

FINANCE, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the rescheduled meeting held on Monday, 26 September 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor Gareth Roberts (Chair), Councillor Nancy Baldwin (Vice-Chair), Councillor Robin Brown, Councillor Lesley Pollesche, Councillor Phil Giesler, Councillor Geoffrey Samuel, Councillor Kuldev Sehra and Councillor Caroline Wren

17. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Petra Fleming.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2022 were approved as a correct record and the Chair authorised to sign them.

20. PETITIONS

No petitions with more than five hundred signatures had been received for discussion at this meeting.

21. WARD CONCERNS

No Ward Concerns had been presented for this meeting.

22. HAM CLOSE - COMPULSORY PURCHASE POWERS

The Director of Environment and Community Services summarised the detailed report. He informed the Committee that it would be necessary for a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to be sought to bring the certainty needed to facilitate the delivery of the Ham Close Scheme.

The Director of Environment and Community Services explained that Richmond Housing Partnership (RHP) had made significant efforts to acquire all interests by voluntary agreement but despite a generous Customer Offer to leaseholders there were still 28 long leases yet to be acquired. He further explained that negotiations were ongoing, and the Council would use its CPO powers as a last resort.

He concluded by stating that the report was seeking the Committees approval for officers to take all necessary steps set out in the recommendations contained within the report.

In reply to questions and comments from the Committee the Director of Environment and Community Services informed the Committee that the Woodville Centre would be able to operate as normal throughout the schemes delivery and confirmed that 23 of the long lease holders were not currently in negotiations at this time but that RHP were continuing to try to negotiate with those leaseholders.

RESOLVED that:

1. The information detailed in the report ne noted;
2. The Council use compulsory purchase powers pursuant to Section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) (in respect of acquiring land), Section 13(1) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 (in respect of acquiring new rights) and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 to acquire all freehold and leasehold interests in the land and buildings required and shown on the plan attached to the report, the Council being of the view

that compulsory acquisition of the land may be necessary in order to secure the delivery of the Scheme and to bring forward its benefits in a timely way;

3. The Director of Environment be authorised to:
 - i. Take all necessary steps to proceed with and secure the making, confirmation and implementation of the CPO including land referencing, serving any requisitions for information on affected parties, preparing all necessary documentation (including the CPO, the Order Map and the Statement of Reasons), submission of the CPO to the Secretary of State for confirmation, submission of an application to the Secretary of State under the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 in respect of open space, the publication and service of all requisite notices, and preparing for and presentation of the Council's case at any Public Inquiry;
 - ii. Negotiate terms for the acquisition of the interests in the properties to be acquired by agreement or to affect the withdrawal of objections to the CPO;
 - iii. Amend and finalise the draft Statement of Reasons annexed to this report at Appendix [2] as considered necessary prior to submission to the Secretary of State;
 - iv. To make reductions and/or amendments, if necessary, to the extent of the land included in the draft Order Map (annexed at Appendix 1) prior to the CPO being made;
 - v. Take all necessary steps to confirm the CPO if granted the power to do so by the Secretary of State;
 - vi. To remove from the CPO any plot (or interest therein) no longer required to be acquired compulsorily, to amend the interests scheduled in the CPO (if so advised) and to request that the Secretary of State makes any changes to the CPO prior to confirmation as may be appropriate;
 - vii. If the CPO is confirmed, to issue confirmation notices, to proceed with acquisition of the interests by use of a General Vesting Declaration and/or Notice to Treat (and Notice of Entry), and to obtain and enforce vacant possession of the land pursuant to the CPO powers and contractual and other powers which the Council may have;
 - viii. Settle the compensation payable in acquiring the interests including entering into compensation settlement agreements or undertakings (where such agreements or undertakings are appropriate);
 - ix. To enter into the CPO Indemnity Agreement with RHP on such terms as he considers reasonable in consultation with the director of the SLLP.
4. The Committee note that the Council's costs associated with making a CPO, including acquisition costs of those interests which are still to be acquired and fees for making the Order and the costs of making and preparing the CPO will be met by RHP which will be secured by an indemnity agreement to be entered into prior to the making of a CPO;
5. A capital budget of £18.515m for the estimated CPO costs, the delivery of the capital works required at the Woodville Centre and other project costs required for the successful delivery of the community facilities be approved. This was being incorporated within the Council's approved capital review paper elsewhere on the committee agenda (paragraph 15.2);
6. The Committee note that RHP / Hill will apply for a stopping up order under section 247 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in respect of the roads known as Ham Close required to facilitate the Scheme and the comments at paragraph 6.26.

23. COST OF LIVING SUPPORT TO HOUSEHOLDS'

The Lead Member for Finance and Resources introduced the item and explained that it had been agreed that it would be a standing item on the Committees agenda. He reported that there were several workstreams in progress, including a communications programme, and that it was important officers had the financial backing available to investigate a range of policy options such as warm hubs, food bank support and improving energy efficiencies.

He drew the Committees attention to the minutes of the previous meeting where it was stated that the Support Audit would look at the issue of those immediately above the means-tested benefit threshold who were just managing but may and explained that it had been difficult to target that group but that the Insight and Analytics team were looking at how it could analyse and combine data sets to identify those people.

The Director of Resources informed the Committee that the report sought to build on the financial support already distributed by the Council or announced by Government. She explained that there had been a Programme Manager appointed to bring all the strands of this Council wide response together to ensure that wise decisions were made and delivered swiftly.

In response to questions, the Committee heard that,

- The Council would be working with external partners such as social housing providers, residents associations and the voluntary sector to reach those in need of support and that this was included in Council's communication plan.
- That the £3 million committed was for this budget year however there would need to be further discussion about the future and suggested this be discussed during the consideration of the Medium Term Financial Strategy later that evening.
- The Council would be convening a 'Cost of Living Summit' in October, chaired by the Leader, to meet with key local partners to discuss the cost of living response.
- That key officers across the Council had met to discuss how a network of accessible warm hubs could be delivered quickly, this could include libraries and other community spaces.
- The Council had been planning its communications campaign for some time and had established a cost of living hub online which signposted residents to a variety of sources of assistance. Leaflets would also be delivered to all households and displayed in libraries and Doctors surgeries.
- That the government had announced it would provide support for schools and the Council would ensure that anything that came through would be delivered to schools but any discussion on individual school surpluses or deficits would come under the remit of the Education and Children's Services Committee.
- The Government had awarded the Council £5.1m of COVID Additional Relief Fund funding to help businesses who had not been eligible for any previous Covid-19 business grants. Eligible businesses had been encouraged to apply and applications were currently being processed and, once complete, business rate relief would be granted to ensure full allocation of the funding available. It was also intended that a business hub would be launched online to provide further support.
- The Council had an excellent data analytics team who were connected to other networks and authorities.
- Not every grant was mentioned in the report however the details would be included on the cost of living hub and officers would ensure all the links were present.
- The Council would again write to those households that had not claimed the Council Tax Energy Rebate so far, to ask for their bank details so payment of the credit on their Council Tax account could be made. Alternatively a post office voucher could be issued. If, by the end of the financial year, a household hadn't received a payment a credit would be applied to their Council Tax bill in April. Those residents not liable to pay Council Tax, such as residents in Houses of Multiple Occupation, might still be eligible to apply however it was harder to reach them as the Council does not hold the required level of data about them.

Colin Cooper, Chief Executive Officer, Habitats and Heritage, addressed the Committee. Mr Cooper explained that Habitats and Heritage had an energy efficiencies auditing programme but that the resources allocated to that were applied for 18 months ago so were not adequate to meet current demand. Mr Cooper provided the Committee with some figures that demonstrated the increased demand and asked the Committee if the Council would consider providing some assistance to help the charity to increase its resources the details of which had been sent to officers.

In response the Lead Member for Finance and Resources informed Mr Cooper that officers would review the request.

The Chair proposed an additional recommendation to refer the item to Council the following evening for Council to ratify the Committees decision. The Committee supported the recommendation.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Noted the whole Council response taken to date to helping residents and businesses through the cost of living crisis plus the clear commitment to do more;
2. Approved the creation of a £3 million Emergency Funding Reserve, funded from the Council's own reserves, to underpin further work, in conjunction with partners, to support residents and businesses through the crisis and;
3. Recommended that Council endorse the decision at point 2 above (to create a £3 million Emergency Funding Reserve, funded from the Council's own reserves, to underpin further work, in conjunction with partners, to support residents and businesses through the crisis).

24. PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENT FUND UPDATE AND ENHANCEMENTS

The Head of Economic Development introduced the report. He explained that the Public Realm Improvement Fund (PRIF) was created in November by a decision by the Committee primarily to encourage the recovery of the town centres post COVID. He further explained that the schemes were on track, and it was hoped they would conclude by Christmas, except for Ham parade, the largest scheme, which was still at the design stage.

The Head of Economic Development concluded that the Committee were asked to approve an extension to the PRIF of an additional £1 million which would fund five new schemes in three new areas and an extension of two schemes that had developed additional plans.

The Lead Member for Business and Growth added that the focus had been on areas of priority, and it was intended that ward Councillors would get involved with this exciting proposal to bring back life to the boroughs high streets.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Noted the progress made to date on PRIF projects;
2. Noted the linkages to placemaking work led by the local planning authority falling within the planning policy remit of the Environment, Sports, Sustainability and Culture Committee, particularly the emerging Local Plan and ongoing conservation area appraisal work and the need to ensure consistency of approach for the cross-cutting theme of place;
3. Approved additional capital budget of £1 million to be allocated to the PRIF programme.

25. RICHMOND CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACTIONS AND INDICATORS FOR 2022/23

The Chair advised the Committee that they would only be considering the parts of the Corporate Plan that applied to this Committee as the other Service Committees would be receiving the parts relevant to their service area. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed this.

The Committee heard a representation from Mr Ted Cremin, Chair the Twickenham Riverside Trust, who provided the Committee with some information about the Trust and figures relating to the Riverside Development and other developments within the borough. Mr Cremin concluded that he felt the Council's consultation process had been flawed. There were no questions for clarification for Mr Cremin.

In response to members questions the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the Council published an annual report detailing the complaints the Council had received each year.

In response to further questions the Director of Environment and Community Services confirmed that the full detail of the Twickenham Riverside scheme and its finances would be the subject of a future report.

The Lead Member for Finance and Resources informed the Committee that the scheme had been backed by the electorate and the May election result signified their support.

The Chair concluded that the Twickenham Riverside scheme had been in the public domain, and it was very clear what that scheme was.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Agreed the proposed RCP key actions for 2022/23 set out in Appendix A;
2. Agreed the proposed key indicators set out in Appendix B.

26. Q1 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

The Committee decided to consider this item alongside the Corporate Quarter 1 Quarterly Monitoring 2020/21 Report (Minute 27).

The Director of Resources advised that this report related to this Committee as each Service Committee received its own report relating to its service area. She explained that whilst the services reporting to this Committee showed an underspend (largely relating to treasury investments that had generated more income than had been budgeted for) the overall Council position was a projected overspend due to inflation and service pressures. The Director also warned that inflation would have an ongoing impact which would be covered in more detail in the Medium Term Financial Strategy report found later in the agenda.

Mr Ted Cremin, Chair the Twickenham Riverside Trust, addressed the Committee. He explained that the Trust believed that, after seeking legal advice, the Council would not win their case for a Compulsory Purchase Order.

In response to members questions Mr Cremin stated that he had shared the Trust's legal advice with the Council.

In response to members questions the Chief Executive explained that overall the balance of risk in recruitment was towards overspend. Recruitment was very difficult across several areas, particularly Social care where the Council could not carry vacancies and therefore had to engage agency staff who were in demand and therefore costly. He further explained that the Council had launched a great employer programme to attract and retain the best staff.

In response to further member questions the Lead Member for Finance and Resources informed the Committee that the overall agreed spend for the Bu'sen was the same but appeared to be more due to slippage.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Noted the current projected underspend for this committee is £695,000;
2. Noted the position on the Capital programme.

27. CORPORATE Q1 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

The Committee decided to consider this item alongside the Q1 Quarterly Monitoring Report (Minute 26).

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Noted that the current projected overspend on the General Fund overall is £1.218 million; and;
2. Noted the position on the Capital programme.

28. CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW

The Director of Resources introduced this annual update report which also captured the capital outturn for 2021/22, included new agreed projects and revised cashflows. She advised that going

forward consideration would need to be given as to how the Capital Programme links into the revenue position as any additional schemes, unless externally funded, would need to be funded by borrowing which would come at a revenue cost.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Reviewed the capital programme and the changes being proposed;
2. Approved the revised capital programme and its funding.

29. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Lead Member for Finance and Resources introduced the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). He explained that it was best practice for the authority to have one to ensure that the Council's finances were reviewed to provide a clear sense of direction of where things are headed. He further explained that the Council's finances were currently in fairly good shape however this was set to change with the impact of inflationary pressures starting to take effect.

The Lead Member for Finance and Resources informed the Committee that it was not yet known by how much the Council could increase Council tax or if additional funding might be provided by the government to recognise the extra inflationary pressures but that it was not currently looking likely that public spending budgets would be adjusted to take inflation into account and as a result the Council may need to increase Council tax, use reserves and make additional savings.

The Director of Resources added that increased service pressures which remained a concern, with Children's Services causing particular concern as it was very difficult to keep costs down in this area. She also explained that some areas had not recovered post COVID with parking and leisure income still down.

In response to members' questions the Lead Member for Finance and Resources stated that:

- The MTFS was not conservative given the inflationary pressures faced.
- That there had been Council Tax freeze grants available from the government when rates had been frozen in the past.
- Freezing Council tax would have an impact on future years as the gap would increase year on year.
- Council reserves were there to help the Council manage one off shocks or to provide a cushion during difficult times.
- It would be irresponsible to deploy all the Council's reserves at one time.

In response to members questions the Director of Resources informed the Committee that an assumption had been made that inflation would fall in future years, but it would not fall straight away from 1 April 2023 and this had been taken into account in the estimates.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Noted the update to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the further work to be undertaken in the lead up to setting the 2023/24 Council Tax;
2. Recommended that Council approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy including the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy.

30. ADDITIONAL BUDGET REQUESTS

RESOLVED That the Committee approved the funding of those items listed in paragraph 3.1 of the report from the central contingency budget or other sources as specified.

Committee	Date	Description	Capital	Revenue	Funding
Education and Children's Services	05/09/22	Education Capital Programme	£40,000	£0	High Needs funding
Adult Social Services, Health and Housing	08/09/22	Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring 2022/23	£0	£446,000	Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund
Finance, Policy and Resources	15/09/22	Ham Close Regeneration	£3,456,000	£0	All but £405,000 funded from external sources
Finance, Policy and Resources	15/09/22	Capital Programme Review	£222,000	£0	A mix of grant, external funding and borrowing, with more detail provided in the Capital Paper
		Total Requested	£3,718,000	£446,000	

31. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

That the current list of items on the Forward Plan for Committee business, with the addition of the items below, be noted.

Additional items:

1. Cost of living update - to be a standing item;
2. White House update - to be provided for the next meeting on 17 November 2022;
3. Digital strategy update – to be provided for the meeting scheduled to take place on 12 January 2023, and;
4. Customer services update – to be provided for the meeting scheduled to take place on 12 January 2023.

CHAIR

The meeting, which started at 7.00 pm ended at 8.30 pm.