

POLICY COMMITTEE (On-line)

1 December 2020

Present – The Chairman, Councillor Foster and Councillors Heseltine, Ireton, Lis, Madeley, Metcalfe, Morrell, Mulligan, Myers, Noland, Place, Rose, Welch and Wheeler.

Also in Attendance – Councillor Jaquin.

Officers – Chief Executive, Director of Services, Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer), Strategic Manager for Planning and Regeneration, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, ICO and Head of Assets and Commercial, Exchequer and Performance Manager, Business Services Manager, Senior Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer.

Apologies for Absence – An apology for absence was received from Councillor Barrett.

Confirmation of Minutes – The minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 20 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

Exclusion of the Public -

Resolved – That, in accordance with the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules, the public is excluded for the purposes of Minutes \$POL.1108 and \$POL.1109 below (marked \$) on the grounds that it is not in the public interest to disclose the Category 3 exempt information (relates to the financial or business affairs of any particular person).

Start: 6.33pm

Finish: 9.24pm

Councillors Metcalfe and Ireton joined the meeting at 6.34 and Councillor Noland joined at 6.52pm.
Councillor Madeley left the meeting at 7pm.
Councillor Welch left the meeting at 8.08pm.

Minutes for Report

POL.1098

QUARTER 2 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING – 2020/2021

The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report advising Members of the revenue budget position of the Council, based on a quarter 2 review of income and expenditure to the end of September 2020 which suggested a forecasted overspend of £222k for the full financial year.

The Council had a General Fund unallocated balance of £995k at 1st April 2020 and it was possible that support from general balances could be required in the current to medium term as part of the response to current financial pressures. The Council had £6,720k in earmarked reserves as at 1st April 2020 and these were set out in appendix C to the Chief Finance Officer's report.

The Council's revised net budget of £7,070,906 had continued to be affected by the impacts of the pandemic with major income streams such as car parking and leisure and income would continue to be affected as activity recovered. The Government had introduced a claim mechanism to allow Councils to claim income losses of up to 75% of 95% of the budget income for a given period. The compensation claimed for the period April – July was £866k. Other income streams affected were highlighted in the Chief Finance Officer's report. Additional costs had also been incurred in specific areas, some one-off in nature such as IT expenditure to facilitate remote working.

Council funding from businesses rates and Council Tax would also be affected, but the extent would not be known until the end of the year. Craven was a member of the North Yorkshire and West Yorkshire Business Rates Pool which operated on a 50% retained growth model. This was in place

for the current year only and it was reported that collection and growth expectations would be affected by business closures or changes and Government grant interventions.

Resolved – (1) That, the outturn revenue budget monitoring position as at 30th September 2020 is noted.

(2) That, the latest position of the savings achieved this quarter and identified as green in Appendix B to the report now submitted are noted and that these savings could be transferred to an earmarked reserve to support the 2020/21 budget and beyond.

(3) That, the central Government COVID grant support and the estimated sales, fees and charges compensation receivable and the estimated contributions to support the future budgets and collection fund as shown in Appendix A to the report now submitted are noted.

(4) That, it is noted that the COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on income and the costs of the Council and it likely some draw on reserves will be required in 2020/21 and that the apportionment is delegated to the Chief Finance Officer (S.151 Officer).

POL.1099

QUARTER 2 CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING –
2020/2021

The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report informing Members of the Council's capital programme position, based on the quarter 2 review of income and expenditure to the end of September 2020. The agreed 2020/21 capital programme of £4,495k had been revised to include slippage from the 2019/2020 programme giving a revised programme amounting to £9,531k.

A summary of the programme was shown in the Chief Finance Officer's report and at the 30th September 2020, expenditure on the programme was £2,349k. There was currently a forecasted variance in project expenditure of £56k, relating to the Growth Deal – Highways Improvement Project, but this was to be funded externally through grant receipts.

The consequences of COVID had triggered the Chief Finance Officer to undertake a review of the existing capital projects to assess their viability, potential project delays and whether any of the programme's projects would have to be delayed or reassessed, particularly key commercial projects, to ease financial pressures.

With Government grant and cash-flow support, careful financial management and income streams beginning to recover, thereby stabilising the Council's financial position, it had not been necessary to recommend the removal or deferral of 2020/21 capital projects. A more detailed assessment would be made in quarter 3, however, the quarter 2 review showed that the full programme could be financed as planned without having to intentionally recommend the deferral of projects.

Resolved – (1) That, the capital budget position of the 2020/21 capital programme as at the 30th September 2020 is noted.

(2) That, the 2020/21 capital programme and the proposed funding for the projects agreed at quarter 2 are noted.

POL.1100

QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING UPDATE –
2020/2021

The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report presenting performance highlights for quarter 2 of the financial year 2020/21 in accordance with arrangements set out in the Council's Performance Management Framework.

Despite challenges resulting from the pandemic response, the majority of Council Plan actions were progressing as planned. Services returned updates for 19 actions and 13 of those (68.4%) were progressing as expected. 2 actions had not started and 4 actions were amber, these were:

- The Town Hall development
- Universal access to high quality broadband
- Recycling rate of 50%
- Waste Education Programme.

The report noted that sickness absences remained low across the Council and there had been some increased focus on the completion of Personal Development Reviews.

Resolved – (1) That, the performance highlights described in the report now submitted are noted.

POL.1101

FEES AND CHARGES 2021/2022

The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report presenting the fees and charges for the 2021/22 financial year. The Council's 2015 fees and charges policy provided for discretionary fees and charges for a number of core areas to be presented to Policy Committee for approval with the remainder being approved under delegated authority by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team in consultation with the relevant Lead Member. The Council's Licensing Committee would continue to be responsible for approving fees and charges in relation to licensing and hackney carriages.

Resolved – (1) That, the discretionary fees and charges that are subject to Policy Committee approval are approved.

(2) That, the discretionary fees and charges subject to delegated authority are noted.

POL. 1102

TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REVIEW – 2020/2021

The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report updating Members on the treasury activity undertaken in the first six months of the year in the context of current and forecast economic climates. The report had been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management. Treasury management was to ensure cash flow was adequately planned with surplus monies being invested in low risk counterparties, providing adequate security and liquidity. Another function of the treasury management service was the funding of the capital plan to ensure the Council could meet its capital spending commitments.

Resolved – That, the treasury management 2020/21 mid-year review is noted.

POL. 1103

ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT – LOCAL SCHEME

The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report asking Members to approve a local Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme as part of a range of the latest support being delivered to businesses.

Government announced on 26th November, that Craven would be in Tier 2, initially for a two-week period. That classification meant that a further local scheme would have to be approved as the LRSG 'Open' grant allowed for an element of local discretion.

The government determined that the purpose of the ARG funding was to support local economies and businesses that had been adversely impacted by national and LCAL Very High restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The funding allocated to the council was £1.143m and was a fixed sum, to be spent by 31st March 2022.

As this was a discretionary fund, the Council were required to determine its own local scheme and this was attached to the report now submitted. The ARG scheme would apply when the Council area was in LCAL Very High (Tier 3) or in a national lockdown situation.

Resolved – (1) That, the Craven District Council ARG scheme as set in in Appendix 1 to the report now submitted is approved and will take effect from 24th November 2020.

(2) That, the establishment of a business support fund as included within the scheme is approved.

(3) That, delegated authority is given to the Chief Finance Officer to amend the scheme and any subsequent iteration of business grants' schemes if necessary, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Lead Member (Finance).

POL.1104 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PEER CHALLENGE –
PLANNING SERVICE**

The Director of Services submitted a report containing the results from the Local Government Association's Peer Challenge of the Council's Planning Service which had taken place in September 2020. Peer Challenges provided an alternative performance and regulation challenge for local government since the abolition of the Audit Commission in 2010. These Challenges were a proven tool for improvement and involved a team of expert local government officers and councillors spending time at a Council challenging the way the service operated and sharing good practice from across the country. The team focussed on service operations, planning committees and decisions.

The Planning Service had faced significant challenges recently and with the Local Plan in place and that being a key strategic priority for the Council and it was important to ensure a fit for purpose planning service was in place and being able to learn good practice from across the profession.

The review uncovered a number of problems and set out a range of recommendations for improvement which were included within the Director of Services' report. In essence, the problems were not simply an issue of resources but more about culture and efficiency. Overall, the service could be more efficient if processes and delegated powers were streamlined, staff knowledge and skills were effectively used and stakeholder engagement was improved.

Planning meetings were long and it was widely acknowledged that communication between officers and councillors and, to some extent between the service and stakeholders was poor. Behaviours in Planning Committee by councillors towards officers, between councillors themselves demonstrated a disjointed and adversarial culture.

Additionally, it was found that the Planning Policy team and the Development Management team worked as two separate entities and therefore they were not well integrated with corporate polices instead of the Corporate Plan and the Local Plan being at the heart of service delivery.

The Executive Summary within the Director of Services' report highlighted improvements made in processing times, developing internal talent and a desire by both councillors and officers to sort things out.

Ten recommendations for continuous improvement were made:

- Reposition and restate the management of planning in the context and at the heart of the Corporate Plan and the Local Plan.
- Establish a Strategic Lead Member (or similar) role to take overall leadership on planning matters.
- Establish a strategic lead officer to be the catalyst for change.
- Adopt a single team approach to planning.

- Members and officers should work together to sort out the problems that exist.
- Establish a clear, transparent, customer focus.
- Establish and communicate clear processes.
- Improve the effectiveness of Planning Committee as the decision making forum.
- Communication with parish councils.
- Embrace and welcome collaborative learning and working.

A draft improvement plan was included within the Director of Services' report but the Council had already acted in response to the review by appointing a new Lead Member of Planning to provide the necessary long term corporate focus and oversee its development. It had already been proposed that an Improvement Board chaired by the Lead Member for Planning, comprised of the Chair of Planning Committee and senior officers be established and its first meeting was already being arranged. The LGA had also offered a representative to be part of the Board to provide continuous challenge and support.

During the ensuing debate, Members commented on the need for achieving improvements to the planning service as soon as possible and that it was imperative that the Improvement Board started its work straightaway.

Resolved – (1) That, the report and draft improvement plan is noted.

(2) That, a progress report is submitted to a meeting of the Policy Committee in the New Year.

POL.1105 **NEW LEASE OF AIREVILLE NURSERIES, AIREVILLE PARK, SKIPTON**

The Director of Services submitted a report seeking approval to grant a new lease for the land and buildings at Aireville Nurseries within Aireville Park Skipton at an undervalue to North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) for ten years. The land and buildings were originally leased at a peppercorn rent to NYCC in 2005 for a period of 10 years with a covenant to restrict use exclusively to horticultural work based training for people with learning difficulties living in the Craven District.

The County had invested in the site including the construction and provision of new buildings, toilets, fencing and security features. The original lease expired on 4th December 2015 and NYCC had been holding over on the original terms with the agreement of the Council. It would be extremely difficult to terminate and oppose the grant of a new lease because of the acceptance of 'holding over' and it was therefore suggested that a new lease be granted for a term of 10 years with a covenant as in the previous lease. Both parties had agreed to an increased rent of £150 per annum from a peppercorn.

Resolved – That, delegated authority is given to the Director of Services and the Solicitor to the Council to grant a lease at an under value of the land and buildings at Aireville Nurseries within Aireville Park, Skipton to North Yorkshire County Council for ten years.

Minutes for Decision

POL.1106 **SKIPTON CREMATORIUM EXTENSION**

The Council's Property Project Manager submitted a report providing information relating to the construction of a small enclosed extension to the entrance of Skipton Crematorium. Bereavement Services had been the subject of a Business Development Plan and a review undertaken by the Council's Select Committee and one of their recommendations had been for an extension to be erected to one side of the Chapel's main entrance to provide an additional covered space for large funerals unable to be accommodated in the main chapel.

Former Councillor Pat Fairbanks' had long campaigned for a porch or shelter and on her death she generously bequeathed £20,000 in her Will to Craven District Council specifically for constructing an extension.

The proposed extension would accommodate an additional 20 persons standing, increasing overall capacity to 104 and with the addition of audio visual equipment they would be able to view services from the main Crematorium.

Indicative total cost of the scheme was in the region of £50,000 and a supplementary estimate was required to proceed with the project.

RECOMMENDED – That, a supplementary capital estimate of £30,000 is approved to provide a sheltered extension to Skipton Crematorium, in addition to £20,000 donated from former Councillor Patricia Fairbanks' estate (£50,000 in total).

POL.1107

COMMUNITY ASSETS TRANSFER

The Director of Services submitted a report seeking approval to investigate options to utilise the assets of Craven District Council for the long term cultural and economic well-being of Craven's communities.

Craven District Council held a range of assets including a theatre, shops, business units, car parks and land holdings that generated a turnover of £4.23m from rent, fees or the services delivered within them. Some important assets not generating a surplus but important to residents included Aireville Park, Skipton Town Hall and Craven Leisure all requiring constant investment and support.

The process for local government reorganisation was underway in North Yorkshire and to safeguard Craven District Council assets for the long term benefit of its communities the Director of Services' report highlighted the benefits of transferring assets to the third sector as well as pointing out the challenges that would need to be addressed through the asset transfer process.

Members approval was sought to develop a business case for the transfer of assets and it was,

RECOMMENDED – (1) That, the development of a business case for the transfer of assets for the long term benefit of Craven's residents is approved.

(2) That, £50,000 is allocated to enable the development of a business case that scopes opportunities to secure assets and activities for Craven communities.

(3) That, delegated authority is given to the Director of Services to develop the business case in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.

\$POL.1108

CRAVEN ARTS' HOUSE

(A separate excluded full minute has been prepared for this item. It is published (on pink paper) in an Appendix to Committee Members, relevant officers and others who are entitled to all details.)

\$POL.1109

**JOINT VENTURE – REDEVELOPMENT OF COUNCIL DEPOT
SITE, ENGINE SHED LANE, SKIPTON**

(A separate excluded full minute has been prepared for this item. It is published (on pink paper) in an Appendix to Committee Members, relevant officers and others who are entitled to all details.)

Date and Time of Next Meeting – Tuesday, 19th January 2021 at 6.30pm.

Chairman