

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES
HELD AT 6.00PM, ON
MONDAY 22 JANUARY 2024
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH**

Committee Members Present: Councillors: Wiggin (Chair), Ahmed, Asif, J. Allen, S. Allen, Ayres, Bi, Casey, Cereste, Cole, Day, J. Fox, Hemraj, Hussain, Iqbal, Jamil, A. Jones, Knight, Mahmood, Over, Perkins, Qayyum, Rush, Sandford, Shaheed, Sharp, Simons, Skibsted, Strangward, Thulbourn and Warren.

Officers Present: Cecilie Booth, Executive Director for Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer, Adrian Chapman, Executive Director for Place and Economy, Rachel Edwards, Head of Constitutional Services, Matt Gladstone, Chief Executive, John Gregg, Executive Director Children and Young People's Service, Adesuwa Omoregie, Interim Director for Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer), Emma Riding, Service Director - Financial Management & Deputy s151 Officer, Stephen Taylor, Executive Director Adults Services, Madia Afzal, Democratic Services Officer and Charlotte Cameron, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Co-opted Members: Neil Boyce and Mark Ormston.

Also Present: Councillor Bisby, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Elsey, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Change, Councillor M. Farooq, Leader of the Council, Councillor S. Farooq, Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, Councillor Hiller, Cabinet Member for Housing, Growth and Regeneration, Councillor Howard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Finance.

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 Cereste, Chair of the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Day, Chair of the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Shaheed, Chair of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Wiggin, Chair of the Growth, Resources and Communities Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Wiggin was nominated by Councillor Day and seconded by Councillor Shaheed. There being no further nominations, Councillor Wiggin was 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 Draft Budget 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/27.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lane, Parish Councillor Katie Howard, and Terry Young, Co-opted Members: Peter French, Chris De-Wilde, Andy Stone, Matthew Barber, Sameena Aziz, Sandie Burns and Caroline Tyrrell-Jones.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of interest or whipping declarations were received.

4. DRAFT BUDGET 2024/2025 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/2027

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Finance - Councillor John Howard was invited to introduce the Draft Budget 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/27 and key points raised included:

- The Corporate Leadership Team and Officers across the Council were commended for their work in respect to the Draft Budget and Medium-term Financial Strategy.
- Members of the Financial Sustainability Working Group were also thanked for their key role within the process.
- Reference was made to the continued financial challenges which councils across the country were facing.
- Members were advised of the pressures Peterborough City Council's Housing and Children's Services were experiencing.
- Managing inflationary pressures and cutbacks on spending were highlighted as key areas of focus.
- The key aspects of the report and prospective plans for the city were outlined.
- It was noted that the authority sought to maximise the return on their assets.
- Reference was made to the proposed, 4.99% increase to Council Tax.
- The Committee were advised that the increase was in line with the expectation set out in the Local Government Finance Settlement and essential to deliver a balanced budget.
- Attention was drawn to the moderate level of risk within the budget and the Committee were referred to Appendix B for further details.
- The consultation with residents, businesses and community groups was detailed.
- Members were advised that the consultation had received a positive 132 responses and participants were thanked for their involvement.
- The Committee were further advised that the responses had been attached to Appendix C of the report and a review of the answers was ongoing.
- Members were reminded that the budget and Medium-term Financial Strategy before them was yet to be finalised and that minor amendments were to be made prior to the Full Council meeting on 21 February 2024.
- The Executive Director for Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer was invited to present her opening statement and Members were reminded of the significant consultation process the draft budget had been subject to.
- Furthermore, the risks within the budget were stressed and the new opportunities were outlined.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated Appendix A of the report (pages 11 - 24) and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Clarification on the risk pertaining to the pay award of 3% in 2024-2025 under key assumptions on page 12 of the report was sought.
- It was advised that the proposed 3% was consistent with other local authorities, and the element of risk was acknowledged.

- Furthermore, the Committee were advised that the negotiations were ongoing and due to conclude next year.
- On the proposal to build 1,300 new homes in Peterborough in the next financial year and the evidence in respect to this, Members were informed that the assumption was based on the estimated growth of 1,000 homes in 2023-2025, increasing to 1,100 in the following year and 1,200 homes thereafter.
- The Committee were further advised that proposals were based on a new, ambitious Local Plan and a transformed planning service.
- Moreover, it was confirmed that housing growth was set to increase in the coming years, and it was hoped that 1,300 houses would be constructed by 2027.
- Members further queried the pay award and whether pensions had been included within the proposed 3%.
- It was confirmed that the 3% had taken the total pay bill/pensions into account.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/27 outlined in Appendix A - MTFS 2024-27 which includes the key financial assumptions, strategic direction, and estimated budget gaps in future years.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated Appendix B of the report (pages 25 - 68) and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- A query was raised on the implications of the proposed £900,000 reduction to housing related support services on homelessness prevention and the timelines for the review.
- The Committee were advised that although savings had been proposed, £400,000-£500,000 of the housing related funds were set to be recommissioned and the plans for the new model were outlined.
- In terms of the timelines for the review, it was noted that conversations were still ongoing.
- With respect to the grants for Peterborough's Citizen Advice Bureau, the significance of the service was acknowledged, and Members were assured that funding was to remain the same.
- On the proposed housing related savings and homelessness, it was confirmed that the risk around these savings were to be monitored rigorously and where necessary the service area would adapt and adjust accordingly.
- Clarification on indexed links under page 27 of the report was sought, with one Member requesting examples.
- It was confirmed that the Peterborough Limited Contract was indexed linked as well as the Milestone Contract.
- On page 28 of the report, under enabling economic growth and regeneration, the Committee queried how the development plans for sites across the city were being accelerated, and clarification on the plans to attract new employers into Peterborough was sought.
- In response, reference was made to the various strategic plans including the Visitor Economy Strategy, the Development Strategy and the Skills Employment Strategy as well as the various investments.
- Furthermore, the plans for the former TK Maxx building were outlined and Members were advised of the developments with respect to Middle Homes, including the advanced, ongoing discussions with the landowner.
- Members were further advised that detailed and advanced meetings had also taken place with respect to Northwest Gate.
- On trees, the importance of investing in trees and the Directorate's continued commitment to this investment was noted.

- The proposal to transform the tree budget whilst protecting high risk works was also noted.
- Clarification on the transformation work around Children's Services was sought, with one Member querying the ambitious cost saving of £1.6 million which had been proposed for 2024 and whether the proposed savings were achievable.
- The challenges with respect to this cost saving were acknowledged. However, it was hoped that the savings would result in improved outcomes for the service area.
- Reference was made to the savings with respect to the new social care academy which sought to recruit additional social workers and thereby reduce reliance on agency staff.
- A question was raised on the proposal to set out a new Quality and Outcomes Panel for reassessment, with the Committee requesting clarification on the current process, the need for investment and the improvements that were being sought.
- In response, it was confirmed that the panel was established in November 2023 and the need derived from the preparations for the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- The Committee were further advised that the panel sought to review care packages, and the quality of assessments to gain an understanding of quality, thereby ensuring that needs were being met.
- In terms of the increasing demand for statutory assessments on page 64 of the report, and whether arrangements had been made for those requiring Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, the challenges were acknowledged, and Members were advised of the authority's investments within the service provision.
- With respect to the cap on the number of assessments, it was noted that demand would be closely monitored.
- A query was raised on the Adults Skills Service and whether any cuts had been proposed. In response, it was confirmed that savings hadn't been suggested.
- The Committee were updated on the authority's collaborative work with the Combined Authority, including the ongoing work with its new Director in relation to the skills review.
- Concerns were raised around the restricted access to the Household Recycling Centre and its impact on fly-tipping.
- The Committee were referred to the evidence which did not demonstrate an increase in fly-tipping.
- Furthermore, it was noted that the Recycling Centre remained open to residents and those outside of Greater Peterborough were encouraged to access centres within their locality.
- A query on the rate of inflation was raised. It was confirmed that the rate was variable and dependant on the specifics of the contract.
- Concerns were raised around the cleaning of the National Highways, especially with respect to the role of volunteers.
- The Committee's concerns especially around the safety of volunteers were acknowledged, the Peterborough Wombles were commended for their efforts and Members were updated on the ongoing work with National Highways and Milestone.
- Further clarification was sought, with one Member requesting details of the investments.
- The authority's investments such as the £68,000 investment in year one was detailed.
- On the proposal to allocate £5,000 to city centre enforcement despite the many issues with the city centre and the need to attract visitors, Members were advised that the figure in question was the net figure and that £400,000 had been proposed for Peterborough's City Centre.
- Furthermore, the significance of this investment and the Committee's concerns were recognised.
- Members were further assured that work was underway and in the coming months the plans for the city centre, buildings and cathedral would be brought to light.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider the proposed draft Budget for 2024/25, outlined in Appendix

B - Budget Report 2024-25 which includes:

- Funding and Council Tax Summary, which includes a proposed Council Tax increase of 4.1% for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27.
- Detailed Revenue budgets and proposal detail
- The Draft Capital Budget (Programme)
- Section 25 robustness statement

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated Appendix C of the report (pages 69 - 82) and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Given the number of comments pertaining to the Hilton Hotel under budget consultation feedback, question 6, assurances were sought on the council's finances.
- Members were assured that the authority was working closely with Hilton Hotel to progress the proposals in a swift manner.
- In terms of the valuation quoted in the press, it was noted that this had been placed by the previous developers.
- Furthermore, it was reiterated that the council sought to protect and progress the existing investment.
- Concerns were raised around the poor condition of the Town Hall and Members queried whether a review of its finances had been proposed as part of the Localities Assets Review.
- Furthermore, the Committee were referred to comment 33 on page 81 of the agenda pack.
- Members were advised that the Assets Review sought to get the best out of every building and that positive outcomes from the review were to follow.
- In terms of the update on phase 2 of the Assets Review, the Committee were advised that work was underway, and Members were to be briefed on the developments.
- Moreover, the Committee were assured that their feedback in respect of the Town Hall and phase two of the Assets Review would be considered in further detail at the Growth, Resources and Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- Concerns were raised around vacant rooms in schools which were not being put to use, and it was suggested that education institutions make full use of any vacant rooms prior to the next Assets Review.
- The Committee's concerns were acknowledged, and it was confirmed that the authority sought to make full use of any excess space to increase accessibility.
- However, it was noted that schools would have to bring the excess space to light and that academies were governed by separate rules and regulations.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider the feedback from the budget consultation summarised in section 4 of this report and outlined in Appendix C Budget Consultation Feedback.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated Appendix D of the report (pages 93 - 102) and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- With the national government advising local authorities to balance their budgets through reserves, clarification on the national guidance was sought.
- It was confirmed that local authorities across the country had been advised to use their reserves before seeking assistance.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider the Reserves commitments outlined in section 2 of the draft budget and the draft Reserves Strategy and Policy outlined in Appendix D – Reserves Strategy & Policy which sets the future direction of travel and planned use of reserves.

Appendix E (pages 103 – 130) – no questions were asked.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider the draft Treasury Management Strategy outlined in Appendix E - Treasury Management Strategy, which has the fundamental roles of managing external investments, ensure debt is prudent and economic, outlining the Prudential Indicators and ensuring that decisions comply with regulation.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated Appendix F of the report (pages 131 – 142) and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- A query on the funding criteria on page 132 of the report was raised and it was suggested that the government be listed as a source of funding.
- In response, it was confirmed that the document/criteria would be amended to include funding from the Combined Authority.
- The Committee queried why Peterborough College, or the new university had not been listed on page 139 of the report given the role both institutions had played in the development of the Green Technology Centre.
- The work of the institutions was acknowledged, and it was confirmed that the document would be amended to incorporate the institutions.
- Members were updated on the culture and leisure review. The Committee were advised that the review was in its initial stage, and it was hoped that a decision on arts and culture would be made in the coming months.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider the draft Capital and Investment Strategy outlined in Appendix F – Capital and Investment Strategy 2024-27 which manages its assets and investment resources to help achieve the strategic priorities of the Council.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated Appendix G of the report (pages 143 –164) and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Clarification on the bus depot was sought, with the Committee querying why it had not been considered as part of the Asset Management Plan.
- The Committee were advised that the depot did not fall under the authority's assets as it was owned by StageCoach East. However, it was acknowledged that regeneration was required.
- With respect to ownership, it was noted that the authority sought to work with bus operators and the Combined Authority to deliver a new base.
- Furthermore, Members were updated on the funding that had been secured from the Combined Authority to help facilitate the developments.
- The Committee were also referred to page 141 of the agenda pack for further information.
- Clarification on the proposed expansion of the university was sought.
- It was confirmed that phase 4 discussions were underway.

- Members were further advised that work on the outline planning application for the remainder of the campus was due to commence in the coming weeks.
- In terms of Flag Fen, it was noted that its operation sat within the Place and Economy directorate. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that improvements were required.
- With respect to the Town Hall, it was noted that investment was required to deliver improved outcomes.
- On the Regional Pool, it was noted that the needs of athletes, swimmers, and young people ought to be considered. However, it was advised that a decision was yet to be made.
- Members were further advised that Councillor Howard had met with living support today and that the administration was keen to deliver a centralised pool within the city.
- On page 146 of the agenda pack, under context and vision, data inaccuracies were noted. The Officer agreed to rectify the errors and review the number of spoken languages within Peterborough.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider the outline Asset Management Plan (AMP) as set out in Appendix G - Asset Management Plan, which sets out principles for managing the Council's assets in the most efficient and effective manner and the direction of travel for future years while a more detailed and refreshed AMP is developed.

Appendix H (pages 165 – 172) – no questions were asked.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to

- Review and consider Appendix H - the Sales, Fees and Charges Policy.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee debated Appendix I of the report (pages 173 - 206) and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Concerns were raised around the increases to fees and charges and its impact on fly tipping.
- In response, it was advised that the changes had already been approved at Full Council and that in comparison to other authorities, the charges were relatively low.
- It was further advised that there was no evidence to suggest that such increases resulted in increased fly tipping.
- The Committee queried why business regulations charges had increased by 10%.
- In response, it was stated that fees and charges were set statutorily so the authority had no option but to charge at that rate.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees reviewed and considered the report and RESOLVED to and consider Appendix I - the Sales, Fees and Charges Schedule.

CHAIR

Meeting began at 6.00pm and ended at 8.03pm

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