



**MINUTES of
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
19 NOVEMBER 2020**

PRESENT

Chairman	Councillor R H Siddall
Vice-Chairman	Councillor C Swain
Councillors	Mrs P A Channer, CC, M F L Durham, CC, M R Edwards, M W Helm, K M H Lagan, N J Skeens, W Stamp, Mrs M E Thompson and Miss S White
In Attendance	Councillors M G Bassenger, M S Heard, A L Hull and C Morris ¹

73. CHAIRMAN'S NOTICES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to this remote meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held under new regulations which had come into effect in response to the COVID-19 situation. The Chairman then went through some general housekeeping arrangements for the meeting.

A roll call of those Members present was taken. It was noted that Councillor Miss S White was running late and would join the meeting shortly.

74. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

75. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 17 September 2020 be agreed (by assent).

Councillor Miss S White joined the meeting at this point.

76. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs P A Channer disclosed a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of Essex County Council in relation to Agenda Item 6 – Budgetary Control (April – September

¹ Minute 212 (28 January 2021)

2020) and 7 – Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021 / 22 to 2023 / 24 and any other item on the agenda pertinent to the County Council. Councillor Mrs Channer also declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 15 – Debt Write Off and advised that she would leave the chamber for this item of business because she was a member of an organisation (appointed to by the County Council) mentioned in the report.

Councillor N Skeens disclosed a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 15 – Debt Write Off as a Member of West Quay Houseboat Association which held a lease with Maldon District Council. He advised that he would maintain his awareness and if matters arose would withdraw from the meeting accordingly.

Councillor K M H Lagan declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following Agenda Items:

- 9 – 2021 / 22 Fees and Charges Policy as he had held conversations with some persons potentially affected by the policies.
- 12 – Maldon Citizens Advice- Request for Review of Funding as he had held discussions with members of the organisation.

Councillor M F L Durham disclosed a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of Essex County Council in Agenda Item 6 – Budgetary Control (April – September 2020) and 7 – Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021 / 22 to 2023 / 24 and any other item of the agenda pertinent to the County Council who as well as Maldon District Council were beneficiaries to both business rates and council tax.

77. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

78. BUDGETARY CONTROL (APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2020)

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources providing information in relation to financial performance over the period 1 April to 30 September 2020. The report provided an update on a number of areas including the following:

- Gross Service Income and Expenditure;
- Top Expenditure Areas and Variance Analysis - A detailed breakdown of refuse, recycling and street cleansing was set out in Appendix 2 and ICT expenditure in Appendix 4.
- Top Income Areas and Variance Analysis;
- Salary Monitor as at 30 September 2020 (Appendix 1);
- Predicted General Fund Balance;
- Capital Projects Monitor as at 30 September 2020 (Appendix 5)

The Chairman drew Members' attention to an addendum to the report which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The addendum sought to update information contained within tables 4 and 5 of the report.

It was noted that the Council's ability to operate within its budget had been directly impacted by the Coronavirus Pandemic, resulting in huge income shortfalls and overspends. Although Government Grants had mitigated some of this they had not fully compensated the Council and there was therefore a shortfall which would have to come out of the General Fund.

The Chairman moved the recommendation set out the report and this was duly seconded.

In response to a question, the Director of Resources advised that the report was based on the most up to date figures at the time of writing and Officers would continue to update these moving forward. It was also confirmed that the level of General Fund was set by the Council on an annual basis following recommendation from the Section 151 Officer.

The Chairman put the recommendation to the Committee and it was agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

79. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021 / 22 TO 2023 / 24

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources presenting the revised Medium- Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2021 / 22 to 2023 / 24 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report).

Appendix 2 to the report detailed the budget growth items identified during the budget review as required to meet service demand and carry out Council Policy. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were set out the report and it was noted that these impacts would continue in future years. An update on the General Fund was provided and it was noted that a number of assumed COVID-19 pressures had been built into the General Fund Balance.

The Chairman moved the recommendation as set out in the report and this was duly seconded.

Members discussed the report and the information detailed in the Appendix. Further clarification was provided by Officers in response to a number of questions.

The Chairman put the recommendation to the Committee and it was agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that the Medium- Term Financial Strategy for 2021 / 22 to 2023 / 24 (as at 19 November 2020) and set out at Appendix 1 to the report be noted (by assent).

80. YEAR-END TREASURY OUTTURN REPORT 2019 / 20

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources reporting the Council's investment activity for the 2019 / 20 financial year in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management and the Council's Treasury Management Policy and Treasury Management Practices (TMPs).

The report provided an update on the following areas and further details were set out in the related Appendices:

- An overview of the external economic environment - Appendix 1 to the report had been prepared by Arlingclose who provide treasury management consultancy and advice services to the Council.
- Investment Activity (April 2019 – March 2020), including an update in respect of Brexit and the Coronavirus.
- Performance – Budgeted income and outturn.
- Compliance with Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy (Appendix 2).
- Outlook for 2020 / 21 provided by Arlingclose.

It was noted that none of the Prudential Indicators had been breached and a prudent approach had been taken in relation to investment activity with priority being given to security and liquidity over yield.

The Chairman put the recommendation as set out in the report. This was duly seconded and agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that the Treasury Outturn report be noted for compliance purposes (by assent).

81. 2021 / 22 FEES AND CHARGES POLICY

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources seeking Members' review of the fees and charges policies that had been put forward by Officers prior to approval of the 2021 / 22 budget.

Appendix A to the report set out the current position for each fees and charges policy including any concessions being given, further financial information and comments. The report highlighted a number of areas for consideration, including changes to and new policies.

It was noted that the detailed schedule of Fees and Charges would be reviewed based on policy decisions and this Committee would recommend to the Council the 2021 / 22 Fees and Charges during the next cycle of meetings. The 2021 / 22 income budget would be based on the recommended policy.

Members discussed the proposed Fees and Charges policies and in response to questions, Officers provided further clarification including the following:

- Wharfage fees – Members were advised that the fees had not been set for 2021 / 22 and this was the opportunity for Members' to feed into that process. It was noted that support had been offered to barge owners during the COVID-19 lockdown but this had not been taken up to date, however Officers continued to engage with them. The Chairman suggested that a meeting with the barge owners, officers and Members could be arranged.

The Chairman advised that if setting up of a Finance Working Group was agreed

later in this meeting, this was a matter that the Working Group could look at.

Councillor K M H Lagan requested it be minuted that Wharfage fees and possible discounts to these be considered by the Finance Member Working Group.

- Officers advised in applying the Council's policies and fees to be set there would be opportunity to take into consideration any COVID implications.
- Schools were now charged for car parking permits and it was not proposed that this policy would change.
- In response to comments regarding the Promenade Park, Officers acknowledged the difficulties faced in this current financial year and the loss of income in relation to this. Officers would continue to work to ensure the best possible income was achieved at the Park.

The Chairman then put the recommendation as set out in the report and this was duly agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that the Fees and Charges policies for 2021 / 22 (as set out in Appendix A to the report), be adopted for Officers to follow.

82. CAPITAL PROJECT BIDS 2021 / 22

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources seeking Members consideration of the Capital Projects that had been put forward by Officers prior to the approval of the 2021 / 22 budget (attached as Appendix A to the report) and updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy in February 2021.

Members were reminded of the four groups into which each capital project (as set out in the report) had been categorised by Officers. An update on the current capital reserves was provided including the monies proposed to support the current 2020 / 21 capital programme and those monies left for future years. It was noted that any revenue consequences of the capital projects would be included in the 2021 / 22 revenue budget.

Members discussed in detail the Capital Project bids submitted, and in response to questions raised the following information was provided by Officers:

- The earmarked and unallocated reserves for 2020 / 21 were detailed on page 50 of the pack for this meeting.
- It was clarified that any pictures shown within the Appendix were indicative and Officers would ensure that competitive quotes / tenders were sought prior to procurement. In respect of vehicles, it was confirmed that electric vehicles would be looked at. It was suggested that this could be reviewed by the Finance Working Group.
- Officers provided an update regarding the Council's procedure for redundant laptops. Councillors Mrs P A Channer and M F L Durham highlighted a programme used by Essex County Council whereby laptops were refurbished and supplied to young persons.

- Riverside Park Information boards and signage – It was clarified that this was a resubmission of a previously agreed capital bid.
- Riverside Park – installation of new car park hard standing – The Lead Countryside and Coast Co-ordinator explained that this was to make improvements to the car parking area with marked spaces.
- Dengie 100 Sports Centre Gym Expansion – Members were advised that would be an ‘invest to save’ project.
- Maldon Promenade – New Improved Skate Park – The Commercial Manager advised that this had been brought forward following requests from Members and members of the public.

In response to a question regarding Burnham-on-Crouch, the Officer advised that Section 106 monies were expected, and he had recently carried out a review of the area to discuss some of the projects that would benefit from these monies.

- Burnham-on-Crouch Houseboats berth – The Commercial Manager clarified that this bid included a pontoon, walkway, utility connects etc. and the proposed monthly cost for berth holders. The Officer advised that he would be happy to go through the scheme with any Members. It was confirmed that due diligence and bench marking had been carried out.

The Chairman put the recommendation as set out in the report and this was duly seconded. The Chairman clarified that the Capital Project Bits would be taken to the Working Group and come back to this Committee in January for recommendation to the Council. The recommendation was then agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that the Capital Project Bids (as detailed in Appendix a to the report) be reviewed for inclusion in the 2021 / 22 Capital Programme (by assent).

83. FINANCE MEMBER WORKING GROUP

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources seeking Members’ approval to establish a Finance Member Working Group (the Working Group) to inform and consult on the constantly updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to overcome financial pressures being presented.

The proposed purpose of the Working Group was set out in the report and it was noted that its Terms of Reference would be finalised at the first meeting of the Working Group.

The Chairman put the recommendations as set out in the report. This was duly seconded. The Chairman then proposed an amendment to recommendation (i) that the Working Group be made up of four Independent Members and two Conservative Members. This was duly seconded.

The Chairman proposed that Councillors R H Siddall, W Stamp K M H Lagan and C Swain be appointed to the Working Group. This was duly seconded. Councillor Mrs P A Channer proposed herself and Councillor M F L Durham be appointed to the Working Group. Councillor Durham declined the proposal and in response Councillor

Mrs Channer amended her proposal to herself and Councillor Miss S White. This was duly seconded.

Councillor M W Helm expressed concern that the Democratic Alliance Group were not represented on the Working Group. In response, Councillor Mrs Channer proposed that seven Members be appointed to the Working Group. This was duly agreed by assent.

The Chairman clarified the proposed membership of the Working Group was:

- From the Independent Group – Councillors Siddall, Stamp, Lagan and Swain
- From the Conservative Group – Councillors Mrs Channer and Miss White
- From the Democratic Alliance Group – Councillor M W Helm.

The membership was duly agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that a Finance Member Working consisting of the following seven Members be established:

- Councillors Mrs P A Channer CC, M W Helm, K M H Lagan, R H Siddall, W Stamp, C Swain and Miss S White.

84. MALDON CITIZENS ADVICE - REQUEST FOR REVIEW OF FUNDING

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery seeking Members' consideration of a request from the Maldon Citizens Advice (MCA) for a review of its funding. A copy of the request received was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The report provided details of existing funding arrangements, the proposed changes and an additional funding request from MCA. It was noted that the increase in funding had not been built into current budgets and funding beyond 2022 should form part of the new contract due to be considered in Spring 2021.

The Chairman introduced Mr Philip Wakeling, Chairman of the Maldon and District Citizens Advice and advised that he had agreed to Mr Wakeling making a short presentation.

Mr Wakeling referred Members to the request submitted by the MCA and advised that they were seeking a new three-year contract with the Council for the provision of generalist advice. He explained that the MCA were about to make a bid to renew its contract for another five years with the National Lottery for specialist debt, homelessness prevention and welfare benefits, worth £350,000. It was hoped as part of this bid to demonstrate that they had secured funding with the District Council. Mr Wakeling outlined the services provided, the number of local residents supported by the MCA during a year and the benefits this in turn had provided. He informed the Committee that the services provided could not be obtained from any other source in the district. Mr Wakeling asked Members to support the request for renewal.

The Chairman thanked Mr Wakeling for his presentation and moved the recommendation as set out in the report. This was duly seconded.

Councillor Miss S White felt that the matter should be deferred and highlighted a number of concerns including the amount of funding provided. In response to comments the Director of Service Delivery advised that the purpose of the report was to consider a one-year extension to assist the CAB and proceed this with a detailed review and Value for Money (VMF) exercise in respect of a new contract with the MCA for future years commitment. He referred to the new Finance Member Working Group and how it could assist with this work.

In response to a question the Director of Service Delivery advised he did not have the detail regarding the charges made to the MCA relating to rent and utilities but would confirm this detail to all Members outside of the meeting.

Councillor Mrs P A Channer declared an interest in this item of business as she sat on the Citizens Advice Bureau Liaison Group.

A lengthy debate ensued during which a number of Members spoke in support of the work done by the MCA and its VFM.

In response to a question the Director of Service Delivery advised that if Members were minded to support the recommendation this would be included in the budget due to be considered at the January 2021 meeting of this Committee. Prior to that meeting Officers could undertake further dialogue with the MCA and report this through the Finance Member Working Group prior to consideration by the Committee. The Director advised it would not be possible to undertake the work required in terms of the three-year funding from 2022, however he would review the timetable to see whether it could be brought forward more expediently.

A question regarding other providers was raised and in response the Director of Service Delivery advised it was difficult to find alternative providers and outlined the process that would be followed as part of the procurement process.

The Chairman then put recommendation (i) as set out in the report to the Committee, this was duly agreed by assent.

The Chairman explained in recommendation (ii) the Committee were being asked to agree continuing funding (with an increase to £75,000) for 2021 / 22 to give security to the MCA. The Director of Service Delivery further clarified that if agreed this would go forward to the Council for approval as part of the 2021 / 22 budget setting process. This was put to the vote and duly agreed.

In respect of recommendation (iii) the Chairman proposed that this be amended to replace spring 2021 with as soon as feasibly possible. This was duly agreed by assent.

RESOLVED

- (i) That following consideration of the request from Maldon Citizens Advice at Appendix 1 to the report Members confirm that an increase in funding to Maldon Citizens Advice, from £73,500 to £75,000 be included in the budget process for 2021 / 22;

- (ii) That funding of the Maldon Citizens Advice for 2022 onwards be considered as part of a report on future procurement to be brought back to the Strategy and Resources Committee as soon as feasibly possible.

85. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Councillor Miss P A Channer reminded Members of her earlier declaration of interest and left the meeting at this point.

RESOLVED under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that this satisfies the public interest test.

86. DEBT WRITE OFF

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources requesting that the aged debt in connection to a leased area in Burnham-on-Crouch be written off.

The report provided detailed history regarding the leased area, related invoices and those proposed to be written-off. It was noted that the Council had exhausted all avenues of recovery.

The Chairman moved the recommendation as set out in the report. This was duly seconded.

In response to a question regarding the write-off, the Director of Resources explained that if the write-off was agreed this would not mean that the Council could not continue to chase the debt.

The Chairman then put the recommendation which was duly agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that the £11,996.40 debt write-off in connection to a leased area in Burnham-on-Crouch is agreed and written off as detailed in the report.

The meeting closed at 8.28 pm.

R H SIDDALL
CHAIRMAN