

Extract of Executive Board Minutes Relevant to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board

Executive Board – 21st September 2017

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB40 2017/18 QUARTER 1 SPENDING

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which summarised the overall revenue and capital spending position as at 30 June 2017.

In overall terms, revenue expenditure was £0.808m above the budget profile. It was reported that based on current spend patterns, projections showed that the Council would have a year-end outturn overspend position ranging between £3m and £3.5m, if no corrective action were taken. The main budget pressure facing the Council continued to be within the Children and Families Department, in particular out of borough residential placements and fostering.

The Capital Programme had been revised to reflect the number of changes in spending profiles and funding as schemes had developed; a list of those schemes that had been revised were set out in the report. Capital spending at 30 June 2017 totalled £39.4m which was 99% of planned spending at this stage. This represented 33.8% of the total Capital Programme of £116.4m.

The Council's balance sheet was monitored regularly in accordance with the Reserves and Balances Strategy which formed part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The key reserves and balances had been reviewed and were considered prudent and appropriate at this stage in the financial year and within the current financial climate.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to the absolutely essential;
- 2) Strategic Directors take appropriate action to contain overall spending within their total

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operational budget by year-end; and

- 3) Council be asked to approve the revised Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3, attached to the report.

EXB41 COUNCIL TAX SECTION 13A DISCOUNT POLICY STATEMENT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on a proposed amendment to the Council Tax Section 13A Discount Policy Statement.

The Board was advised that a recent Children's Society campaign called upon local authorities to do more to support families struggling with council tax debt, particularly care leavers. At its meeting on 5 September 2017, the Corporate Policy and Performance Board considered a report on the matter, recommending changes to the Council Tax Section 13A Discount Policy, so that care leavers were exempt from paying council tax until they reached their 25th birthday.

It was reported that, under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council had a general discretionary power to reduce the liability for council tax in relation to individual cases or classes of case that it may determine, where national discounts and exemptions could not be applied. It was proposed that Care Leavers relief would be available from the start of the 2018/19 financial year, with an estimated cost of £6,000 per annum.

RESOLVED: That the amendment to the Council Tax Section 13A Discount Policy Statement, to reduce to nil the amount of council tax payable by young people leaving care from the age of 18 to 25, be approved.

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EXB42 LOCAL DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATE RELIEF SCHEME

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which sought approval to establish a Local Discretionary Business Rate Relief Scheme.

The Board was advised that, on 8 March 2017, the Chancellor announced that the Government would make

available a discretionary fund of £300m nationally, to support those businesses which faced the steepest increase in business rates. It was reported that, following revaluation, those businesses facing an increase were already being supported through transitional arrangements. Additional help was also in place to support those businesses that had lost some or all of their small business rate relief and to public houses.

It was noted that, although the General Election had delayed the detailed implementation of the announcement, the necessary guidance and funding was now in place which enabled Councils to establish and implement their schemes. Section 31 grant funding would be administered through billing authorities' existing legal powers. It was reported that Halton had been allocated £285,000 over four years, to be spent as set out in the report.

Appendix 1 set out the proposed Local Discretionary Business Rates Relief Scheme, detailing eligibility criteria to be applied and the application process. There was a requirement for the Council to consult with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority on the design of the Local Scheme.

It was further reported that the Government had also announced a scheme of business rates relief for public houses, which would be fully funded under Section 31 grant funding, as well as a further scheme known as Support to Small Business Relief, which was intended to help those ratepayers that would lose some or all of their Small Business Rates Relief following revaluation.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Local Discretionary Business Rates Relief Scheme set out in the report and appendix, be approved, subject to consultation with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority;
- 2) delegated authority be granted to the Operational Director, Finance, in liaison with the Resources Portfolio holder, to finalise and implement the Scheme following appropriate consultation;
- 3) the scheme of business rates relief for public

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houses outlined in the report, be approved; and

- 4) the scheme of business rates relief support for small businesses outlined in the report, be approved.

EXB43 DISCRETIONARY NON DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on an application for discretionary non-domestic rate relief.

The Board was advised that, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business rate payer. Since 1 April 2017, the Council had been responsible for meeting the full cost of all mandatory and discretionary rate relief granted, as part of the Liverpool City Region 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme.

The report detailed an application from Bamboo Bear Childcare Limited, which operated from premises in Runcorn, providing childcare facilities for children aged 0-5 years old. It was reported that the organisation was not a registered charity and therefore was not eligible to receive mandatory rate relief. The request was for 100% discretionary rate relief for 2017/18, backdated to 1 November 2016. It was noted that the organisation had submitted an appeal to the Valuation Office Agency for a further reduction in the property's rateable value with the outcome of this request awaited.

The Board was reminded that the Council did not currently provide discretionary rate relief to any other private childcare providers within the Borough. It was also noted that the organisation was already well established within the Borough, with ambitious development plans and there was no indication that these plans would be influenced by the award of rate relief.

RESOLVED: That the request for 100% discretionary rate relief from Bamboo Bear Childcare Limited for the period from 1 November 2016 to 31 March 2018, be refused on the grounds set out in paragraph 3.8 of the report.

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EXB45 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 1) Whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- 2) Whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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EXB46 ACQUISITION OF BROSELEY HOUSE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on the acquisition of Broseley House, Widnes.

The Board was advised that there was an opportunity to acquire the freehold and leasehold interests in the property. Details of the financial implications were set out in the report for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the acquisition of the Freehold interest in Broseley House for the sum referred to in the report, be approved;
- 2) the acquisition of the Long Leasehold interest in Broseley House for the sum referred to in the report, be approved;
- 3) an allocation of a sum referred to in the report for demolition costs be approved; and
- 4) Council be recommended to approve a variation to the Capital Programme as referred to in the report, to cover the costs outlined in section 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 of the report.

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RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB55 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on progress against key milestones/objectives and performance targets for the first quarter 2017/18.

The Board was advised that the Directorate Performance Overview Report provided a strategic summary of key issues arising from performance in the relevant quarter for each Directorate, being aligned to Council priorities or functional areas. The Board noted that such information was key to the Council's management arrangements, with the Board having a key role in monitoring performance and strengthening accountability. Performance management would continue to be important in the demonstration of value for money and outward accountability.

RESOLVED: That the report and progress and performance information be noted.

EXB56 DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on an application for discretionary non-domestic rate relief.

The Board was advised that, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business rate payer. Since 1 April 2017, the Council had been responsible for meeting the full cost of all mandatory and discretionary rate relief granted, as part of the Liverpool City Region 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme.

The report set out the details of three applications which had been received from organisations that were registered as charities.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the request for 15% discretionary rate relief from Stick 'n' Step for the period 22 April 2017 to 31 March 2019 be approved;
- 2) the request for 15% discretionary rate relief from Halton District Citizens Advice Bureau Service for the period 12 June 2017 to 31 March 2019 be approved; and
- 3) the request for 15% discretionary rate relief from Community Integrated Care Ltd for the period 1 November 2016 to 31 March 2019, be rejected on the basis that the organisation operates nationally.

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EXB57 DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT SCHEME – WAIVER OF PROCUREMENT STANDING ORDER

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which sought approval to extend the contract for the provision of community support items under the Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS).

The Board was advised that the DSS was in its fifth

year of operation and provided two areas of support for members of the public - Emergency Support (food parcels and fuel support) and Community Support (household items).

It was reported that the current contractor for Community Support items was Argos, whose contract would expire on 31 March 2018. Given the current welfare reform changes, Members were advised that it was considered prudent to extend the existing contract whilst the impact of those changes upon DSS applications was assessed. It was also considered essential that the contractor was able to provide a wide range of items at relatively short notice and Argos had been able to demonstrate it was able to meet this requirement.

RESOLVED: That approval be given to the use of Procurement Standing Orders 1.14.3 (c) and 1.14.3 (d), in order to waive Procurement Standing Order 3.1 in respect of the contract with Argos for the provision of community support goods for the Discretionary Support Scheme.

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EXB66 2017/18 QUARTER 2 SPENDING

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which reported on the 2017/18 Quarter 2 spending as at 30 September 2017.

A summary of spending against the revenue budget up to 30 September 2017 was attached to the report at Appendix 1. This provided individual statements for each department. The Board was advised that, in overall terms, revenue expenditure was £1.939m above the budget profile at this stage. It was reported that over the last quarter, the position had worsened and increased by £1.131m. If current spending patterns continued, projections showed that the Council would be overspent by approximately £4m by year-end if no corrective action was taken.

It was further noted that the main budget pressure facing the Council continued to be within the Children and Families Department, with Out of Borough Residential Places and Out of Borough Fostering dominating the overspend position. In addition, the Complex Care Pool

Budget with Halton Clinical Commissioning Group was over budget at 30 September 2017, with financial pressures within the Service for health and social care services covering Residential and Domiciliary Care, Direct Payments and Day Care.

The Capital Programme had been revised to reflect a number of changes in spending profiles and funding as schemes had developed and these were detailed in Appendix 3.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to the absolutely essential;
- 2) Strategic Directors continue to take appropriate action to contain overall spending within their total operational budget by year-end; and
- 3) Council be recommended to approve the revised Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3.

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EXB67 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEAR REPORT 2017-18

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which updated Members on the activities undertaken on the money market, as required by the Treasury Management Policy.

The report provided supporting information on the economic background, interest rate forecast, short term borrowing rates, longer term borrowing rates, borrowing/investments, budget monitoring, new long term borrowing, policy guidelines and treasury management indicators. It was noted that no debt rescheduling had been undertaken during the quarter.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB68 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2018/19 to 2020/21.

The Board was advised that the MTFS set out a three year projection of resources and spending based on information currently available.

The projections in the forecast showed there was a need to make a significant level of savings over the next three years. This was the effect of projections of public spending through to 2020 which resulted from the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review. The MTFS took account of:

- The Comprehensive Spending Review 2015;
- The Local Government Finance Settlement 2017/18 dated 21 February 2017;
- The Budget 2017 announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8 March 2017; and
- The announcement of the Government's final position on the schools national funding formula and high needs formula dated 14 September 2017.

The MTFS provided initial guidance to the Council on its financial position into the medium term. Revenue savings of approximately £5.6m, £13.2m and £3.3m would be required over the next three years. It was noted that as a result, a total of £22.1m would need to be removed from the Council's budget which represented 21.4% of the net budget.

The Board was advised that the MTFS had a number of objectives, as listed in the report. The Council would need to consider these objectives when balancing its budget over the next three years. The report also set out the Council's budget strategy, with budget savings proposals and areas identified for further savings. The report contained details of the Council's Capital Strategy for the management of assets such as land and buildings in Council ownership.

Reason(s) for the Decision

To seek approval for the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2018/19 to 2020/21.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The alternative option of not maintaining a MTFS had been considered. However, this would not follow good financial management practice, as the MTFS was a key element in informing the Council's financial planning and budget setting processes.

Implementation Date

The Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018/21 would be implemented from 1 April 2018.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved;
- 2) the 2018/19 base budget be prepared on the basis of the underlying assumptions set out in the Strategy;
- 3) the Budget Strategy and Capital Strategy be approved;
- 4) the Reserves and Balances Strategy be approved;
- 5) the award of Council Tax Support for 2018/19 remains at the 2017/18 level of 21.55%; and
- 6) the Council's 2018/19 Council Tax Support grant is not shared with the Parish Councils.

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EXB69 DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2018/19 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, on the requirement for the Council to determine the Tax Base for its area and the Tax Base for each of the Parishes.

The Council was required to notify the Tax Base figure to the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Environment Agency by 31 January 2018. In addition, the Council was required to calculate and advise the Parish Councils of their relevant Tax Bases.

The Board was advised that the Tax Base was the measure used for calculating Council Tax and was used by both the billing authority (the Council) and the major precepting authorities (Cheshire Fire Authority and the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner), in the calculation of their Council Tax requirements. It was arrived at in accordance with a prescribed formula which represented the estimated full year number of chargeable dwellings in the Borough expressed in terms of the equivalent Band "D" dwellings. Taking account of all the relevant information and applying a 97% collection rate, the calculation for 2018/19 gave a base figure of 34,435 for the Borough as a whole.

It was noted that since 2013/14 the tax base calculation had included an element for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (the replacement for Council Tax Benefit).

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval for the 2018/19 Council Tax Base for the Borough.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

There is no alternative option, as unless the Council Tax Base is approved it would not be possible to set the level of Council Tax to be charged for 2018/19.

Implementation Date

The 2018/19 Council Tax Base will be implemented from 1st April 2018.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve

- 1) the Council Tax Base for 2018/19 be set at 34,435 for the Borough, and that the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Environment Agency be so notified; and
- 2) the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes be as follows:

Operational
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Parish	Tax Base
Hale	665
Halebank	529
Daresbury	172
Moore	328
Preston Brook	338
Sandymoor	1,112

(N.B. Councillor Ron Hignett declared a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item of business as he was a member of the Daresbury Public Sector Joint Venture Board)

EXB70 INITIAL BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which presented the revenue budget proposals for 2018/19.

The Board was advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast potential revenue budget funding gaps of £22m over the next three years. This figure assumed that the Council would apply a general council tax increase of 1.9% in each year with a levy of 3% social care precept in 2018/19. It was reported that the gap for 2018/19 was £5.6m.

Appendix 1 presented the first set of proposals totalling £2.2m and it was proposed to implement these immediately in order to achieve a part-year saving in 2017/18. This would assist in keeping the Council's overall spending in line with budget. In addition, a number of proposals would take time to implement and therefore commencing this process as soon as possible would assist with ensuring they were fully implemented from 1 April 2018.

It was reported that a second set of budget saving proposals currently under consideration by the Budget Working Group, would be recommended to Council on 7 March 2018, in order to deliver a balanced budget for 2018/19.

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval for the initial set of revenue budget proposals for 2018/19.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

There is no alternative option, as failure to set a balanced budget would put the Council in breach of statutory requirements.

Implementation Date

The 2018/19 revenue budget will be implemented from 1st April 2018.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the budget proposals for 2018/19 as set out in Appendix 1, attached to the report.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB71 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 3) Whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- 4) Whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being

information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO,
TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO AND RESOURCES
PORTFOLIO**

EXB72 FORMER CASTAWAY SITE - LAND DISPOSAL

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on the disposal of the former Castaway Site, Widnes.

The Board was advised that, following negotiations, heads of terms had been agreed in principle for the Council to sell the land as indicated on the plan appended to the report. Details of the proposed use of the land were set out in the report.

RESOLVED: That disposal of part of the former Castaway Site, as shown edged blue on the plan attached to the report, for the sum stated in the report, be approved.

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Resources

Executive Board – 14th December 2017

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB76 ANNUAL EXTERNAL AUDIT LETTER 2016/17

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which presented the Annual Audit Letter 2016/17.

The Board was advised that the Annual Audit Letter (the Letter) summarised the findings from the 2016/17 external audit completed by Grant Thornton, the Council's external auditor. The Letter included messages arising from the audit of the financial statements and the results of the work undertaken in assessing the Council's arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources.

Mark Heap, Audit Lead and Georgia Jones, Audit Manager for the external auditor, Grant Thornton UK LLP, attended the meeting and reported that an unqualified opinion had been issued on the Council's financial statements. The Letter also provided an unqualified conclusion that the Council had adequate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of

its resources.

The Board wished to place on record their thanks to all Officers that had assisted in the preparation of the audit.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Audit Letter 2016/17 be approved.

EXB77 AGENCY WORKER CONTRACT PROCUREMENT - 2018 TO 2022

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, regarding a contract for the supply of Agency Workers.

The Board was advised that in 2014, the Council accessed a contract through a framework for the supply of agency workers. It was reported that the framework contained a number of suppliers, referred to as "Neutral Vendors" which offered a service to source agency workers from individual employment agencies covering the wide range of disciplines used by public sector bodies.

It was noted that the contract was due to end in February 2018; Halton had been the Lead Authority for the review of Agency provision on behalf of the Liverpool City Region authorities. The report set out details of the options appraisal that was conducted.

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with Procurement Standing Order 2.10.1, the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, be authorised to enter into a contract with the preferred supplier assessed as being the most economically advantageous and effective organisation to supply agency workers within the Liverpool City Region. The contract will be awarded for a period of four years.

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