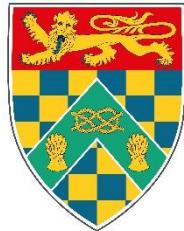


Meeting of the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Tuesday, 28 November 2023, 2.00 pm

Committee Members present

Councillor Bridget Ley (Chairman)

Councillor Ben Green

Councillor Tim Harrison

Councillor Graham Jeal

Councillor Gloria Johnson

Councillor Robert Leadenham

Councillor Max Sawyer

Councillor Lee Steptoe

Councillor Murray Turner

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Economic Development)

Councillor Richard Cleaver (Leader of the Council)

Councillor Phillip Knowles (Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing)

Councillor Rhea Rayside (Cabinet Member for People and Communities)

Councillor Paul Stokes (Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture)

Other Members present

Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren

Councillor Charmaine Morgan

Officers present

Richard Wyles (Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer)

Nicola McCoy-Brown (Director for Growth and Culture)

Alison Hall-Wright (Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer)

Graham Watts (Monitoring Officer and Assistant Director – Governance and Public Protection)

Debbie Roberts (Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance)

James Welbourne (Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Alice Atkins (Project Officer)

Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** to elect Councillor Max Sawyer as Vice-Chairman.

39. Public Speaking

No comments from members of the public were received.

40. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies received, all Councillors were present as expected.

Councillor Graham Jeal substituted for the vacant seat on this Committee.

41. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Robert Leadenham declared an interest on agenda item 7 – proposed revision to Car Park Tariffs – Grantham and Stamford. He did not participate in the debate or vote and left the Council Chamber, for this item.

A Member acknowledged the particularly full agenda for the meeting and suggested that some items be deferred to an extra meeting, possibly in December 2023.

The Deputy Chief Executive informed Members that many agenda items were time-critical, therefore not able to be deferred. For example, the Terms of Reference for the Turnpike Depot Project needed to be agreed as the work was to start imminently. Items 12 and 13 – the Discretionary Housing and Discretionary Council Tax Payment Policies were intended to be taken together to expedite proceedings.

It was proposed that item 7 – Proposed revision to Car Park Tariffs at Grantham and Stamford, be heard first, followed by items 10 – 13 – the Turnpike Depot Project, Localised Council Tax Support Scheme and Discretionary Payment Policies.

The Committee **AGREED** the amended running order.

42. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2023

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the minutes from the meeting held on 19 September 2023 were a correct record.

43. Updates from previous meeting

Members noted the action sheet and the Chairman confirmed that the requested information on movements carried forward within the budget update had been circulated to Members, therefore completing the action.

44. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service

The Deputy Leader of the Council informed the Committee that it was expected that a joint meeting of the Finance and Economic and the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny

Committees was to be held to discuss the Deepings Leisure Centre by early January 2024. It was intended that an extraordinary meeting of the Council on 11 January 2024 would discuss any recommendations put forward by the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

45. Proposed revision to Car Park Tariffs - Grantham and Stamford

The Leader of the Council introduced the report to the Committee, informing Members that a significant amount of income was received from Council-owned car parks and that given the current financial situation, it was essential to maintain that level of income as far as possible. It was also recognised that supply and demand patterns needed to be noted across the towns. A change to the Car Park Tariff Order would need to meet legislative requirements.

At its meeting on 19 September 2023, the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to receive draft car parking tariffs at today's Committee, on 28 November 2023, in respect of the current pay and display car parks.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that based on the ticket sales information, a utilisation and capacity study of the car parks was being undertaken in order to demonstrate how each car park performed from a demand perspective, demonstrating the turnover of spaces in each location. The results would be heard within a report at a future meeting. It was clear that Grantham and Stamford operated very differently as towns and the demands on the car parks operated differently with a multitude of different users identified. The Officer informed Members that demand was lower in Grantham as there was a high number of free parking opportunities, for example in supermarket car parks. Stamford, by comparison, had an over-supply of demand to the current capacity.

This report brought forward a number of tariff options that were designed to:

- Stimulate usage and demand across the car parks
- Meet the needs of the different users specifically shoppers, visitors, commuters, businesses and residents
- Simplified the tariff structures across all car parks
- Sought to provide a blend of short and long-term parking options in both Grantham and Stamford

The analysis of car parking tickets confirmed that there was a need for a review of the tariffs in order to:

- promote longer shopping dwell time periods in the short stay car parks (2-to-4-hour parking) and thereby discouraging longer stay parking (all day parking)
- promote all day parking and thereby discouraging short stay car parking
- maximise the utilisation of the car parks by encouraging users through competitive and attractive tariff structure.

Tariff Options for Grantham:

Scenario A - new tariffs 7 days a week including Sundays and Bank Holidays 7am-7pm, 1-hour free parking, £2 charge for evenings.

Scenario B - new tariffs Monday to Saturday 7am – 7pm, 1-hour free parking, £2 charge for evenings and £3 charge for Sundays and Bank Holidays.

The analysis identified that there was no separation between usage between Monday to Saturday and on Sundays or Bank Holidays. The night-time economy indicated that evening charges could be considered. There was no data on night-time usage but it had been considered that income received would offset some of the income loss of introducing free parking but was not expected to fully compensate for any financial loss from offering free parking for 2 hours, particularly in Grantham.

The key changes proposed as a result of the analysis were:

- The introduction of 1-hour free parking across all locations with the exception of the Wharf Road multi storey car park where a 2-hour free parking was proposed to complement the Morrisons shoppers surface car park.
- Simplification of tariff bandings
- Introduction of charging for Sundays, Bank Holidays as a single simplified maximum charge and a single charge evening parking tariff
- Reclassification of Conduit Lane from long stay to short stay to encourage greater use to support the Grantham market • Discounted season tickets and an increased offer of choice.

Tariff Options for Stamford

Scenario A - new tariffs Monday to Saturday 8am-6pm, £3 charge for evenings (long stay only) and £3 charge for Sundays and Bank Holidays

Scenario B - new tariffs Monday to Saturday 8am – 6pm, £3 charge for evenings (long stay only) and £5 charge for Sundays and Bank Holidays

Utilisation of the Council operated car parks in Stamford performed very well and in some instances demand exceeded capacity at peak times particularly Fridays and weekends. Therefore, there was no business case to consider the introduction of free parking during the day as this will only increase the demand on the car parks and add to congestion concerns. However, options had been developed to provide a charging differentiation between short and long term parking and incentivise longer term parking to the edge of town at the Cattle market and Wharf Road car parks.

Members raised the following points during discussion:

- The report was welcomed as 'a step in the right direction.'

- Was the cattle market in Stamford due to increase car parking capacity by 100 spaces?
- The hour free parking in Grantham would reduce a lot of parking in town-centre streets which was welcomed. Lower prices for parking will encourage people to stay longer with the town centre – a necessity for local businesses.
- Could the free 2-hour parking at Morrisons, Grantham be extended to Guildhall Street and Conduit Lane car parks on a Saturday, to compete with local supermarkets and encourage visitors to the Grantham Market?
- It was important to encourage families into Grantham for shopping purposes.
- Could the Council consider Penalty Charge Notices to be increased, having been fixed for two years?

It was clarified that the charges relating to Penalty Charge Notices were not set by the Council but were set nationally.

The Leader confirmed that the work to be done was to be led by the capacity and demand information from the external study and money would be allocated within the next year's budget accordingly. The particularly high demand in the cattle market area of Stamford was acknowledged. The Leader confirmed his full support in increasing the capacity at the cattle market carpark if the results of the survey confirmed this was a high priority. Wharf Road in Grantham was confirmed as offering 2-hours free parking every day of the week. Under the proposals, Conduit Lane, Grantham was to be re-designated as a short-stay car park, facilitating a higher turnover within the car park.

The Leader informed Members that a weekly season ticket would be possible, purchased through the app, thereby reducing administrative costs. It was hoped this would be popular amongst commuters in both towns.

The Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider the range of proposed new car parking tariffs and make a recommendation to Cabinet on the preferred charging structure (scenario) for Grantham and Stamford.

A Member **proposed** that the free 2-hour parking at Morrisons, Grantham be extended to Guildhall Street and Conduit Lane car parks on Saturdays, to compete with local supermarkets and encourage visitors to the Grantham Market as an amendment to Scenario B for Grantham.

This proposal was **seconded** and **AGREED**.

Stamford Scenario A was **proposed, seconded and AGREED**.

46. Turnpike Depot Project - Proposed Terms of Reference

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report.

At its meeting on 28th September 2023, Council approved the Replacement Depot Project in order to provide a new facility at Turnpike Close Grantham.

This report provided members with an update with regard the decision for the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish a working group in order to be updated and enable it to monitor the progression of the project.

In order to respond to this decision, a proposed set of terms of reference had been drafted. These have been provided in order to ensure there is clarity of the role of the FEOSC and was to provide members with assurance that there was sufficient governance and additional support to the overall governance structure in order to oversee the successful delivery of the Turnpike Close Depot project.

At each meeting of the Working Group, the following information was to be provided in order to give an overview on:

- The delivery of the project plan
- The project plan activities against the timeframes
- Financial appraisal of expenditure compared to budget projection
- The outstanding risks and issues, the controls in place and the ongoing monitoring of the risks and issues

An Operational Project Team was to meet each week to manage the current contractor and deal with on-site delivery issues alongside a Project Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive which was to take the weekly activities on a monthly summary basis, bringing a monthly dashboard report to future Committee meetings. This was to enable Members to look at the timelines, financial position of the project, the risk register or any issues.

The Deputy Chief Executive informed Members that it was recommended that the project became part of this Committee's Work Programme, featuring on regular meetings throughout the next municipal year. The project was considered to be over approximately 42 weeks.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- A Member enquired whether a replacement depot was the best use of taxpayers' money.
- It was suggested that a formal Cabinet presence was required at the Working Group and Project Team, particularly the Finance and Environment Portfolio holders so they could be scrutinised by Committee.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that a robust business case for the Turnpike Close Project had been established in line with the Corporate Plan and fully debated. The

Officer considered that the delivery of the project was the responsibility of the Senior Officers involved on an operational basis.

The Leader of the Council informed the Committee that it was necessary to have a separation of powers of executive from scrutiny.

The Deputy Leader agreed that while attendance of Cabinet Members was necessary, so they could be held to account as part of the process, it was not appropriate that those Members were part of the Working Group. For this reason it was considered that attendance at the Project Board meetings might be necessary to see the project proceed to its completion.

It was **proposed and seconded** that a formal Cabinet presence, as observers only, of up to 3 Cabinet seats, was required at the Working Group and Project Board particularly the Finance, Property or Environment Portfolio holders.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed to Members that Cabinet Members were to be kept informed through the S151 Officer. The Cabinet Members for Environment was considered to be the customers in the delivery of the project as recipients of the asset, having contributed to the design.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee had no decision-making ability in reference to membership of the Project Board and Working Group. The report required that the Committee agree the terms of reference around the Working Group, which was to hold the project to account. The proposal would be a recommendation to the Cabinet Member to endorse those terms of reference.

It was **AGREED** that the **Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee**:

- a) **Considered and adopted the proposed terms of reference with respect to the Committee's role in monitoring the Turnpike Close Depot Project.**
- b) **Recommended to Cabinet that a formal Cabinet presence, as observers only, of up to 3 Cabinet seats, was required at the Working Group and Project Board**

47. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2024-2025

The Deputy Leader introduced the report to Members of the Committee.

The Council Tax Benefit system was abolished on 31 March 2013 and replaced by the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS). This scheme can be determined locally by the Billing Authority after due consultation with precepting authorities, key stakeholders, and residents.

There are currently 7,152 residents in receipt of Council Tax Support in the South Kesteven District. Of these, 4,023 were working age and 3,129 were pension age who were protected under the legislation and received Council Tax support as prescribed by the Government (broadly similar to the level of Council Tax Benefit).

The core scheme currently provided:

- 80% support for working age claimants
- 100% support for pension age claimant

There was uncertainty regarding the impact of remaining legacy benefit claimants moving to Universal Credit by the end of 2026, which resumed in May 2022. The transition date from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit had been pushed back on many occasions (nationally). In July 2023, a report to this committee advised the transfer date would be completed by 2024; this had since been postponed to 2026.

A report was presented to this committee on 18 July 2023 to consider a number of options for public consultation and potential changes to the scheme from 1 April 2024. The recommendation by this Committee was to undertake consultation for the 2024/25 Localised Council Tax support scheme and to consider the outcome of the consultation findings prior to making a recommendation to Cabinet, for the final scheme to Council in January 2024.

Public consultation began on 1 September 2023 and ran to 13 October 2023. Consultation had been undertaken with major precepting authorities, stakeholders, and residents through a variety of methods.

A Member suggested that the discount criteria on second homes be reconsidered and that an opportunity had been missed to reduce this discount.

The Head of Service for Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community confirmed that the proposal was to introduce a premium to 100%. Currently second properties had a 10% discount on their council tax, therefore paying 90% of the charge. The proposal was that second home-owners will pay their council tax plus an additional 100%. Some owners may sell these properties as a result of this change, making them available to be occupied. There were 353 second properties across the district and if the proposals were approved, an additional income of £632,000 would be generated – just under £57,000 for South Kesteven.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

a) Made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- 2.1. Approve Option 2 of the public consultation – to continue with War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Disregard for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. (To be included within the scheme from 1 April 2024 as detailed in paragraph 3.4.1).**
- 2.2. Approve Option 4 of the public consultation – capital tariff limit and disregard for working age claimants to be aligned to pension age claimant values. (To be included within the scheme from 1 April 2024 as detailed in paragraphs 3.5.1 to 3.5.3).**

2.3. Approve Option 5 of the public consultation – introduction of a second home premium of 100%. (To be included within the scheme from 1 April 2025 as detailed in paragraphs 3.7.1 to 3.7.5).

The Deputy Leader confirmed that it was proposed that the following options were not to be included in the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25:

- Regularity of changes to income to be reviewed – to be considered as part of 2025/26 scheme consultation
- Introduction of a Volunteer Council Tax Discount Scheme – to be considered as part of 2025/26 scheme consultation
- Introduction of a Veterans' Council Tax Discount Scheme – to be considered as part of 2025/26 scheme consultation

The Deputy Leader informed Members that there were particular difficulties in defining a vulnerable veteran. If the Council were to offer a discount to all veterans, the financial implications would be substantial for all preceptors as well as the Council. It could also cause those who were genuinely experiencing financial hardship as tax-payers to be subsidising this discount. The Deputy Leader acknowledged that not all veterans were on low incomes.

Members raised the following points during discussion:

- Was there a similar discount scheme for veterans at any other Local Authority?
- It was acknowledged that a person could be defined as a veteran without seeing active service and a Member informed the Committee that feedback they had received from veterans was not supportive of the proposed discount. There was sufficient help available to veterans but they needed to register for the assistance that was available.
- Veterans should be given an opportunity to apply for a discount for their Council Tax. Charities supporting veterans were experiencing a drop in funds.
- A Member informed that as a result of the formal public consultation, 70.3% who responded were in favour of the principle of the discount scheme for veterans. This was a democratic mandate. The third recommendation within the report suggested to begin the process of conducting further work in defining the scope of veterans eligibility – for example, employed veterans who occupy properties within Band A. The Member confirmed that the Council was a signatory of the Armed Forces covenant.
- It was considered that the debate about assistance for vulnerable veterans should be led locally and was about in-work poverty. There was a lot of support within the district for a veterans discount and could be affordable.
- It was considered that the Armed Forces Covenant did not require the Council to award discount to approximately 8,700 veteran residents. This needed to be looked

at in further detail, inviting the views of veterans. The authoritative definition of a veteran had been defined by the Office of Veterans Affairs.

- There were many people who serve their country in a number of ways, for example, nurses and firefighters.

The Head of Service for Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community confirmed that there was no similar discount scheme for veterans in existence. The Officer clarified that if the Committee were looking at a potential banding support, based on income, the Council were unable to identify who the 8,700 veterans were and would need to devise an application form to go on the website alongside clear communication to all residents to ensure as many eligible veterans applied for a scheme that had not yet been confirmed. A 5% response rate was received to the recent survey sent to 7,133 residents and a potentially low response from veterans to an application scheme could be expected. The Officer explained if this was the case, there would need to be assumptions with regards to modelling the full cost of a scheme. The Council had an Armed Forces Officer who worked tirelessly to look at the support available to the veterans within the district. An Armed Forces Action Plan update was due to be heard at the Rural and Communities Committee on 1 February 2024. Armed Forces champions existed within the Housing team, Revenues and Benefits team and our Cost-of-Living team to provide additional assistance to those veterans in need.

The Officer continued that the special constable application process could be looked at and adapted for the PCSO volunteer Council Tax Discount scheme. There was already an approved scheme for the Special Constable discount process and policy, and this could be replicated, if this was something the Committee wanted to consider.

The Leader confirmed that the Council received the Gold Award for our armed forces commitment and the district was proud and committed to its veterans. The Leader informed Members that the issue of supporting veterans was national, not just local and should be financially supported from Central Government. The Leader welcomed the opportunity for a debate to lobby the Government to bring in a national scheme that was properly funded. The discount scheme for PCSOs was to reward those who did unpaid voluntary work with a statutory emergency service.

The Deputy Leader referred to the Armed Forces Covenant, stating '*special consideration should be given to the injured and bereaved.*' The Deputy Leader continued that vulnerability could not be measured in property bandings.

The Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the feedback from the public consultation.

A Member **proposed** an amendment to recommendation 3 of the report:

That the report should explore the feasibility of providing Council Tax relief exclusively to employed veterans residing in Band A properties, considering relief rates of 5% and also 10%, yielding two distinct options. This analysis must encompass a detailed examination of the financial implications on South Kesteven District Council, Lincolnshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire. It is expected that those findings should be

presented to the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee no later than May 2024.

This was seconded and AGREED.

The Deputy Leader referred to the Armed Forces Covenant, stating '*special consideration should be given to the injured and bereaved.*' The Deputy Leader continued that vulnerability could not be measured in property bandings.

A Member proposed an alternative recommendation:

To review the Armed Forces Covenant and identify how South Kesteven District Council can offer further support to injured or bereaved members of the armed forces.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the proposal was not within the remit of the report and needed to be submitted outside of the meeting. This was agreed. It was clarified that option 6 was not agreed within the proposal and had not been debated during the meeting.

48. Discretionary Housing Payment Policy 2024-2025

The Deputy Leader of the Council introduced the report.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provided extra funding to Local Authorities (LA) to provide claimants in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB) or Universal Credit (UC) further financial assistance with their housing costs in cases where there was a shortfall between the HB entitlement and the rent payable. The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (SI 2001/1167) as amended by the Discretionary Financial Assistance (Amendment) Regulations 2008 SI 2008/637 provided a statutory framework for the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).

DHPs were not intended to replace lost benefits but to provide, instead, extra resources that local authorities can use to assist those most affected by the changes to adjust to a long term, sustainable and affordable approach.

The aim of the policy was to enable our most vulnerable residents, who cannot access any other income, to sustain their home and health. Awards of Discretionary Housing Payments may be made where a resident had a short-term financial difficulty or had continuing and unavoidable needs that meant they were unable to pay their rent. Awards would normally be for a defined period. Consideration would be given as to whether all other discounts and sources of help had been exhausted. Where appropriate, decisions would be deferred until other avenues had been explored.

In most years, actual spend had been very closely aligned to the level of grant received, meaning that, it had been unnecessary for any contribution to be made from the Council's own resources or the contribution required had been minimal.

It was considered that the policy was sufficiently robust and well supported.

A Member asked who the Council's Cost-of-Living Team were.

The Head of Service for Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community informed Members that the Cost-of-Living team were managed by herself and consisted of a small team who were focussed on providing support and signposting customers were appropriate.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Committee recommended to Cabinet the approval of the policy for the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments for 2024/25.

49. Discretionary Council Tax Payment Policy 2024-2025

Each year, as part of the Council Tax Support Scheme consultation, the Council had agreed to provide £30,000 funding for this scheme. The continuation of this funding was currently being considered as part of the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme decision process, with approval of a final scheme to be in place by January 2024. If funding was approved, the Discretionary Council Tax Payment (DCTP) policy for 2024/25 will be put in place to ensure effective financial support is provided to eligible recipients.

A DCTP was available to anyone in receipt of Council Tax Support who had a shortfall between the weekly amount awarded and their Council Tax liability. The DCTP scheme provided additional funding to help those with a council tax liability who were experiencing exceptional hardship in situations where Council Tax Support does not cover all of their council tax liability. To qualify for consideration for assistance under this scheme the customer must already be in receipt of some Council Tax Support. Awards will normally be for a defined period and have the effect of reducing the monthly contribution a taxpayer has to make towards their bill. Consideration would be given as to whether all other discounts and sources of help have been exhausted. Where appropriate, decisions will be deferred until other avenues had been explored.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Recommended to Cabinet the approval of the continuation of the £30,000 Discretionary Council Tax Payment fund for 2024/25.**
- b) Recommended to Cabinet the approval of the policy for the administration of Discretionary Council Tax Payments for 2024/25.**

50. Budget Monitoring Report - Period up to 30 September 2023

The Deputy Leader introduced the report.

During the current financial year, Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provided with regular finance reports. These monitored and forecast the budget against the current economic conditions facing the Council.

The Revenue budget set by Council for the General Fund on 1 March 2023 was £22.256m.

The approved budget amendments, together with forecast changes since the previous budget update report, indicated a projected reduction in the use of reserves for 2023/24 of £1.705m. The reduction in forecast spend on the Blue/Green Witham Corridor project (£123k), utility costs (£582k) and in year vacancies (£138k) together with additional awards of grant income including the one-off windfall Swimming Pool grant of £344k indicated a forecasted balanced position for the current financial year. However, given the uncertainty of the Council's exposure to external cost changes, and other variables outside of the Council's control, this position was to remain under a monthly review.

The budget set by Council on 1 March 2023 for the 2023/24 General Fund Capital programme was £12.147m.

The budget set by Council on 1 March 2023 for the 2023/24 HRA Revenue Budget was £7.519m. The budgeted surplus was fully utilised to fund future investment in stock growth and property maintenance.

There had been two areas identified as pressures within the HRA general repair costs. Materials had increased significantly above inflation by £300k and unbudgeted damp and mould costs of £140k will be incurred during the current financial year in order to respond to this important area. Additional work was being undertaken by the service area to re-apportion appropriate budgets to fund these in-year additional pressures. Increased materials costs were likely to continue to be a pressure in the next financial year so additional budget will need to be considered during the budget setting process.

The budget set by Council on 1 March 2023 for the 2023/24 HRA Capital programme was £18.479m.

The collection rate for Business Rates was 0.70% below target which equated to £287k due to numerous changes to liable and occupation received from the Valuation Office. The collection rate for rents was 0.15% below target which equated to £42k. There was always a reduction at this time of year due to changes in benefits as a result of child benefit and tax credit reviews.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Was it possible to 'drill down' further into some of the headings, to establish in further detail what they referred to?
-
- What was the current state of the overall reserves and what were our plans for them?
- The delays in the Voids process was a concern and the financial impact of this was acknowledged.
- The total of the General Fund reserves was forecast to reduce by end of March 2024 by approximately £7 million. How was this?

The Deputy Leader clarified that further detail was included within the appendices of the report. A large number of the reserves were earmarked – for example, the 'Local

Priorities' reserve. Forecast movements within the reserves had been approved at Full Council.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that further details of the budget lines could be provided if requested. Reserve statements were included with all budget reports, these were monitored throughout the year. A decision had been made to use the Council's own resources rather than undertake further borrowing to avoid unnecessary costs.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the forecast 2023/24 outturn position for the General Fund, HRA Revenue and Capital budgets as at the end of September 2023 and identified any variances that might require action or investigation.

It was **AGREED** that the remaining agenda items would be deferred to a future meeting due to time restraints. These were:

- Future High Streets Fund Update
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – mid-term update

51. Work Programme 2023 - 2024

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that an additional meeting be arranged prior to February due to the large number of items to be heard.

ACTION:

An additional meeting to be arranged in early 2024.

52. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstance decides is urgent

There was none.

53. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 16:55.