

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 5 October 2022

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors T Anderson P Stuart
P Gilchrist H Cameron
P Cleary J Bird
EA Grey M Booth
T Jones K Hodson
Y Nolan J Johnson
J Robinson A Wright (In place
of L Rennie)

In attendance: Councillors S Percy

53 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast.

54 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lesley Rennie.

55 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.

No declarations were made.

56 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 31 August 2022 and 7 September 2022 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

57 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that a public question had been received from Kieron Murphy who was in attendance.

Kieron asked what the average daily rate was paid by the Council for consultancy services. In response, the Chair outlined that consultants were used to add capacity and specialist skills to support the delivery of projects on

a short-term basis and was the most cost-effective solution in circumstances if the Council doesn't need or can't secure permanent staff. Rates varied significantly based on the length and nature of the assignment and availability of skills required, with the average currently being £405 per day.

58 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

The Chair reported that there were no statement or petitions.

59 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

The Chair reported that there were no questions by members.

60 **2023/24 BUDGET UPDATE**

The Director of Resources introduced the report which provided an update on the 2023/24 budget position following changes to the assumptions made and presented to the Committee in March 2022. The changes had arisen as a result of the national picture of high inflation and rising costs which were impacting on the budget gap, causing it to increase significantly for 2023/24. The report set out the work already undertaken as well as the need for further work to develop the 2023/24 budget in order to urgently mitigate the gap.

The Director of Resources outlined that the Council was in a good position to meet the original 2023/24 budget gap of £14m prior to the changing macro-economic position, which had since increased the 2023/24 budget gap to £49m and put pressure on the delivery of the 2022/23 budget. The breakdown of the additional budget pressures was outlined to the Committee which included £12.9m for increased demand and cost of adult social care, £10m increased utility costs, £9.9m for the staff pay award, £5.5m increased cost of children's residential placements, and £3.5m of reduced income for leisure services. Members were advised that these additional pressures were being reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and would be further considered by additional Policy and Services Committee budget workshops.

The report proposed the commencement of a high level pre-budget consultation to gain the views of Wirral residents, the outcomes of which would be reported back to Policy and Resources Committee alongside the outcomes of the further Policy and Services Committee budget workshops.

The Interim Director of Finance provided an overview of the national and international economic position and how this would impact on the Council's budget. Members were advised on the rate of inflation interest rate and how this had impacted on the Council's borrowing costs, as well as the Government's mini-budget and the consequential need to take a prudent view on the expected level of government assistance.

The Committee discussed the report in detail and considered how the £49m budget gap would be met, where the cost to only provide statutory service was sought. A further debate ensued on the proposed pre-budget consultation and the appropriateness of consulting on the budget position before the level of government settlement was known.

Resolved – That

- (1) the work undertaken to date to deliver the 2023/24 budget be noted.**
- (2) the revised 2023/24 budget gap and the factors contributing to this be noted.**
- (3) it be noted that officers will work up a further package of policy options to meet the revised budget gap, with Members engaged via the Group Leaders' Budget working group and a further round of budget workshops with Policy & Services Committees.**
- (4) the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Chair and Group spokespersons, to undertake a pre-budget “have your say” consultation, setting out the scale of the Council’s 2023/24 budget challenge and inviting residents to offer their views on the prioritisation of Council Services.**
- (5) the outcomes of the pre-budget “have your say” consultation be reported back to a future meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee as part of the budget setting process.**

61 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report which provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

It had been clarified that the Committee had agreed to receive further reports in relation to the cost-of-living crisis and the use of council buildings as ‘warm banks’, and that these had been omitted from the work programme but were due to be considered in November. The Chair asked for an update on the progress of these reports and the use of Bromborough Civic Centre as a warm bank.

The Director of Resources outlined that Bromborough Library or Civic Centre was not being considered to be reopened by the Council as a warm hub as the revenue costs associated with the running of the building has been taken as savings to address the Council budget gap therefore no funding existed for utilities and other expenditure in addition to the capital investment required to

address issue with ventilation and options for the future of the building would be considered by the relevant Committee. It was further reported that the Council was working with the community, voluntary and faith sector in relation to community warm spaces and further information on this and the use of Council buildings would be reported back to Policy and Resources Committee.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.

62 **MINUTES OF FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE**

Resolved – That the minutes of the Finance Sub-Committee meeting held on 8 September 2022 be noted.