

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET 9 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM THE JOINT PANEL MEETING HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2022

9. BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

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Members received a presentation on the Budget and Capital Programme from the Assistant Director (Section 151 Officer) as attached.

It was noted that the Budget and Capital Programme would be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 9th February 2022 and Full Council on 23rd February 2022.

The presentation firstly covered the Revenue Budget and questions and comments were invited from Members on this element of the presentation.

Councillor Morley referred to the pie chart for the Council Tax claim, he suggested that the Internal Drainage Board levy be added and that it be communicated to council tax payers that the Council had no control over this levy. He also referred to the West Norfolk Partnership and the budget that was attributed to this. He asked for information on the projects they had carried out.

The Chair also commented that it was a disadvantage that the Borough had to pay an Internal Drainage Board levy and others did not and that it was a matter for Westminster.

The Assistant Director explained that the Council had lobbied on funding reforms and that Internal Drainage Boards should be considered separately. The Council also engaged in relevant consultations and would update Members as appropriate.

With regard to the West Norfolk Partnership, the Assistant Director agreed to find out more information and feedback to Members.

Councillor Crofts explained that previously the Council used to get a percentage of Internal Drainage Board levies back from the Government and asked if this was still the case. The Assistant Director explained that this previously came through the Revenue Support Grant, but now nothing came back to the Council. She also made reference to the Revenue Support Grant and Rural Services Grant and that they were now only based on a one year settlement and would most probably not continue for much longer.

Councillor Moriarty explained that Internal Drainage Board levies had been an issue for a long time and asked if there was anything that could be done, especially as not all areas of the Borough benefitted from the Internal Drainage Board, but all of the Borough had to pay the levy. He also made reference to the Business Rates Pool and Business Rates Reform and the announcement made today by Government about the £150 Council Tax rebate. The Assistant Director explained that the Business Rates Pool had been revised and base lines reset and it was likely that the Borough would not benefit as much as it had previously from this. The process for the Business Rates Pool had been revised and now instead of bidding for projects the Pool was split across Norfolk.

With regard to the £150 Council Tax rebate announced by Government, the arrangements for this were still unknown, but it was likely that a grant from Government would be received.

Councillor Dark, Leader of the Council explained to Members that work was ongoing to make the Internal Drainage Board levy more visible to the public and a communications plan would be put in place.

In response to queries raised relating to fees and charges, Councillor Dark explained that the revenue from fees and charges contributed to providing a range of services.

Councillor Kemp addressed the meeting under Standing Order 34. She commented that it would be a challenge to balance the books and she noted that funding had been set aside for investments. She urged caution that risky investments should be avoided and to ensure that the necessary checks, balances and due diligence was carried out. She also made reference to the budget attributed to the West Norfolk Partnership. The Assistant Director explained that individual investments would be looked at on a case by case basis and business cases would be required.

Councillor Bambridge referred to the collection of Council Tax and commented that the financial plan based it on a 100% collection rate. The Assistant Director explained that the 100% collection rate ensured that estimates could be forecasted more smoothly.

Councillor de Whalley made reference to the draw down from reserves and the risks in doing so. The Assistant Director explained that the financial plan would be monitored and work to make savings would continue. She also reminded those present that the financial plan beyond 2023 was projections and estimates at the moment.

Councillor Ryves referred to the Town Plan and the impact this could have on finances. He also made reference to income generated by West Norfolk Property and if this would have a positive impact on the budget going forward. He commented that he would like to see further work carried out on car parking charges and options for car parking revenue. The Assistant Director explained that the Town Fund had been built into the Capital Programme and each project would be considered individually through the Councils decision making processes. With regard to West Norfolk Property, information on the loan and rate of return was provided and it was noted that a review on the Governance of Companies was currently being undertaken.

The Assistant Director then provided information to Members on the Capital Programme as included in the presentation. Questions and comments were then invited from those present.

Councillor Morley referred to the Capital Programme phasing and the Assistant Director explained that projects were being reviewed with Service Managers and as part of setting the Capital Programme schemes had been refined.

Councillor Moriarty referred to the ICT Development Group and asked for information on the Group. He also referred to funding from reserves for dog bins and play areas and asked if these should be funded in a different way such as Special Expenses. The Assistant Director explained that the ICT Development Group was made up of Members and Officers and looked at ICT projects to be submitted for approval. She also explained that money had been set aside for projects such as the dog bins and play areas.

Councillor Moriarty agreed to submit additional questions he had relating to the Financial Plan to Cabinet in advance of their meeting next week and advised he would be attending the Cabinet Meeting under Standing Order 34.

Members were requested to consider any recommendations they would like to submit to Cabinet.

Councillor Morley suggested that it be recommended to Cabinet that assurance be sought that the 2022/2023 expenditure had been verified and that profiling on Capital Spend had been checked and expenditure was in line with project outcomes.

Members considered this recommendation and it was agreed that this be submitted to the Cabinet as well as Cabinet being asked to note the comments made by the Panel.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Panel make the following recommendation to Cabinet:

1. That the comments made by the Joint Panel are noted.
2. That assurance is sought that the 2022/2023 expenditure had been verified, profiling on Capital Spend had been checked and that expenditure was in line with project outcomes.