

Council

A meeting of Council was held on Wednesday, 12th June, 2013.

Present: The Worshipful the Mayor (Cllr Kathryn Nelson), Cllr Mrs Lynne Apedaile, Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Mark Chatburn, Cllr Julia Cherrett, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Michael Clark, Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Phillip Dennis, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Robert Gibson, Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Ben Houchen, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Elliot Kennedy, Cllr Jean Kirby, Cllr Paul Kirton, Cllr Miss Tina Large, Cllr Colin Leckonby, Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Ken Lupton, Cllr Ray McCall, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Ross Patterson, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Maureen Rigg, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Michael Smith, Cllr Andrew Stephenson, Cllr Norma Stephenson O.B.E, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Tracey Stott, Cllr Steve Walmsley, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr David Wilburn, Cllr Norma Wilburn, Cllr Mrs Mary Womphrey, Cllr Mick Womphrey, Cllr Bill Woodhead and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: N Schneider (CE); J Danks, L King (R), J Humphreys (CESC); P Dobson, P Kelly (DPH); D E Bond, P K Bell (LD).

Also in attendance: 4 members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr David Coleman, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Terry Laing, Cllr Mick Moore and Cllr David Rose.

C Evacuation Plan

34/13

The evacuation plan was noted.

C Declarations of Interest

35/13

Councillor Cunningham declared a personal / prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 6 - Medium Term Financial Plan - Big Ticket Update & Savings Proposals as her son worked for the Community Energy Savings Programme (CESP).

C Minutes

36/13

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th May 2013 were signed by the Worshipful the Mayor as a correct record.

C Public Question Time

37/13

The Director of Law & Democracy informed Members that no Public Questions had been received.

C Members' Policy Seminar Programme

38/13

Consideration was given to a report that provided Council with an overview of content from the Members Policy Seminar in May 2013, which provided updates on regeneration projects and housing in the Borough.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

C Medium Term Financial Plan - Big Ticket update

39/13

Consideration was given to a report on the financial challenges facing the Council, and which provided an update on the Big Ticket reviews and proposed a range of savings to contribute to the financial pressures.

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) report to Council on 27 February 2013 set a balanced budget for 2013/14 and agreed an approach to addressing the budget gap in future years. A table showing the budget gap was detailed within the report.

The MTFP reflected a significant reduction in Government Funding over recent years. Between 2010/11 and 2013/14 there had been a reduction of £31m which was a 25% cash reduction (35% in real terms).

The Government had only provided indicative grant allocations to 2014/15 and the future funding assumptions in the MTFP were based on Government announcements at the time of an estimated reduction of an additional £20m by 2016/17, which would be a total of £51m over the 7 years, a 42% reduction (58% in real terms). The recent announcements as part of the Chancellor's latest Budget Statement indicated that there would be further restrictions on Public Sector Spending which would inevitably mean further reductions which could be in excess of £3m by 2016/17. Further details were expected and the 2015/16 Spending Review was due to be announced on 26 June 2013. ANEC had prepared a submission to Ministers and this was attached to the report at Appendix A.

Also, a number of significant changes to Local Government finance had been introduced which would take effect in 2013/14 including Business Rates retention and Local Council Tax Support Scheme. In addition, assumptions have had been made around pay increases, income from New Homes Bonus, health funding and Council Tax capping levels.

Nonetheless the Council had a long history of strong financial management and of providing value for money. It was the first Council in the country to introduce 3 year financial planning and its flexible approach between years was seen as very innovative. For the first 10 years of the Unitary Council most services received only 1% increases in budgets despite inflation running much higher. This encouraged an efficient approach and provided a development fund which was used to progress Council priorities. The Council was one of only three in the country to achieve top ranking by the Audit Commission on managing its resources. This had been reinforced in the letter from the District Auditor who suggested that the Council had a strong track record of delivering savings and efficiencies and was therefore well prepared for the challenges ahead.

This strong culture of managing resources well was apparent across the Council and resided both with Members and officers (it being a core management competency). It involved challenging what the Council did, why the Council did it and how the Council did it. The EIT programme being a prime example. This delivered approximately £20m of savings, with approximately 600 fewer staff being employed.

Proposals had been identified and these had been discussed by:

- a. Informal Cabinet
- b. Informal Executive Scrutiny sessions
- c. Members seminars

The report to Council on 27 February 2013 agreed the approach to dealing with the projected budget gap as twofold. Firstly, the Big Ticket reviews were to continue with a target to at least cap growth in these areas, which would aim to remove £7.2m from the budget gap by 2016/7. This would mean there would remain a gap (estimated at £10.6m) and it was agreed that officers were to develop proposals for savings or service reductions which would then be considered at various Member meetings including Cabinet, Executive Scrutiny and Members Seminars.

The Council continued to experience pressures and growth to a range of services, not least in Social Care.

There were 3 Big Ticket reviews:-

Childrens Board chaired by Jane Humphreys

Adults Board chaired by Jane Humphreys

Waste & Energy Board chaired by Paul Dobson

There was a separate report attached at Appendix B outlining progress in all 3 areas. The reviews were wide-ranging and required services to undertake radical transformations. They were looking for example, at high cost placements; different methods for fostering; alternative provision for home care. Some initiatives had already been introduced. Photovoltaic panels were being fitted to Council buildings and split body vehicles were being introduced to recycling rounds. A recent report to Cabinet also approved the redevelopment of King Edwin School. These three initiatives alone would generate savings of almost £1m. Quarterly reports to Cabinet and Executive Scrutiny would update on progress and there would be opportunities via Members Seminars and Group sessions for input and debate.

There were a number of savings proposals which Cabinet was recommending for implementation and these were attached to the report at Appendix C.

The proposals covered all portfolios and totalled £7.4m by 2016/17. They were either:

- a. Management reductions
- b. Service Restructures
- c. Reductions or removal of subsidies to schools and outside bodies
- d. Service reductions

There were also a number of areas where Cabinet was recommending a detailed service review. These were outlined at Appendix D and had a target saving of £2m by 2016/17 and would include appropriate consultation arrangements. These would be reported back to Cabinet in due course. The schedule also indicated where Equality Impact Assessments and public consultation might be required.

All services had been considered and the strong resource management culture had been evident throughout the exercise. CMT and Heads of Service were very aware of the policy priorities and this had played a significant part in the development of the proposals as had the understanding of the Council's statutory responsibilities. The general approach had been to protect the "front

line” and the most vulnerable. Services in Resources and Law & Democracy for example, contribute 25% of their budget to the savings. Many of the proposals look to join teams still further thereby reducing the number of senior managers. The proposals for many of the reviews, which were to be undertaken and reported back in the future, were to target resources/services more.

The proposals included a number of changes to Heads of Service. There was an overall reduction of 5 posts, in addition to the reduction of 1 post following the merger of the Head of Human Resources / Head of Communications post and the reduction of 2 posts within CESC as part of the EIT process. This represented an overall reduction in excess of 30% and the proposed changes were as follows:-

The functions of the Head of Finance and Assets and the Head of Finance and Procurement would be merged into one post with effect from 2014. The Head of Finance and Procurement had expressed a preference for voluntary redundancy and it was therefore recommended that the Head of Finance and Assets would take on Financial Planning and Audit, Risk Management and Insurance and Health & Safety.

The post of Partnership manager would be deleted, with some of the functions being taken on by the remaining 2 Heads of Service in Xentrall. The Partnership Manager would therefore be in a redundancy situation.

The post of Head of Legal Services would be deleted, with the Director of Law and Democracy taking on direct responsibility for the management of Legal Services. The current Head of Legal Services had expressed a preference for Voluntary Redundancy.

The functions of the Head of Housing and the Community Safety functions which were the responsibility of the Head of Community Safety would be combined. Following the transfer of public health responsibilities, there was the opportunity to consider Health functions across the Council and as such it was proposed that the responsibility for Environmental Health Services would transfer to the Director of Public Health. The Head of Community Safety had expressed a preference for Voluntary Redundancy and therefore the Head of Housing would take on the additional Community Safety responsibilities. The Head of Community Safety also carried out a number of lead roles for the Council and it was recommended that the decision on who carried out these roles in the future be delegated to the Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services.

It was proposed that The Head of Business Support post be deleted. The Registrars and Bereavement Service would transfer to the Head of Direct Services, with responsibility for Events transferring to the Head of Arts, Leisure and Culture. Options for the Performance and Support aspect were being considered and it was recommended that the final decision on this aspect of the Service be delegated to the Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services. The Head of Business Support had expressed a preference for Voluntary Redundancy.

Members were aware of the commitment to deliver savings from the Big Ticket

areas and there was a significant workload involved. To support this, a number of temporary arrangements had been put in place within CESC and it had been identified that an additional Head of Service was required on a temporary basis to support and manage the Big Ticket process. This opportunity would be ring fenced to the Heads of Service identified as being in a redundancy situation with the usual Member appointment process followed for Head of Service posts being followed.

The posts affected by the changes would need to be subject to review through job evaluation.

With regard to staffing a reduction in funding of this magnitude would undoubtedly have an impact on staff. A reduction of around 300 posts was referred to specifically in the proposals and others would arise as proposals were firmed up and reviews finalised. The breakdown by levels of staff was detailed within the report.

Paragraph 1 had identified that there was a balanced budget position for 2013/14. The proposals incorporated into the report meant that some of the savings would be delivered in 2013/14 which would increase the one off resource available by £1.9m. Council had approved, via the urgency route, as reported to Council on 8 May 2013, the allocation of £175,000 to support super-fast broadband.

Since the budget had been approved by Council in February, there had been some additional calls on one of Resources identified and these were detailed within the report.

The remaining one off funding would be considered as part of future MTFP update reports.

The report concluded that the overall savings total, assuming that the reviews delivered in line with the target, was £9.4m by 2016/17. Although this was short of the £10.6m gap, the reviews were being targeted for early delivery, with most beginning to deliver in 2014/15. This should allow the Council to continue with its planned approach over the medium term through, if necessary, utilising the savings to bridge the 2016/17 gap.

Once there was further clarity around Government funding and the MTFP, the position for future years would be re-assessed and further savings and service reductions could not be ruled out. Further information would be provided as part of the MTFP update reports.

Members were provided with Equality Impact Assessments for Proposed Budget Reduction Measures in Bus Subsidies, Cashiering and the Proposed Budget Reduction Measures in Countryside Parks.

Councillor Cook moved and Councillor Beall seconded that:-

1. The level of funding reductions be noted and the savings identified at Appendix C be approved.
2. The reviews of services outlined at Appendix D be undertaken.

3. The use of one-off funding outlined in paragraph 27 be approved.
4. The progress to deliver savings in Big Ticket areas at Appendix B be noted.

Councillor Apedaile moved and Councillor Leckonby seconded the following amendment:-

Amend recommendation 1 to Council, on Agenda item 6 at Page 1, by adding the words;- 'save for and excluding the automated arrangements for the Town Hall in the Housing & Community Safety portfolio, Community Protection service area, and reduce the overall estimated savings by £6,000 for 2013/14 and £12,000 per annum thereafter'.

A vote took place and the amendment was not carried.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The level of funding reductions be noted and the savings identified at Appendix C be approved.
2. The reviews of services outlined at Appendix D be undertaken.
3. The use of one-off funding outlined in paragraph 27 be approved.
4. The progress to deliver savings in Big Ticket areas at Appendix B be noted.

**C
40/13**

Motion

The following motion had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.1 moved by Councillor Clark, seconded by Councillor Beall:-

"Stockton Crown Post Office is an essential part of the local economy, a valuable asset to the town and is relied upon by local residents and businesses as well as people who collect their pensions and benefits here. The staff are well-trained and have a wealth of experience between them which could be lost under the company's plans to close this office and find what it calls a 'retail partner'.

At a time when the council and its partners are doing all they can to revitalise the Town Centre the closure of this Post Office would be a major blow to the local economy and to the services which many people rely on.

Accordingly, the Council fully supports Stockton North MP Alex Cunningham and the CWU in their campaign to retain the people's Post Office which is currently one of 76 nationwide scheduled to be closed or offered to a yet unidentified private sector partner. We also call on the MP for Stockton South to join in this campaign.

We believe that the closure will lead to a reduced and less professional service and jeopardise jobs. We would also urge all members to sign the on-line petition and fight this ill-advised back door privatisation of an essential public service."

The motion was agreed.

C
41/13 **Members' Question Time**

The following question was submitted by Councillor Walmsley for response by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Finance:-

"Why is it necessary to have questions submitted 10 days before each Council meeting?"

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Finance responded with:-

"At its meeting on 19 October 2011 (minute C150/11) Council agreed a number of recommendations put forward by the Members Advisory Panel at its meeting on 30 September 2011 (minute MAP4/11)."

Councillor Walmsley asked the following supplementary question:-

"I have asked this question before and I got no rational answer. I seem to remember I presented one complaint which was that Cabinet Members had prepared speeches that invariably put everyone to sleep. All that has happened since is that answers have been shortened, but clearly researched and rehearsed. Couldn't papers for full Council still be put together without Members' Questions which could be tabled on the day?"

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Finance responded with:-

"One of the recommendations (agreed by Council) was that the notice period for receipt of Member and Public Questions and Member Motions should be extended to 7 clear working days, to allow all Council business which is to be discussed to be included in full within the Council Summons when published and available on line.

Councillor Walmsley was in attendance at the 30 September 2011 MAP meeting and the 19 October 2011 Council meeting.

The extended notice period also allows sufficient time for a full answer to be provided at the meeting to the more detailed questions, rather than having to circulate a response (either in whole or in part) after the meeting.

On 21 October 2009 (minute C210/09) Council agreed that to avoid questions being unnecessarily asked at Council meetings, all Members should consider initially seeking satisfactory answers to those questions from relevant Directors / Cabinet Members outside of the Council meetings. That had been proposed at the Members Advisory Panel Meeting on 6 October 2009 (minute MAP 15/09). Councillor Walmsley was present at both of these meetings."

The following question was submitted by Councillor Walmsley for response by the Cabinet Member for Arts, Leisure & Culture:-

"At the last Cabinet meeting, I argued the case for Westbury Street library to be kept open - pointing out the nonsense of what was proposed in relation to

transfer to a peripheral, smaller venue, inadequate consultation, and also to the fact that the report gave no plausible reason whatsoever for closure. At the same meeting, the Deputy Leader suggested that decisions were made on a 'use it or lose it basis.' Would 60,000 visits in the last year indicate that the library was being used?"

The Cabinet Member for Arts, Leisure & Culture responded with:-

"The proposal to explore co-location of Westbury Street into the Riverbank Centre was first highlighted as an option within the Cabinet report of December 2011, then reiterated and further detailed in the Cabinet report of November 2012 as a basis for public consultation. Public meetings were held at each affected Library Branch, and I believe Councillor Walmsley acknowledged that he attended the meeting at Westbury Street on 12th February 2013.

The evidence provided in the Cabinet report and supporting documents made available to Members demonstrates that there was a slight majority of people responding to the public consultation who were in favour of the co-location of services in the Riverbank Centre. The location of Library Branches within the district is based on consideration of how to serve an area of approximately 81sq. miles with 10 or 11 fixed service points. In this context an argument that a 250 metre movement of a service point renders it 'peripheral' is not a realistic argument."

Councillor Walmsley asked the following supplementary question:-

"This is another example where Cabinet have got something woefully wrong, but with the knowledge that a servile majority on Council will just waive it through. 60,000 visits in a year, up 20% - half of which were not for borrowing books, but for advice, access to computers which they now need for a whole raft of reasons and a host of communities activities. But I wouldn't expect the Cabinet Member to know a great deal about this and in fact have any first hand knowledge about this area of Thornaby. So my supplementary question is: Is there a secret list of preferred bidders for the transfer of assets and are taxi drivers given priority notification of successful bidders because they seem to know before Councillors are informed?"

The Cabinet Member for Arts, Leisure & Culture responded with:-

"Not to my knowledge."

The following question was submitted by Councillor Walmsley for response by the Leader of the Council:-

"A leaflet is being circulated in Ingleby Barwick accusing Stockton Council of turning down a planning application for a Free School. It goes on to say: "worryingly it seems they (Stockton Council) might want to stop the school only to see the site covered in housing in the future" - the implication being that it is only the school that SBC opposes. Can the Leader tell us if there is any truth in the allegation?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"Thank you for the opportunity to clarify the situation, if as you suggest, some inaccurate facts are being distributed. The Local Planning Authority rejected the application on the following grounds:-

01. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the proposed development represents an unjustified incursion into the Bassleton Beck valley green wedge and by virtue of its scale and nature would have an unacceptable detrimental impact on the open character and visual amenity of the area and thereby harm the amenity value of the site and the separation that exists between the settlements of Ingleby Barwick and Thornaby, contrary to saved policy H03 of the Adopted Stockton on Tees Local Plan and policies CS3(8) and CS10(3) of the Adopted Core Strategy and paragraph 123 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

02. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the applicant has failed to provide any justification or viability assessment to satisfy the Local Planning Authority that would reasonably justify a reduction in affordable housing provision, from the minimum 20% level identified within the Core Strategy, contrary to the requirements of Policy CS8 (5) of the Core Strategy and paragraph 50 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Consideration may have been very different if the application had been for a school by itself. Indeed the many local objectors' only concerns related to the unnecessary residential elements of the application. The Council has not identified the site as a suitable sustainable housing site as part of its LDF."

Councillor Walmsley asked the following supplementary question:-

"I'm a bit puzzled over this one. The leaflet is being distributed by the local MP who, like IBIS Members, supports this Free School madness. And so my question is: If Labour is predominately the guilty party in blocking the school, why are IBIS keeping them in power?"

The Leader of the Council responded with:-

"The Free School is not in our power to deliver. The identified site for the Free School and housing is on green wedge land. The Council's declared preferred option is to see an extension to the existing All Saints School, thereby negating any need for additional housing."

C 42/13 Forward Plan and Leader's Statement

The Leader of the Council gave his Forward Plan and Leaders Statement.

Cabinet had met on 16th May and considered a wide range of issues – of particular interest were reports on:-

- The latest phase of work on the Asset review, school capital and site disposal plans
- The Medium Term Financial Plan savings proposals

- A proposal to select a delivery partner to deliver the new ECO commitment in the Borough – to follow the Go Warm Scheme – this would deliver up to £20 million additional private sector investment in the Borough
- A review of the way forward on supporting employability schemes in the Borough
- The Xentrall annual report and
- An update on individual electoral registration

The beginning of June also saw a great success at the Riveting Stuff Festival at the Barrage Part of the Festival of the North East – thousands of people enjoyed the Festival of Innovation and Engineering in the sunshine.

The Leader of the Council gave congratulations (and commiserations) go to all the staff and volunteers at Preston Hall Museum and Grounds. It had been learnt last week that the Council had been pipped at the post in the finals of the Art Fund Museum of the Year competition. However, everyone should be proud of the incredible achievement of being ranked in the top 10 in this national competition.

Looking Ahead the Cabinet would meet on 13th June 2013 to consider:-

- A follow up report on the action plan from the Ofsted inspection of Child Protection
- A report on the Local Strategic Partnership “Tackling Disadvantage”
- An update on the Medium Term Financial Plan update
- The review of the full year performance for 2012/13.
- And to review the draft Supplementary Planning Document on the provision of Affordable Housing and the need for viability evidence.

The Leader of the Council had a working lunch hosted by Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) with Graham Pendlebury, a senior Whitehall official and the Director of Local Transport at the DFE where a number of issues on city deal were worked through. He was the Tees Valley main Cabinet Office contact for the City Deal. Work continued on the development of the City Deal as work towards submission of the bid continued.

Looking further ahead the outcome of the Government Spending Review on 26 June was awaited.

The Minister for Transport - Norman Baker would be visiting the Tees Valley later in June and would be meeting with TVU.

Finally, on 5th – 7th July there would be the Stockton Cycling Festival. The races in Stockton town centre on the Friday evening would be spectacular and the family fun rides on Sunday promised to be a great day out.

