

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

24 August 2023

COUNCILLOR CHRIS MORLEY - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

For the period 14 July to 15th August 2023

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Statement of Accounts – External Audits by EY

We have still to secure sign off by EY for 2019/20 and later audits. Our team are becoming increasingly frustrated by the repeated requests for more sampling. When one tranche of questions is completed, another set are requested. This piecemeal approach is not helping a resolution but we aim to clear the last (hopefully) batch of samples and clear the audit for the November Audit Committee.

However and as most will know, this delay is repeated across the Country. So much so that it induced me to beam into a webinar run by Neil Harris, Director of Local Audit in the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) and who has been appointed to set up a new Audit Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA). He is currently consulting on the audit process to complete the many outstanding cases across England.

He is suggesting a limitation in audit scope with the potential for qualified audit opinions and disclaimers for aspects not fully explored, with sign off as follows;

2015/16 to 2019/20	by 30/12/23
2020/21 to 2021/22	“ 31/3/24
2022/23	“ 30/9/24
2023/24	“ 31/3/25.

I doubt that, whatever the outcome of the consultation, we can comply with these dates.

We wait to hear what transpires from the consultation.

Revenue Budget,

Our total Borough Revenue spend this year is a net budget of £25m but to meet this figure we expect to have to draw £2.6m from our General Reserves. Indications from the 1st ¼ monitoring report are that this budget will be maintained but the small sum of £205K, allocated to us to help level up and offset the £3m IDB Levy, indicates that, the draw from our Reserves may reduce to £2.4m.

The 23/24 pay awards are coming to Council for agreement. We have made the appropriate contingencies to cater for the acceptance of the award in full.

The Period 3 Budget Monitoring Report will be available later this week and before Council, on ModGov.

Capital Budget.

Our review of the current forecast, for all but the Town Board Projects, continues. This more forensic examination has reduced the total from £64m to £48m. This work will continue until I am satisfied we have a realistic profile, which will then be subject to further flex based upon the impact of conditions prevailing through the execution of works. These changes will be implemented for the next monitoring report.

However, our Minimum Revenue Provision (the amount we include in the Revenue Budget just in case we have to repay the financing of our capital borrowing) is based on the higher capital figure, so should provide some benefit at year end.

Earmarked Reserves.

Work on checking Earmarked Reserves will pick up after the holiday period. More anon.

IDB Levy.

The S151 Officer and I have joined a consortium of up to 15 coastal Districts to form a lobby group to seek enhanced grants to meet the cost of IDB levies. We await our marching orders.

Grants.

By the time you read this report you will have read that:

- Councillor Community Support Grant Scheme has been extended.
- The defibrillator scheme was a welcomed success (credit where it's due) and has now been superseded by a National scheme.
- Small grants scheme re-starts from 1st October with total revenue pot up to £15K and capital staying at £50K but match funding needed.
- Council Tax Support Scheme out to consultation for wider eligibility and 100% support.

West Norfolk Wins.

This is far from the biggest prop we have to support charities in our communities but it does garner some £30K for West Norfolk Charities so we should not let it wither on the vine. I was therefore extremely disappointed to receive only 5 replies from Councillors to my request for promotional assistance.

Nevertheless, we are ploughing on and as an example of reach, the last 2 (£25) winners had nominated the money for their tickets to Hospital Radio Lynn and Snettisham Bobtails Pre-school.

So far we have: -

- made the scheme more visible on the Borough web site (just type in "wins").
- Changed the emphasis to stress it's a community lottery (the money is not for us!).

- Created an explainer page stressing the benefit of local causes.
- Negotiating phone access for those not on the internet. This number will be highlighted on new posters which we are distributing direct to Parish/Town clerks.

I have a review with the service provider, Gatherwell, later this week to secure their help in reminding all the charities involved that it is in their interests to freshen their own promotions.

I would hope that all Members (subject of course to any faith reservations) would join the scheme and promote its benefits.

It is important in these financially constrained times that we measure the benefit of the resources we consume wherever possible. We are therefore recording the cost of this project in spent hours and materials so that we can compare this with growth in the scheme. I trust we will have a positive benefit.

Finally, on this score, I would wish to record my thanks to Luke Burrige for his sterling support – thank you Luke.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Finalising my portion of the corporate plan including completion of measurement and KPIs for the finance function.

Work on an effective communication package for my colleagues.

Continuing review of efficiency and our earmarked Reserves.

Welcoming a revitalised Members Major Project Board.

Formulation of a maintenance programme.

Procurement Review.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

Attended:-

CPP
 R&D Panel (part only and hybrid)
 Audit Committee
 West Norfolk Wins x2

 Local Audit Webinar 1/8
 Cabinet
 BC/NCC briefing on County Deal 4/8

LGA Cabinet Support Session 8/8
Oliver Judges & Team Project Profiling 11/8
David Ousby, Officers & 3 Members Council Company Funding 15/8
Cabinet briefing and sifting various.
Weekly Portfolio Meetings.
Syderstone PC 20/7
Bircham PC 26/7
East Rudham PC 15/8

Scheduled:-

Gatherwell – remote meeting 17/8
Group Meet Up 26/8
Finance Portfolio Meetings weekly
Cabinet Meetings various
Independent Group Meeting
Financial assistance various
Council company funding
West Norfolk Wins
Tour of Town Deal Projects
Meeting re staff perception survey
Panel meetings
Parish Councils Meetings