



# Rutland County Council

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Minutes of the **MEETING of the JOINT RESOURCES & PLACES SCRUTINY PANEL** held in the Council Chamber, Catmose, Oakham, Rutland, LE15 6HP on Wednesday, 18th January, 2017 at 6.00 pm

**PRESENT:**

Mr A Walters (in the Chair)	Mr M E Baines
Mr N Begy	Mr O Bird
Mr K Bool	Mr G Conde
Mr W Cross	Mr J Dale
Mr J Lammie	Mrs D MacDuff
Mr A Mann	Mr M Oxley
Mr A Stewart	Mr K Thomas
Miss G Waller	

**APOLOGIES:**

**ABSENT:** Mr B Callaghan

**OFFICERS**

**PRESENT:**

Mrs D Mogg	Director for Resources
Mr S Della Rocca	Assistant Director – Finance
Miss D Greaves	Finance Manager
Mr A Merry	Finance Manager
Mr D Brown	Director for Places (Environment, Planning and Transport)
Mr P Phillipson	Director for Places (Development and Economy)
Mrs S Ramsay	Corporate Support Officer
Mr K Silcock	Administrative Assistant (Corporate Support)

**IN**

**ATTENDANCE:**

Mr O Hemsley	Portfolio Holder for Resources (excluding Finance) Culture, Sport & Recreation, Tourism and Housing
Mr T Mathias	Acting Leader and Portfolio Holder for Places (Highways, Environment, Transport and Community Safety) and Market Towns and Acting Portfolio Holder for Finance

## **511 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- (i) Mr Oxley declared an interest in Item 5 (Registrars Fees) by virtue of the fact he is a Civil Burial Celebrant.
- (ii) Mr Walters declared an interest in Item 5 (Registrars Fees & Hire of Council premises) by virtue of the fact he was a professional photographer.

## **512 PETITIONS, DEPUTATIONS AND QUESTIONS**

No Petitions, Deputations or Questions had been received from members of the public.

## **513 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS**

No questions had been received from members.

## **514 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2017-18 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

Report No. 8/2017 was received from the Director for Resources. The purpose of the report was to present a draft budget for consultation prior to the budget being formally set in February 2017.

The Acting Leader, Mr Mathias, gave a brief overview of the report. He advised members that the Council was in the second year of a four year settlement from government which significantly reduced funding provided to local authorities. A further reduction was due to changes in the New Homes Bonus. Payments previously received for 6 years were being reduced to four years and a baseline of 0.4% is being introduced. This baseline represented the percentage of new housing the government expected an authority to build and therefore the New Homes Bonus would now only be paid for new builds after a deduction for the baseline. . He advised that Rutland's MP, Sir Alan Duncan, had written to the Government on the council's behalf requesting more funding. He summed up stating that the 2017/18 budget was robust but that there was uncertainty beyond 2020.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- a) There would be no direct impact on the interest payable on loans due to the changes in the exchange rate of the £ against both the \$ and the € as debt was fixed. The Assistant Director Finance, Mr Della Rocca, advised that forecasts of interest receivable were based on advice from Capita. This advice was updated on a weekly basis and current indication was that rates are unlikely to exceed 1%.
- b) The Council will lose £700,000 with the introduction of a baseline for development eligible for the New Home Bonus over a four year period. Rutland has in excess of 16,500 properties and under the change the bonus would no longer be payable for approximately the first 65-70 new properties built.
- c) Members noted that the Councils spend per head is one of the lowest of all Unitary Council's and queried how this compared at service level. Mr Della Rocca advised that historic data produced by the Audit Commission showed spend in most service areas was low but that analysis on the data returns provided to Government had not been completed across service areas. He advised that as the data returns were not audited, there were some concerns with using the data at service level. Members asked if, going forward, it would

- be possible to compare Rutland's spend against other authorities, for example in social care. It was noted that this was not an immediate request as part of the budget setting process.
- d) That the provision for a full time Conservation Officer was not currently included in the budget. Mr Mathias confirmed that this was a shared service with South Kesteven District Council and Rutland's provision was for one day per week. At present this was deemed sufficient by officers. Mr Brown further clarified that the previous full time officer would deal with the whole of a listed building application. A large proportion of this is non-specialist work which is now progressed by the planning team. The shared service was working well and met the current need. If there is a demand for additional resources these will be bought in as necessary, for example for conservation area appraisals. Mrs MacDuff confirmed concerns had been raised by parishes within her ward, she also advised that whilst the process had been lengthened by only having the provision one day per week the Officer concerned had been fantastic.
  - e) That the net cost of services for 2017/18 was lower than that in 2016/17, Members asked what impact this may have on services, more so where vacancy savings had been identified in the budget. Mrs Mogg advised that the authority would always review an area when a job became vacant to ascertain if an exact replacement would be appropriate for the service needs. Service reviews were also carried out periodically but it was felt that it could be more efficient to do this on a one off basis should a vacancy occur. Mrs Mogg assured members that a post would not be removed if it would result in a detrimental effect on the service.
  - f) That the Acting Leader and Portfolio Holders were in correspondence with the Local Government Association with regard to lobbying government on the funding position and the Council has responded to the Government consultation on the settlement. This was in addition to lobbying being done by Rutland's Member of Parliament, Sir Alan Duncan.
  - g) That the budget for Neighbourhood Plans had not been removed. The overall cost to the authority was nil as spending in this area was negated by grants received for this purpose.
  - h) That the cost centres for the Prison Library Service – Stocken showed a saving for the budget year 2017/18, Mr Phillipson advised that he would provide a written response in this regard. Immediately following the meeting Mr Phillipson confirmed that it was due to an increase in funding received to operate the service and therefore a net saving for the authority.
  - i) That the budget previously set aside for a solar project at Oakham Enterprise Park (£100,000) had been deferred to 2018/19. Any new developments had to feed in to the National Grid and this was not currently possible. The problem had been identified on a national level, Western Power had indicated that this may be possible by 2018/19.
  - j) Members asked how the closure of St George's Barracks would impact the Local Plan. Mr Mathias advised that the authority was engaging with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and that a meeting had been arranged. Mr Phillipson reassured members that the authority was fully engaged with the DIO and this would form part of the commentary in the Local Plan.
  - k) That the IT projects identified that could be funded include: development of the new website, improvements to Customer Services, replacement Planning Software and relocation of the Council's disaster recovery. The Director for Resources would report back in due course..

- l) Members asked what work had been done in regard to swimming facilities at Catmose following discussion in 2013 regarding repairs and the suitability of the structure for the length of the current lease. Mr Phillipson advised that a full sports study had been carried out and provision for swimming within Rutland and just outside the county was sufficient. Should the swimming facility at Catmose be deemed not viable in the future, he advised that provision would need to be addressed at that time. Mr Phillipson further advised that works carried out to the pool were sufficient for the current lease but that roofing still remained an issue.
- m) That £20,000 funding to prevent the withdrawal of the 747 bus service between Uppingham and Leicester was being provided in the short term and would be reviewed at a later date based on usage.

**AGREED:**

- 1. That the Panel **NOTED** the Report.

**515 FEES AND CHARGES 2017/18**

Report No. 23/2016 was received from the Director for Resources. The report set out the proposals for fees and charges for services provided by the Council for the financial year 2017/18.

In accordance with the declarations of interest the Chair, Mr Walters, deferred discussion on the Fees and Charges for the Registrars Service until all other areas had been dealt with.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The level of fees and charges was increased annually using either inflation of the anticipated base increase in council tax, for 2017/18 this was 1.99%.
- b) That Cabinet recognised a need for these increases to be dealt with more commercially in some areas, especially where recharging officer time rather than just recovering costs. In order to facilitate this it had been agreed that fees and charges proposals would be put to Portfolio Holders earlier in the budget setting process.
- c) That the proposed changes to parking fees were to simplify the charging structure across the county's car parks and to mitigate the increase in the National Non Domestic Rates levy on the car parks themselves, which in some cases had doubled. Mr Mathias advised that whilst Uppingham had been benefitting from lower charges historically the cost to provide this with regard to rates, electricity and Enforcement Officer time was the same for Uppingham as it was for Oakham and costs should reflect this, it was recognised that a previous subsidy paid by Uppingham Town Council had now been withdrawn. Mr Oxley raised concerns that Uppingham was being treated the same as Oakham as, in his opinion, they were not the same entity; Uppingham did not have a train station and serviced 17 surrounding villages. Should parking charges in Uppingham rise substantially many would choose to shop elsewhere for example Corby where free parking was available.
- d) Mr Lammie later noted that as the approval of the budget was to be done by Full Council an amendment to the parking charges could still be submitted by members.

Mr Walters invited questions or comments in regard to the Registrars service, as none were forthcoming he and Mr Oxley remained in the meeting in line with their declaration of interest. Mr Walters advised members of the timeframe available to submit comment to Cabinet before the 14 February meeting.

**AGREED:**

1. That the Panel **NOTED** the content of the report.

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**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.42 pm.**

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