issued with a staging date of 1 February 2014, by when staff who met the eligibility criteria needed to be enrolled into the pension scheme. However, as part of the transitional arrangements, the Council was entitled to delay auto-enrolment until 1 October 2017, provided that members of staff were written to giving the option of joining the pension scheme before this date should they wish to do so.

- 7.3 It was understood that the transitional arrangements would also apply to any Members who met the eligibility criteria, although definitive legal advice was difficult to obtain as the political intent on this issue was uncertain at present.

- 7.4 Where an employee was auto-enrolled and subsequently opted out of the pension scheme, the employee's contributions would be refunded. It was unclear whether this would also be the case with employer contributions and the Human Resources Manager undertook to clarify the position and advise the Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED:

That, having carefully considered the Equalities Impact Assessment, it be endorsed.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

- i) That pension auto enrolment for any staff eligible before 1 February 2014 be delayed until 1 October 2017
- ii) That staff be written to offering the option of joining the pension scheme before 1 October 2017 if they wish to do so.

((Reason: to meet legislative requirements))

8.0 REVENUE SUPPORT GROUP – ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS

- 8.1 The Head of Customer and Community Services reported that the Council retained a small number of staff on “zero hours” contracts to undertake ad hoc duties that were time bound, seasonal or of a temporary nature. These arrangements were used for the “Revenue Support Group” (RSG) staff, who formed part of the Revenues and Benefits service.
- 8.2 No new staff had been added to the RSG pool over the past three years and the salary budget had been reduced. Some of the duties undertaken by the RSG had been transferred to permanent staff, which had impacted on the Customer Services team to the extent that this was having an adverse affect on the team’s performance.
- 8.3 It was proposed to transfer some of the staff budget from the RSG group to recruit a part-time Customer Services Assistant. This would involve reducing the RSG salary budget from £59,000 to £47,000 in a full year and, to enable the new post to be filled from January 2014, £3,000 would be transferred from the existing RSG budget in the current financial year.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of a part time Customer Services Advisor from within the existing salary budgets be approved.

((Reason - to make best use of existing resources))

9.0 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because exempt information, as defined under paragraphs 2 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, may be disclosed.

10.0 PLANNING POLICY AND CONSERVATION TEAM (STAFF PROPOSAL 18)

- 10.1 The Head of Planning Services presented a report outlining proposals for the structure of the Planning Policy and Conservation Team in the light of three fixed term posts expiring in 2014 and to progress the emerging work programme of the team.
- 10.2 Members reiterated the need for the team to be appropriately resourced to enable the anticipated future workload to be carried out.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the report be noted

- ii) That the changes set out in the report be approved in principle and consultations take place with any affected employees.
- iii) That the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with the Chairman of this Sub-Committee, be authorised to implement the changes set out in the report provided that there are no significant issues raised during the consultation process.

(Reason: to provide resources to progress the Council's local plan strategy as quickly as possible following the Review of the Core Spatial Strategy)

11.0 COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

11.1 The Head of Customer and Community Services reported that, further to the Sub-Committee's approval for the restructuring of the Communications Team in September 2012 by the creation of two fixed term posts, the team's work programme for the future was now clearer and it was proposed to retain the current structure by making the posts permanent.

11.2 RESOLVED:

That the posts of Communications Manager and Communications Officer be approved as permanent posts.

(Reason - to provide continuation of service from within the existing Communications Team)

12.0 UPDATE ON STAFF PROPOSAL SP27

12.1 Further to the Sub-Committee's consideration of this proposal at its last meeting, the Head of Resources and Organisational Development presented a report providing updated information on the proposal to establish a business transformation team to undertake robust business process reviews to improve efficiency and customer service at reduced costs and ensure projects have appropriate corporate support to help deliver the Council's Corporate Plan..

12.2 RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and, subject to the outcome of staff consultation, the introduction of the Business Transformation Team be approved.

(Reason - to ensure that the Council has the skills and the capacity to deliver projects to reduce costs and ensure continued progress in delivering the Corporate Plan)

Chairman



Welfare Reform Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 27 November 2013 at 2.00pm, The Kasen Room, East Northamptonshire House, Thrapston

Present:

Councillors: Andy Mercer (Chairman)
Glenvil Greenwood-Smith
Richard Lewis
Jeremy Taylor

Officers: Lisa Hyde – Head of Customer and Community Services
Richard Hadden – Revenue Manager
Lucy Hogston – Benefit Manager

1.0 MINUTES

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Steven North and Kelly Watson, Finance Manager.

3.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor	Item	Nature of Interest	DPI	Other Interest
Richard Lewis	Council Tax Support Scheme	Relative affected by empty property element of scheme		Yes
Andy Mercer	Council Tax Collection	Recent business meeting with debt collection service providers		Yes

4.0 UPDATE ON COLLECTION OF COUNCIL TAX TO 31 OCTOBER 2013

4.1 The Sub Committee considered a report prepared by the Revenue Manager on the effects of implementing the local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme and the council tax technical reforms on workloads, collection performance and related matters.

- 4.2 At 31 October 2012 67.56% of the total council tax for East Northamptonshire had been collected. At the same point this year the figure stood at 67.68%. For Council Tax Support (CTS) payers the collection rate to date was 68.58% and the predicted year end figure was now between 80% and 90%, compared to the 70% originally predicted. The Sub-Committee noted that there had been no apparent diminution in collection rates arising from the decisions taken on CTS last year.
- 4.3 The impact of under/over collection was discussed and information would be required from the Chief Finance Officer, although any over or under collection was likely to be insignificant in the overall amount of Council Tax collected. All financial information would be taken into account when compiling the information for setting the council tax base for 2014/15.
- 4.4 Records showed that some owners of empty properties were continuing to find it difficult to understand that they would be required to pay a sum towards council tax, rather than receiving an exemption or discounted rate, prior to 1 April 2013. These issues were likely to subside as the arrangements settled in, but the issue of an exemption being provided in future years in appropriate circumstances could be considered.
- 4.5 It was noted that 544 magistrate court summonses had been issued to customers who had previously been in receipt of council tax benefit and therefore did not have to pay. This represented 20% of the lowest income CTS customers. Negotiated payment arrangements had been arranged in many cases but there were still cases where customers ignored reminders regarding payment. Staff were currently working to develop processes to help those with payment difficulties.
- 4.6 The Sub-Committee noted its appreciation of the hard work undertaken by the Revenue and Benefit team in achieving the results so far.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

5.0 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

- 5.1 Further to the decisions made at a previous meeting of the Sub-Committee on 10 October 2013, consultation had been carried out on a new CTS scheme for 2014/15 based on a Council Tax liability of 87.5% as the preferred option. Consultation ran from 21 October to 18 November 2013 and asked respondents to confirm their agreement/disagreement to the proposal that all working age people claiming Council Tax Support should pay 12.5% of their Council Tax Bill as a minimum.
- 5.2 A total of 118 consultation responses were received, 67 of which supported the proposal to apply a 12.5% liability reduction. It was noted that 47 of the 67 were currently in receipt of Council Tax Support.
- 5.3 In considering the various options available to the Welfare Reform Sub Committee, for varying the existing CTS scheme, the following key principles were agreed. The scheme should:
- at least recover the 10% reduction in government funding

- act as an incentive for people to work rather than remain on benefit, or at least not act as a disincentive to work
 - protect the vulnerable as far as possible
 - be simple to administer, to avoid increased administration costs where possible
- 5.4 The Sub-Committee considered the various financial implications of the proposals as set out in the report.
- 5.5 A verbal update was provided on the varying CTS schemes across the County. Kettering Borough Council had adopted a 15% liability reduction scheme and Corby Borough Council had agreed a scheme of 8.5% liability. Schemes still out for consultation were South Northants (8.5%), Daventry (8.5%), and Northampton Borough Council (15%). The Borough Council of Wellingborough was also still consulting on various schemes.

RESOLVED:

That the consultation responses received and the Equality Impact Assessment have been given due regard

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL:

- i) that the local Council Tax Support scheme for East Northamptonshire should be the existing Council Tax Support Regulations with the following amendment:
 - that the scheme be based on 87.5% of the annual Council Tax liability.
- ii) the scheme be reviewed during 2014/15 to ensure that a financially sustainable scheme is in place for 2015/16.

(Reason – to deliver a Council Tax Support scheme for 2014/15 that meets all statutory requirements)

6.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

- 6.1 No questions under Procedure Rule 10.3 had been received.

Chairman