

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 6.00PM ON
9 FEBRUARY 2022
AT THE ENGINE SHED, SAND MARTIN HOUSE, BITTERN WAY**

Committee Members Present: Councillors M Farooq (Chairman), Jackie Allen, R Brown, C Burbage, G Casey, A Dowson, S Farooq, John Fox, C Harper, T Haynes, S Hemraj, Ishfaq Hussain, A Iqbal, B Rush, L Robinson, S Lane, N Moyo, E Murphy, O Sainsbury, N Sandford, L Sharp, S Warren, C Wiggin, S Qayyum.

Independent Co-optee Members:

Sameena Aziz
Parish Councillor Neil Boyce

Officers Present:

Matthew Gladstone, Chief Executive of Peterborough City Council
Fiona McMillan, Director of Law and Governance
Dr Joyti Atri, Director for Public Health
Charlotte Black, Executive Director (People and Communities)
Sue Grace, Director, Customer and Digital Services
Cecilie Booth, Corporate Director of Resources - Virtually
James Collingridge, Head of Environmental Partnerships
Charlotte Palmer, Head of Service - Environment, Highways and Transport
Kirsty Nutton, Head of Corporate Finance
Jonathan Lewis, Service Director, Education
Nicola Curley, Director, Children's Services
Lou Williams, Service Director, Children's Services
Will Patten, Service Director, Commissioning
Adrian Chapman, Executive Director Place & Economy
Rachel Edwards, Head of Constitutional Services
Phillipa Turvey, Democratic and Constitutional Services Manager
Paulina Ford, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Also Present:

Councillor Fitzgerald, Leader of the Council and Deputy Mayor of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
Councillor Allen, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities
Councillor Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education, Skills and University
Councillor Marco Cereste, Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation
Councillor Walsh, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Public Health
Councillor Hiller, Cabinet Member for Strategic, Planning and Commercial Strategy and Investments

Councillor Coles, Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor Simons, Cabinet Member for Waste, Street Scene and Environment
Councillor John Howard, Cabinet Advisor for Housing, Culture and Communities

The Senior Democratic Services Officer opened the meeting by welcoming everyone present and those members of the public and press who were watching the livestream of the meeting through the Council's YouTube page.

1. NOMINATION OF CHAIR

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised the Committee that in accordance with *Part 4, Section 8 – Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules, section 13, Joint Meetings of Scrutiny Committees* a Chair would be required to be appointed from among the Chairs of the Committees who were holding the meeting. Nominations were sought from those present who were Councillor Casey, Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee and Children and Education Scrutiny Committee and Councillor M Farooq, Chair of the Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Farooq was nominated by Councillor Casey and seconded by Councillor Sainsbury. There being no further nominations, Councillor Farooq was therefore appointed Chair of this committee.

The Chair welcomed everyone present and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for all members of each Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022/23 Phase Two Proposals document as part of the formal consultation process before being presented to Cabinet on 21 February 2022 for approval and recommendation to Full Council on 2 March 2022.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ansar Ali, Barkham, Elsey, Fenner, Judy Fox, Haseeb, Over, Skibsted and Tyler.

The following co-opted members also submitted their apologies: Peter Cantley, Flavio Vettese, Parish Councillor June Bull and Parish Councillor Michael Samways.

Cllr Nawaz and Cllr Dowson substituted for Cllr Ali and Cllr Skibsted respectively.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of interest were received.

4. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022/23 PHASE TWO

The Cabinet Member for Finance gave a short introduction to the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 Phase Two proposals for consideration. He wished to place on record his thanks to the officers involved in producing the report as well as the Finance Team, the Cross-Party Financial Sustainability Working Group and Cabinet colleagues.

The Cabinet Member for Finance highlighted the following:

- The budget was designed to maximise income, deliver efficiencies and manage demand, by achieving the required phase two savings of over £6.5 million, a total of £12.6 million. There would be a configuration of services, including libraries and other leisure services.

- The budget would be subject to careful monitoring and control over the next 14 months, with arrangements in place to spot any variances and combat risk. The risks were detailed in sections 6.3 and 8 of the report and also in Appendix D. Section 6.3 highlighted the main concerns of potential demand and inflationary pressures which were issues currently being considered by ongoing work from the Finance Team.
- There was a small surplus of £276,000, based on current proposals, though officers believe that these were subject to change. Current proposals were estimated to reduce the Council's current dependence on reserves by £5.5 million, compared to the previously budgeted position.
- The Capital Programme would be reduced by £28 million over the next 3 years, though there would still be a programme of £160 million to be spent on roads, housing, schools, and a range of infrastructure projects.
- There was a marked difference in this year's report compared to previous budget reports, with the focus on next year's budget, without the pretence of providing a genuine medium-term financial strategy at this stage.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

Section Of Phase Proposals	MTFS One	Questions / Comment from Members	Response from Relevant Cabinet Member / Executive Director
Presentation and Introduction of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy Phase Two Proposals Document		Members asked questions regarding the Improvement Plan and queried if there was still a commitment to a governance review as it had not been included in the Plan.	The Leader advised Members that the omission of the governance review was due to an error and omission in the document but assured Members that there would be a governance review. The Leader then later clarified that the Cabinet papers had been published before the information on the governance review had been confirmed.
		Members queried the Corporate Strategy and commitment to the Council achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. Members sought clarification as to where this commitment was reflected in the budget	The Leader advised that no specific proposals had been put forward on this matter and would welcome alternative options at the next Financial Sustainability Working Group. The Leader confirmed that there was a lot of work being done with regard to climate change and achieving net zero carbon emissions.
		Members asked about proposals included for one off savings within the target savings and what ongoing savings would replace the one-off savings going forward.	The Head of Corporate Finance advised that there was a table on page 14 of the report with details of one-off savings and reoccurring savings. The Council would be looking to replace the one off savings going forward.

	A Co-opted Member asked for clarification regarding funding and Parish precepts and wanted to know where in the budget it detailed payment to the Parish Councils.	The Head of Corporate Finance advised that council tax was collected on behalf of the Parishes and was listed in Appendix A, under Planned Expenditure, under the resources line.
	Members referred to the moratorium on capital spending and the reduction in tree maintenance and was concerned that this might cause bigger problems in the future. Members also sought clarification on whether future rises in the cost of living had been taken into account within the budget.	The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that there were risks regarding the moratorium on capital spending and tree maintenance and that there was a risk that would require monitoring. Any health and safety matters with regard to tree maintenance would be dealt with immediately. In terms of petrol and the rising cost of living this was covered in the assumptions with regard to costs and increases in inflation.
	Members asked about the administration's current thinking.	The Leader advised that closures such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Museum, Flag Fen had been stopped by the administration and that it was a collaborative Council budget, not a Conservative budget, therefore everyone had the opportunity to contribute to it.
	Members asked the Cabinet Member for Finance if he had received any assurances from Central Government about fairer funding going forward.	The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that there was a much-delayed review already in place and that the Council was not in a position to make representations before the information became available. Assurance was given that representation would be made as soon as the fairer funding regime had changed.
	Members asked about investment in the local economy, what were the key risks from not making investments in the local economy now and what was being done to mitigate those risks.	The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that the Council had a strong reputation for bringing business and investment into the area and to improve financial sustainability the aim was to improve on that effort.
	Members queried if all judgements were based on 4.1% inflation going forward.	The Head of Corporate Finance advised that in terms of inflation, there was not one single percentage applied as a flat rate. The Council had

		looked at where increased costs were occurring such as utilities and other things like market sustainability in areas such as Adult Social Care.
	<p>Members queried the legal implications regarding the adoption of the budget, believing it to be the role of the Cabinet to create the budget and the council to approve it. Members referred to paragraph 14.3 in the report regarding Legal Implications which stated: <i>“In terms of the Council’s executive arrangements, the adoption of the Council’s Budget is a role shared between the Cabinet and the Council, whereby the Cabinet (Leader) is responsible for formulating the budget proposals and Full Council is responsible for then approving (or not) those proposals and setting the budget and council tax requirement”</i></p> <p>Members felt that the budget had not been formulated on a collaborative basis.</p>	<p>The Leader asked the Chief Executive to clarify the legality of the budget position. The Chief Executive advised that he had seen a collaborative approach since joining the Council. It was a Full Council responsibility to set the budget. All parties had to take responsibility for setting the budget as it was a whole Council issue and approach, and this had been made clear by Government to the Council several weeks ago.</p>
	<p>Members queried the title Medium-term Financial Strategy as it was mentioned several times in the report. The term strategy seemed contradictory as the plan was only for one year.</p>	<p>The Cabinet Member for Finance advised it was a semantic issue in the naming, adding that it could be called Medium-term Financial Plan for 2022/23. The Chief Executive advised that whilst it was a tactical plan for one year it did look beyond one year, so Medium-term Financial Plan was still an appropriate name. There were also references in the document referring to the next three years.</p>
The Joint Scrutiny Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		
<p>Appendix A Page 35 to 36 2022/23-2024/25 MTFS Detailed Budget Position Phase Two</p>	<p>There were no questions raised.</p>	
The Joint Scrutiny Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		

<p>Appendix B Page 37 to 66 MTFP Phase Two Budget Consultation Document</p>	<p>Referring to page 46, Members sought clarity on what the Adult Social Care Front Door reference to technology was and if it was different to technology enabled care. If it was different technology, had it been costed.</p>	<p>The Executive Director (People and Communities) advised that the Front Door was not a form of technology but was about making sure that when people come to the council to ask for help with a specific issue, they would come through what is called our 'Front Door' which was Adult Early Help. The proposal was that better technology could be used at that point rather than drawing people into the assessment process.</p> <p>In terms of the Lifeline personal alarms contract, there was a good evidence base to support the existing approach and to keep it as part of the Council's preventative strategy.</p>
	<p>Members referred to page 46 regarding Adult Social Care reablement and sought clarification as to which frontline workers were being referred to. Clarification was also sought as to whether the council were investing in more carers.</p>	<p>The Executive Director (People and Communities) advised that this was about developing the reablement service and by increasing capacity, which hopefully would enable the council to avoid costs further down the line.</p>
	<p>Referring to page 49, Members queried proposals to sell the Council's CCTV services to other companies and if there had been any interest.</p>	<p>The Executive Director, Place and Economy confirmed that there had been interest. Prior to the pandemic a number of contracts had been arranged with private companies but unfortunately had fallen by the wayside due to the pandemic. The Executive Director was however confident that the proposed target could be met.</p>
	<p>Members referred to page 50 remodelling the library service and sought clarification as to what this would entail.</p>	<p>The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities advised that an in depth study and complete review of the library service was being undertaken which could include the closure of some libraries and the repurposing of others. This may also result in some staff changes. The Cabinet Member assured Members that there would be engagement with the relevant</p>

		ward councillors and that their input into the review would be important.
	Members referred to page 47, Children's Social Care and in-house fostering and sought clarification as to whether the savings stated were realistic.	The Service Director for Children's Services advised that it was challenging to recruit foster carers. A significant amount of work had been put into redesigning the recruitment strategy with the help of external partners to look at different ways of making the fostering offer more attractive. He added that a recruitment plan would be launched shortly.
	Regarding reunification, Members were concerned that the thresholds were being raised in terms of children slipping through the net and wanted to know how this could be prevented. Would this mean a change in policy, and referrals and training?	The Service Director for Children's Services advised that Peterborough had a very robust safeguarding arrangement in place for children and young people. This was about looking at the way children could be supported to return home. Performance data had shown that Peterborough had a much lower proportion of children returning home from the care system compared to other similar authorities. There were plenty of safeguards in place covering this area to make sure that children were not put at risk.
	Members commented that they were pleased that Cabinet were reviewing public libraries but raised concerns at the possibility that some public libraries could be shut. Members sought clarification as to whether there would be a detailed plan presented at Council providing information on the exact changes to the libraries including	The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities advised that the answer was yes, and that the information would be presented in full. The Leader clarified that the information would not be available at the budget meeting of Full Council as the review would take six months to complete. Members would however have full input into any decisions made.
	Referring to Culture and Leisure, on page 49 Members noted that by exploring the benefits of having a charitable partner which if implemented	The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that he did not have the figures to hand. The Service Director, People and Communities added that they

	may release both VAT and business rate relief of between £500,000 and £700,000 a year. Members requested a breakdown of the figures.	were estimates based on available information and that the figures were a broad estimate which was subject to the partners obtaining charitable status which was a work in progress.
	Where was the net gain of these savings?	The Service Director, People and Communities, advised that this was the additional revenue that would be generated.
	Members referred to Peterborough Museum and Flag Fen archaeological site, how could we operate these sites with cuts and reductions in opening times?	The Cabinet Member for Finance advised it was a short-term plan to reach financial sustainability. The Service Director, People and Communities added that the vision for these facilities was ambitious as part of the Cultural Strategy and that reductions should be regarded as a worst-case scenario if an alternative did not materialise.
	Members referred to Clare Lodge, on page 56 and noted that there had been a loss of income, partly due to the recruitment of more agency staff. Was there any scope for the Council to work in partnership with Clare Lodge to advertise vacancies to avoid agency fees to fill the backlog?	The Service Director for Children's Services advised that the loss of income was against an overall income target of £1 million. Clare Lodge would still be making money but not as much as it had done in the past. Some of this was due to a change of clientele and type of referral which were becoming much more complex with much more challenging needs. This then reflected on pressures on staffing, compounded by the Covid-19 crisis where staff were on sickleave which meant that agency staff had to be brought in to cover the gaps.
	Members sought clarity regarding the impact of the reduction in management of trees? Would the budget saving also include not replacing trees that had been taken out?	The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that it was a short-term tactical budget and savings had to be made. Any matter that was an emergency or health and safety risk would be dealt with quickly. The Service Director, People and Communities added that the annual budget for tree maintenance was £900,000 and added that it was only a one-year saving. He would not expect new stock commitments

		to be affected by this temporary reduction.
	Members referred to page 49, unauthorised encampments. Clarification was sought as to why the report says that there had been a lower amount spent in recent years. Was this due to the pandemic and the lockdown or was it because the areas were well-defended?	The Service Director, People and Communities, advised that it was due to the latter. The city had had its fair share of unauthorised encampments. There were now fewer options for travellers who were not working with the Council to gain access to unauthorised sites. He added that Members should pay attention to relevant new legislation coming through in Parliament to assist further with unauthorised encampments.
	Members sought clarification as to what the plans were with regard to the bid for the City of Culture.	The Service Director, People and Communities, believed that the economic argument for the City of Culture programme was sound (tourism, inward investment) and that the Culture Strategy was a city strategy, not a council strategy. He added it was the aim to put in a bid for City of Culture status in 2029. The Leader added that 2029 was always the year desired for the City of Culture bid.
	Regarding reunification Members sought clarification as to whether the council were confident that the service had sufficient staff capacity to do this extra work in the shorter periods to enable reunification?	The Service Director for Children's Services advised it involved relatively small numbers of older young people and it was about Social Workers thinking sooner about whether it was time for the young person to return home.
	Members asked about the assumptions of achieving savings of £1.7 million and wanted to know what the assumptions were based on.	The Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation advised that there were over 300 existing contracts in place, and it had been agreed that all of these would be reviewed. It was not clear at this point exactly how much would be saved and the figure of £1.7 million was a conservative estimate. The Corporate Director of Resources added that officers were working closely with Serco to review all procurement contracts and was confident that the £1.7m savings target could be met and probably more.

	<p>Members referred to the Aragon Direct Services savings of £41,000, and requested a breakdown of the intended savings?</p> <p>Members were particularly concerned at the proposed reduction in wildflower areas.</p>	<p>The Head of Environmental Partnerships advised that wildflower areas the Council were currently looking at were the annual ones at the side of the roads. These sites had to be weeded otherwise the weed species would overtake the wildflowers. The current cost of planting the wildflowers was £1.55p per square metre but a standard grass cut was about 0.5p a square metre. However ongoing work was being done with groups to put in other wildflower areas.</p>
	<p>Members referred to page 46, Adult Social Care reablement and sought clarification if savings would still be able to be made if the service was unable to recruit staff.</p> <p>Regarding interim beds, if some of these are being closed, what would happen if a patient required one and none were available?</p>	<p>The Service Director for Commissioning advised that there had been a review of beds and usage levels, which had shown evidence of underuse. As a result, some of them were being decommissioned.</p> <p>The reablement term was still six weeks and there was an ongoing active recruitment campaign for staff which was proving successful.</p>
<p>The Joint Scrutiny Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.</p>		
<p>Appendix C Page 67 to 70</p> <p>Capital Programme Schemes 2022/23-2024/25</p>	<p>Referring to page 68, Members had been advised that the Community Leadership Fund had been terminated but noted that there was an amount of £60,000 listed against this fund.</p>	<p>The Cabinet Minister for Finance advised that the Fund has not been terminated but suspended and that the matter was still up for discussion.</p>
<p>The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.</p>		
<p>Appendix D Page 71 to 80</p> <p>Financial Risk Register</p>	<p>Members referred to page 78 and Climate Change on the City and if there was work being done to reduce carbon emissions.</p>	<p>The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that the information in the report was just a summary, and a full document could be provided with further detail.</p>
<p>The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget, and the following action point was agreed:</p> <p>ACTION AGREED:</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Finance agreed that any documentation relating to the Council's plan to reduce carbon emissions would be circulated to Members.</p>		

<p>Appendix E Page 81 to 88 Fees and Charges</p>	<p>Members commented that the Fees and Charges had not been presented to the Financial Sustainability Working Group.</p> <p>Members asked why car parking charges had not been increased.</p>	<p>The Leader advised that all recommendations were welcome but stressed the importance of providing specific details when making a recommendation.</p>
	<p>Members queried increases in cemetery fees and if work could be done to combat the waterlogging of graves.</p>	<p>The Leader empathised with regard to the waterlogging of graves but didn't believe it was a fees and charges issue. A longer-term solution would need to be sought.</p> <p>He believed that the increase in fees was due to the carrying out of the services and in line with inflation.</p>
	<p>Members referred to the disbanding of the Tourist Information Centre and redundancy costs and queried if alternative jobs had been found for the staff at the Tourist Information Centre.</p>	<p>The Cabinet Member for Culture, Housing and Communities advised that the post would end but the service would be maintained by the reception desk at the Town Hall and through the Central library. The Leader added that it was one member of staff, and that due process would have been followed with regard to redundancy.</p>
	<p>Referring to page 81, Members queried the Hackney Carriage Licensing fees and if there was any intention to increase the fixed-rate tariff for Hackney Carriage.</p>	<p>The Service Director, People and Communities, advised that the increase was due to a levelling-up arrangement. A briefing note would be prepared and circulated to Members. An allowance had already been made to support the trade.</p>
<p>The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget, and the following action point was agreed:</p> <p>ACTION AGREED</p> <p>The Service Director, People and Communities agreed to circulate a briefing note to all members in relation to the Hackney Carriage licencing fee uplift, in particular on the fixed tariff rate.</p>		
<p>Appendix F Page 83 to 84 Reserves Commitments</p>	<p>There were no questions raised.</p>	

The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		
Appendix G Page 85 to 120 Equality Impact Assessments	Pointing to the Impact Assessment on page 92 on library closures, Members asked if libraries were closed, what measures would be put in place to make sure older people and students were not adversely affected.	The Leader advised that this was up to Members to shape the future of library services, not the Cabinet. He added there were discussions about encouraging the increased usage of technology and mobile libraries. Members will be able to shape the future service of libraries.
The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		
Appendix H Page 121 to 124 Carbon Impact Assessments	There were no questions raised.	
The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		
Appendix I Page 125 to 156 Executive Summary of the Council's Improvement Plan	There were no questions raised.	
The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		
Appendix J Page 157 to 168 Dedicated Schools Grant and the Schools Budget 2022-23	There were no questions raised.	
The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		
Appendix K Page 169 to 198 Treasury Management Strategy	There were no questions raised.	
The Committee RESOLVED to note this section of the budget.		
General Comments, any overall recommendations and Conclusion of item 4.		
<p>The Leader reiterated the importance of setting the budget and that Members needed to come together to achieve a balanced budget. He added that if people had ideas of what should be in the budget, then they should come forward. He highlighted risks and that savings were necessary.</p> <p>Members commented that it was up to every Group to decide whether or not they supported the budget.</p>		

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.

CHAIR

The meeting began at 6.00pm and ended at 7:47pm

This page is intentionally left blank