

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

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2023

EXB61	TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME AND BUDGET PROPOSALS 2023/24 TO 2025/26
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The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which outlined a recommendation to Council in respect of the budget savings proposals and the implementation of a transformation programme for the three year period 2023/24 to 2025/26.

The Board was advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), approved at its meeting on 17 November 2022, had identified funding gaps for the Council over the next three years. The latest MTFS forecast a total budget funding gap of around £25m over the next three years, with a gap of £17m for 2023/24.

Appendix 1 outlined proposed budget savings totalling £6.881m over the three year period 2023/24 to 2025/26. Given the significant forecast budget gap for 2023/24, further work would be undertaken to review the assumptions within the forecast and to identify further saving proposals and the scope to use one-off reserves to deliver a balanced budget for 2023/24.

In order to identify sufficient savings to bridge the forecast budget gaps, a more fundamental approach was required to transform delivery via the implementation of a three year Transformation Programme as outlined in Section 5 of the report.

The Board discussed the proposal to close both Warrington Road and Ditton Daycare Centres. Further information was provided on the significant financial losses made at both sites for a number of years, proposals to provide places for 2 to 4 year olds within the current nursery setting at the same site, communication with staff, parents and Trade Unions and a letter from Derek Twigg - Halton Member of Parliament.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Council's latest financial position and forecast budget gaps, as outlined within the section three of the report, be noted;
- 2) Council be recommended to approve the budget savings proposals for 2023/24 to 2025/26 presented in Appendix 1; and
- 3) Council be recommended to approve the three year transformation programme and funding arrangements, as outlined within section five of the report.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 16 FEBRUARY 2023

EXB74	BUDGET 2023/24
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The Board considered a report from the Operational Director, Finance, which outlined a recommendation to Council in respect of the Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2023/24.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), approved at the Executive Board meeting on 17 November 2022 had identified a funding gap of around £21.1m in 2023/24, £1.9m in 2024/25 and £2.0m in 2025/26. The Strategy had the following objectives:

- Deliver a balanced and sustainable budget;
- Prioritise spending towards the Council's priority areas;
- Avoid excessive Council Tax rises;
- Achieve significant cashable efficiency gains;
- Protect essential front line services and vulnerable members of the community; and
- Deliver improved procurement.

In terms of consultation, it was noted that the Council used various methods to listen to the views of the public, and Members own experiences through their Ward work was an important part of that process. Individual consultations were taking place in respect of specific budget proposals and equality impact assessments would be completed where necessary.

The Board received regular reports summarising spending in the current year against the budget. The latest report indicated that spending was forecast to be over budget in the current year by approximately £7.1m against a net budget of £111.7m.

The proposed revenue budget for 2023/24 totalled £140.880m; the departmental analysis of this was shown in Appendix B and the major reasons for change from the current budget were shown in Appendix C. A total of £2.830m of savings were approved by Council on 1 February 2023.

The Board was advised that the proposed budget incorporated the grant figures announced in the Local Government Finance Settlement. Additional funding for Adult's and Children's Social Care was announced as part of the provisional settlement and details of these were set out in the report.

Further information was also provided on the budget outlook, Halton's Council Tax, Parish precepts, Police, Fire and Liverpool City Region Mayor precepts, the Capital Programme, Prudential Code and School Budgets.

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval for the Council's revenue budget, capital programme and council tax 2023/24.

Implementation Date

8 March 2023.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended

- 1) to adopt the resolution set out in Appendix A, which includes setting the budget at £140.880m, the Council Tax requirement of £60.714m (before Parish, Police, Fire and LCR Combined Authority precepts) and the Band D Council Tax for Halton of £1,675.29;
- 2) to approve the capital programme set out in Appendix E;
- 3) to approve the introduction of a Council Tax Premium of 100% to properties where there is no resident and which are substantially furnished (typically referred to as second homes) from 1 April 2024, subject to legislation being enacted; and
- 4) to approve the Use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in Appendix F.

EXB75	CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/24
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The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, on the Council's Capital Strategy for 2023/24.

It was reported that all councils were required to produce a Capital Strategy annually, the aim of which was to ensure that the Council understood the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

Members were advised that the Capital Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, included on the same agenda; this detailed the expected activities of the treasury management function and incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy for 2023/24. It was noted that the successful delivery of the Capital Strategy would assist the Council in planning and funding its capital expenditure over the next three years.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the 2023/24 Capital Strategy, as presented in the Appendix attached to the report.

EXB76	2022/23 SPENDING AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022
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The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which reported the Council’s overall revenue net spending position as of 31 December 2022 together with a forecast outturn.

A summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 31 December 2022 was presented in Appendix 1, and Appendix 2 provided detailed figures for each individual Department. In overall terms the outturn forecast for the year showed that net spend would be over the approved budget by £7.098m. It was noted that this represented a lower figure than the figure of £7.586m forecast at 30 September 2022. The revisions to the Capital Programme were listed in the report and the revised Capital Programme was attached at Appendix 3.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to only absolutely essential items;
- 2) Strategic Directors take urgent action to identify areas where spending could be reduced or suspended for the remainder of the current financial year; and
- 3) Council be requested to approve the revisions to the Capital Programme as set out in paragraph 3.16.

EXB77	TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2023/24
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The Board received the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, (TMSS) which incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Strategy for 2023/24.

The TMSS was appended to the report and detailed the expected activities of the treasury function in the forthcoming financial year (2023/24). Its production and submission to Council was a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

The Local Government Act 2003 required the Council to have regard to the Prudential Code and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years, to ensure that the Council’s capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable.

The Act therefore required the Council to set out its treasury strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy (AIS), which set out the Council’s policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments. Government guidance notes stated that authorities could combine the TMSS and the AIS into one report, which the Council had done and was included in Section 4.

Members noted that the production of a Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement was required and a formal statement for approval was contained within the report at paragraph 2.3, with the full policy shown in Appendix A.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to adopt the policies, strategies, statements, prudential and treasury indicators outlined in the report.

EXB78	TAXI LICENSING MATTER - PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE TABLE OF FARES
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The Board considered a report of the Regulatory Committee which recommended a proposed increase to the Hackney Carriage Table of Fares.

It was noted that the request to increase fares had been received from members of the taxi trade and was due to the impact of costs of living crisis on the trade over the last 12 months. The Council had the discretion to fix the fares for Hackney Carriages within the Borough and fares may be varied in accordance with the statutory procedure set out in the report.

The report detailed the proposed increased, comparisons with neighbouring authorities and the written responses that had been received from the taxi trade in support of and against the proposal that were considered by the Regulatory Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) agree the proposed increase to the Hackney Carriage Table of Fares; and
- 2) authorise officers to commence the public notification and consultation in line with the statutory procedure as detailed in the report.

EXB79	CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2023-2024
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The Board received a report of the Chief Executive, which set out the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the 2023/24 Municipal Year, which was appended to the report for information.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the Calendar of Meetings for the 2023/24 Municipal Year, as appended to the report

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 16 MARCH 2023

EXB87	PENSIONS DISCRETIONS STATEMENT 2023/24
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The Board received the annual Pensions Discretions Statement for 2023-24 for Halton Borough Council.

The Council was required to publish a Pension Discretion Statement annually, to advise the discretions it intended to exercise under the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) – this was appended to the report.

It was reported that the Pensions Discretion Statement for 2023-24 was based upon the statement for 2022-23, which was approved by Executive Board in February 2022. It was noted that no new discretions had been added.

RESOLVED: That the Board approve the Pensions Discretions Statement for 2023-24.

EXB88	THE CORPORATE PLAN: INTERIM APPROACH AND THE WAY FORWARD
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The Board considered a report which outlined the approach to producing an interim Corporate Plan for the Council. In order to progress the initial work, North West Employers had facilitated and supported a session with members of the Board and Management Team on 6 December 2022. Following the session, it was agreed that an interim Plan with a Statement of Intent would be in place by March 2024 and a Corporate Plan would be produced from April 2024. The report set out the key themes for Halton, timeline and engagement with the public (the ‘Big Conversation’).

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) agree on the interim approach outlined and the way forward culminating in a new Council Corporate Plan being launched on 1 April 2024;
- 2) the report be noted;
- 3) approves the Statement of Intent for publication on 1 April 2023; and
- 4) endorses the approach to facilitate the ‘Big Conversation’.

EXB89	DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF
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The Board considered a report from the Operational Director, Finance which presented two applications for discretionary non-domestic rate relief, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The report outlined details of the applications from Widnes Gymnastics Academy and Runcorn Amateur Boxing Club, in respect of their premises and the potential annual cost to the Council of granting discretionary rate relief to each organisation.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the application for 15% discretionary rate relief from Widnes Gymnastics Academy with effect from 14 July 2022, be approved; and
- 2) the application for 90% discretionary rate relief from Runcorn Amateur Boxing Club with effect from 1 June 2022, be approved.

EXB90	REVIEW OF COUNCIL WIDE FEES AND CHARGES
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The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, on the review of the Council wide fees and charges for 2023/24 for services provided by the Council's Directorates.

The Board was advised that, as part of the budget preparations for 2023/24, a review of fees and charges had been carried out. The aim in setting fees and charges was to ensure that the Council fully recovered the cost incurred in providing the service, although this was dependent on a number of factors outside of the agreed charge. These were detailed in the report and noted as including demand, which could change year on year and be affected by weather, economy, regional and national events and demographics; competition, where there may be a strong competitive market; and a statutory element, where some charges were outside the control of the Council and there was no discretion to what could be charged.

Attached at Appendix A was the proposed schedule of statutory fees for 2023/24 and the chargeable rates for The Brindley Theatre and the Registrar's Service were attached at Appendix B and C respectively, for 2023/24.

RESOLVED: That the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix A attached to the report and for 2023/24 as set out in Appendices B and C attached to the report, be approved.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 20 APRIL 2023

EXB105	HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND NO.4 2023-24
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The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, which sought approval for a proposed Scheme and Spending Plan, regarding how the Council's grant allocation of £2.6m from the Government for the 2023/24 Household Support Fund might be utilised. The grant allocation would provide continuation of the

Household Support Fund for a further twelve months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

A Spending Plan had been prepared, as set out in the Appendix, regarding how the grant funding might be utilised via a combination of Council departments and the voluntary sector, to deliver help and assistance to vulnerable households over the twelve month period. The Plan would also provide a basis for monitoring spending against the grant, as required by the DWP and ensure that it was fully utilised in accordance with the grant guidance by 31 March 2024.

The Spending Plan must be submitted to the DWP by 17 May 2023. It was proposed that any subsequent revisions to the Plan would be approved by the Operational Director, Finance, in consultation with the Leader. Regular monitoring reports would be presented to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Scheme and Spending Plan for the 2023/24 Housing Support Fund, as outlined in the report and appendix, be approved;
- 2) regular progress reports be presented to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board; and
- 3) any subsequent revisions to the Spending Plan be approved by the Operational Director, Finance in consultation with the Leader.

EXB106	DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF
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The Board considered a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented an application for discretionary non-domestic rate relief, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The report outlined details of the application from SHAP Limited in respect of their premises and the potential annual cost to the Council of granting discretionary rate relief to the organisation.

RESOLVED: That the application for discretionary rate relief for SHAP Limited be approved at 15% with effect from 11 January 2023.

EXB107	ANNUAL REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION 2023
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The Board received a report of the Operational Director – Legal and Democratic Services, which sought the approval of Council to a small number of changes to the Constitution.

The revised version of the Constitution picked up the changes to the Council's working arrangements that had taken place during the year, as well as other changes which were intended to assist the Council to operate more effectively.

Members were referred to Appendix one where the proposed amendments were listed; these had been considered by the Chief Executive and the Leader, in accordance with Article 16.02.

RESOLVED: That Executive Board recommends Council to approve the changes to the Constitution including the matters set out in Appendix one.