



Rutland County Council

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Minutes of the **MEETING of the GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held virtually via Zoom on Thursday, 29th April, 2021 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Mrs J Fox (Chair)
Ms A MacCartney
Mr M Oxley
Mrs K Payne
Mr I Razzell
Mr N Begy
Mr A Brown

OFFICERS	Mr S Della Rocca	Strategic Director for Resources
PRESENT:	Mr A Merry	Finance Manager
	Mrs J Morley	Governance Officer

IN		
ATTENDANCE:	Mrs L Stephenson	Portfolio Holder for Culture & Leisure, Environment, Highways, Transportation & Road Safety
	Mr G Brown	Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Planning and Finance
	Mr O Hemsley	Leader and Portfolio Holder for Rutland One Public Estate & Growth, Tourism & Economic Development, Communications, Resources (other than finance) and Property
	Miss G Waller	Councillor

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Miss M Jones.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Oxley declared a personal interest in respect of PLA-042 Arts Development Support as Arts for Rutland gave a grant to the Rutland Morris Men for their visit to Albania. He advised Councillors that he would not take part in any debate on that item.

Councillor Begy declared a personal interest in respect of Arts for Rutland as his wife used to be a member of the group. He advised Councillors that he would not take part in any debate on that item.

3 PETITIONS, DEPUTATIONS AND QUESTIONS

No petitions, deputations or questions had been received through Governance but Councillor Fox stated she had received emails from members of the public, which she had forwarded to committee members prior to the meeting. The emails were in regard to the arts budget and would be read and considered during the discussions.

4 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS

No questions with notice had been received.

5 BUDGET SAVINGS 21/22

Report No.62/2021 was received from the Strategic Director for Resources.

Mr Della Rocca, Strategic Director for Resources, introduced the revised budget report and gave a short presentation to attendees. During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- The previously approved budget had highlighted a gap of approximately £2.4m, which would have been covered by using the Reserves, but this was poor financial practice as the reserves should only be used to cover unforeseen pressures and not be used to balance core expenditure.
- A target had been set to reduce the £2.4m deficit by at least £1m
- Officers had undertaken a line-by-line review of services to see where costs could be reduced or even stopped completely.
- Long-term projects such as the waste and leisure projects had already started but others needed to start so that reductions in cost and savings could be made as soon as possible.
- Funding for 2022/23 was uncertain and additional pressures were emerging.
- Councillor G Brown queried the overall year-end financial position and the £328k spending on external support. Mr Della Rocca stated that the year-end financial position could not be confirmed due to the complex events of 2020/21 but that he hoped to have a definitive figure for when the final report went to Cabinet. He also stated that the use of external support was vital to enable long-term projects to begin and result in long-term cost savings. There was not the capacity or resource within the Council to undertake this work in-house.
- Councillor Begy queried whether the external support costs for the listed projects would go to the relevant Scrutiny Committee for discussion before approval. Mr Della Rocca stated that it would depend on what decision Council made as to who would be responsible for the management of the funding. Cllr Waller felt that it was essential to have funding that could purchase any expertise that the Council required to further long-term projects.
- Short-term cost saving proposals identified by Officers were detailed in Appendix B
- RES-001 Finance (inc. Revenues and Benefits): the posts would be held vacant for a year which would give savings of £40,000 as the service had managed without the resource for some time and this would have a minimal impact on the provision of service.
- RES-012 Customer Services (CST): customer services to be closed and cash payments no longer accepted but face-to-face meetings would continue via an

appointment service whilst a walk-in service would be available for emergency services only. This would result in a cost saving of £10,000, which was a significant saving for such a small team. Mr Della Rocca confirmed that the Council ruled several years ago not to accept cash payments, but this had not been enforced and the actual sum received in cash was very low.

- RES-006 IT Hardware: service to stop replacing/refreshing IT hardware after 4 years and instead only replace existing hardware when it was broken or unusable. This would result in a revenue cost saving of £20,000. Mr Della Rocca confirmed that the additional laptops purchased in 2020 had been funded by Covid monies.
- PLA-010 Grounds Maintenance – Verge Cutting: it was proposed to revert to the original specification of 3 x 1m cuts per annum, which would result in a cost saving of £14,000. Councillor G Brown queried why a re-tender was not proposed as this would surely enable a bigger saving. Councillor Lucy Stephenson, Portfolio Holder for Culture & Leisure, Environment, Highways, Transportation & Road Safety confirmed that the existing scheme of one full width cut and one shorter cut (one metre) would be continued for the current season and that re-procurement of the contract could not be undertaken until 2022/23. Councillor Oxley asked if Parish Councils and residents had been requested to adopt verges and Councillor Stephenson confirmed that this would be included in the re-procurement process. Mr Della Rocca reported that a 'Localism' project was planned to discuss with parishes what additional responsibilities they would be able to undertake.
- PLA-017 Green Waste Charge (22/23): it was proposed to increase the annual charge from £40 to £45 (for online subscriptions) and £48 (for telephone subscriptions) from 2022. Councillor Lucy Stephenson, Portfolio Holder for Culture & Leisure, Environment, Highways, Transportation & Road Safety confirmed that the £5 increase would cover the increased contract costs and inflationary increases expected from 2022 and that the additional £3 would cover the administrative staff required to deal with the telephone calls. The public would also be encouraged to compost their garden waste.
- PLA-022 Transport – Staff Car Scheme: A saving of £5,000 was proposed. Councillor Stephenson confirmed that the saving would result from the removal of one car from the fleet as visits to service users' homes was still ongoing. However, a full review of staff needs would be undertaken in June 2021 and this may result in a further reduction in the number of fleet cars and so an increase in savings. The Senior Transport Manager had full details regarding fleet car usage, mileage and costs and would review the service to ensure future savings could be made.
- PLA-023 Transport – Oakham Town Bus Service: Councillor Stephenson confirmed the costs related to the council's hopper service which was contracted to Centre Bus. It was proposed, following 3 months' notice to Centre Bus, to bring the hopper service into the council's fleet service for a period of 12 months. After 12 months, Oakham Town Council would decide on whether to run the hopper service themselves or pay Rutland County Council to run the service for them.
- PLA-035 Public Rights of Way – proposed saving of £60,000. Councillor Stephenson confirmed that the savings would be for the revenue budget, which was used for ongoing maintenance works and was a finite pot. It was proposed that the capital budget would be used to carry out ongoing maintenance for which the council received a government grant. Councillor Stephenson also stated that landowners would be encouraged to undertake maintenance work themselves on public rights of way located on their land.
- PLA-042 Arts Development Support - Councillor Razzell stated that any cuts within the arts were always difficult but difficult decisions were needed at this moment in time due to the financial situation. Councillor Stephenson confirmed that meetings had already been held with independent funding providers but that the

main message was that the council would support the arts within the County, just not financially.

- PLA-047 Library Service: Replace Mobile Library with Order & Deliver Service. Councillor Stephenson confirmed that some of the County's smaller libraries were already run by volunteers and that this way of working would be encouraged in other Rutland libraries. The mobile library was coming to the end of its life so would only have scrap value.
- PLA-054 Economic Development: Councillor Oxley expressed his concern about the proposed changes, in particular the proposal for the Council to facilitate rather than lead the regeneration/adaption of the high streets – with 4Oakham and Uppingham First taking the lead role for their respective towns. Councillor Oxley asked for assurances that in particular Uppingham Town Council would be consulted before any decisions were made. Councillor Hemsley confirmed that Oakham and Uppingham Town Councils would be consulted on any proposals moving forward.
- PLA-060 Cemeteries Operative - Possible Reduced Hours: Councillor Fox stated that the proposal was for Oakham Town Council to maintain the open cemetery in Oakham rather than RCC and Councillor Oxley confirmed that Uppingham Town Council maintained the open cemetery in Uppingham and that RCC checked and maintained the closed cemeteries in Uppingham.
- RES-004 Reprographics Service: Councillor Waller requested that any person who required a hard copy of papers still received them and in a timely manner. Mr Della Rocca confirmed that printed papers required by any person due to disability would continue to be available.
- PLA-010 Grounds Maintenance – Verge Cutting: Councillor Waller asked if the proposed £14,000 would be made within the 2021/22 budget or the 2022/23 budget. Mr Della Rocca confirmed that the saving would not be made until 2022/23 so the item would be removed from the final papers relating to the 2021/22 budget savings.
- RES-012 Customer Services (CST): Councillor Waller queried if enough time was allowed for service users to get used to the new systems before removal of the old systems. Mr Della Rocca confirmed that a review was being undertaken to fully understand what types of calls CST received, how services were requested by service users and how this could be changed.
- PLA-022 Transport – Staff Car Scheme: Councillor Waller requested that the use of car user scheme be investigated by the Portfolio Holder as part of the review into staff usage.
- PLA-025 Transport – Bikeability Scheme: Councillor Waller asked the portfolio holder to investigate if schools had been consulted about the proposed £150 charge per session and if schools would pass the charge on to parents. Councillor Stephenson confirmed that the council staff were very conscious that not all children could access the scheme due to funding or the lack of a bike and had previously worked around this so that the relevant child could attend.
- PLA-035 Public Rights of Way: Councillor Waller stated that walking was popular with the people of Rutland but that stiles were problematic for people. She asked that priority regarding maintenance was made to those rights of way that had stiles etc. Councillor Stephenson confirmed that the officers had full details regarding the different public rights of way and their popularity, and that this information would be provided for decisions to be made. Councillor Waller also requested that parish councils be encouraged to take responsibility for the maintenance on public rights of way located within their boundaries.

- Leaflets – Councillor Waller requested that leaflets be available in different electronic formats so that they can be printed off at home by the relevant service user in a format suitable to them e.g. large print, black and white.
- PLA-042 Arts Development Support: Councillor Waller stated some parish councils had already set their budgets for this financial year so would not be able to take on the arts events in this financial year that were no longer supported by the Council. Councillor Stephenson confirmed that she was in ongoing discussions with outside organisations to independently fund future art events.
- Councillor Razzell stated that difficult decisions needed to be made and made now. Postponing budget cuts/potential savings until the next financial year was not appropriate and would not make the Council financially viable.
- Councillor G Brown queried the Commuted Sum detailed in the Earmarked Reserves and the Commercial Properties sum detailed in the Budget Reprofile; both items listed in Appendix C. Mr Della Rocca stated that developers paid a contribution or ‘Commutated Sum’ when the Council adopted a park and/or open space and that the Council used this money to maintain the area. He confirmed that more money would be taken from this fund in the future. Mr Della Rocca confirmed that the monies from ‘Commercial Properties’ would be a one-off and not recurring.
- Councillor G Brown confirmed that PLA-024 - Bus Service 47 referred to the Oakham-Uppingham-Peterborough service which went to The King’s School and stated that Appendix D of the report was for information only and would be debated in the future.
- Councillor Begy requested that officers and the Portfolio Holder ensured that the profits from the use of the castle were maximized.
- Councillor Waller requested that comparisons were provided when Members were asked to make decisions about forthcoming strategic projects and that the People Directorate was included in the discussions regarding projects PLA-018, PLA-019, PLA-020 and PLA-024 as detailed in Appendix E.
- Councillor Oxley queried why the council had 88 garages as detailed in PLA-034 – Garages. Mr Della Rocca confirmed the garages were received from Spire Homes.
- Councillor Stephenson informed Councillor A Brown that Jules House in Oakham used to be the base for the youth services and that further information regarding the building could be obtained from Councillor Wilby, Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Families.
- Councillor MacCartney stated that, in her view, PLA-053 Active Rutland Hub should be self-financing.

AGREED:

1. That Scrutiny noted the report and reviewed the proposed changes to the budget in advance of consideration by Cabinet in May and then Council in June.

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The Chair closed the meeting at 9.25pm

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