

Minutes

Policy Review Committee

Venue:	Microsoft Teams - Remote
Date:	Tuesday, 12 January 2021
Time:	5.00 pm
Members present remotely via Teams:	Councillors A Lee (Chair), T Grogan (Vice-Chair), M Jordan, K Arthur, J Chilvers, R Packham, J Shaw-Wright, M McCartney
	Also present: Executive Members Cllrs C Lunn and R Musgrave
Officers present remotely via Teams:	Karen Iveson – Chief Finance Officer, Dave Caulfield – Director of Economic Regeneration and Place, Suzan Harrington – Director of Corporate Services and Commissioning, Martin Grainger – Head of Planning, Caroline Skelly – Planning Policy Manager, Peter Williams – Head of Finance, Sarah Thompson – Housing Service Manager, Tammy Fox – Revenues and Benefits Manager, Michelle Dinsdale – Senior Policy and Performance Officer, Victoria Foreman – Democratic Services Officer
Others present remotely via Teams:	Guy Thompson, Programme Director - White Rose Forest Partnership

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

16 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor K Arthur declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 – Preferred Options Local Plan Consultation Document. The report mentioned Transport for the North and, by extension, Network Rail, who were Councillor Arthur's employers. Councillor Arthur did not leave the meeting during consideration thereof.

17 MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2020.

RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee meeting held on 20 October 2020 for signing by the Chair.

18 CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE

There was no Chair's address to the Policy Review Committee.

19 UPDATE FROM THE LOW CARBON WORKING GROUP (STANDING ITEM) (PR/20/7)

The Committee received updates from the Director of Economic Regeneration and Place and Senior Policy and Performance Officer on the Executive's consideration of the Low Carbon Working Group report.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Executive Member for Place Shaping was in attendance at the meeting and asked that representatives from the Working Group accompany him to talk to the Executive about the report; the Chair of the Committee and Councillor R Packham confirmed that they would do so. The report would be considered by the Executive in full on 4 February 2021.

Members were pleased that the Council was leading the way in the district on low carbon work and agreed that it was important to continue to build on the work already undertaken.

The Lead Executive Member for Place Shaping explained that further interrogation of some of the low carbon measures was required to give a clearer picture of the best ways to reduce and offset the Council's carbon footprint.

Also in attendance at the meeting was Guy Thompson from the White Rose Forest Partnership (WRFP), who gave an overview of the organisation's work. The Council was well placed to develop a strategic partnership with WRFP that could bring numerous benefits to the district. The WRFP was a joint venture agreement in North Yorkshire with Kirklees Council acting as the organiser, with any plans or investment in a Council area having to reflect the priorities of the local authority in which it was taking place. Members noted that landowners were encouraged into the process by a small team based at Kirklees Council, and that there was a funding group that included the Forestry Commission, the Woodlands Trust and other such bodies. Sites for planting had been identified and funded in Craven and Leeds, with more to come in the future.

The Committee asked if it was possible to begin tree planting in the district quickly; Mr Thompson explained that sites needed to be identified and analysed first, landowners communicated with, and the design and funding of the scheme supported.

Members were pleased to note that the WRF also had a 'landscapes for water' project which looked at the effects of tree planting on areas prone to flooding.

The Committee asked that the WRF attend the next meeting of the Low Carbon Working Group in order for further discussions on tree planting to take place; Officers emphasised the importance of the work being evidence based and linked to the Council's new Local Plan.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the update on the work of the Low Carbon Working Group and requested that a representative from the White Rose Forest Partnership attend the next meeting of the Working Group.

20 UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE (PR/20/8)

The Committee received the report of the Revenues and Benefits Manager which asked Members to consider the content of the report, note any changes, and make any comments on Universal Credit.

Officers explained that the Universal Credit Full Service was introduced in the Selby District in May 2018. Claim numbers had continued to rise in the District due to the natural migration of customers onto the benefit. The Council continued to support customers who transitioned onto Universal Credit; the report provided an update on Universal Credit in the District and any changes relating to ongoing COVID-19 situation.

Members asked a number of questions in relation to the report on matters such as the future of the hardship fund, incidences of homelessness relating to the number of people on Universal Credit and council tax support.

The Committee agreed that they should still receive regular updates on Universal Credit, but that just headline figures would suffice as opposed to longer written reports; these next set of figures were requested for around six months' time. Officers confirmed that this would be possible as the Council received a quarterly report from the Department for Work and Pensions, which could feed into the figures to be presented to Members.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report and requested that headline figures relating to the management of Universal Credit at the Council be presented to the Committee in six months' time.

**21 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021-22
AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (PR/20/9)**

The Committee received the report of the Chief Finance Officer which asked the Committee to provide comments on the Draft Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2021-2022.

Also in attendance at the meeting was Councillor L Lunn, Lead Executive Member for Finance and Resources.

Officers explained that the report presented the draft revenue budget, capital programmes and the Programme for Growth for 2021/22 to 2023/24. Subject to the confirmation of the Local Government Finance Settlement and Council Tax level, the 2021/22 budget was expected to require £2.270m of funds earmarked in the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve (BRER) for revenue support.

Members noted that a Council Tax freeze for 2021/22 was proposed; this was a departure from the approved Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and had added £160k p.a. to the forecast deficits. A CPI+1% increase was assumed for housing rents.

The Committee were informed that in 2021/22 (subject to confirmation of these receipts) it was proposed that £9.2m of renewable energy business rates be transferred to the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve. This would help to provide future support to the revenue budget as capacity was, in the shorter term, diverted towards the on-going Covid-19 response and existing investment programmes.

Officers went on to explain that the Medium-Term Financial Plan (3-year draft budget) showed there was an underlying gap between core spending (with spending reflecting the budget risk highlighted in the MTFS) and current assumed core funding as a result of New Homes Bonus being phased out and the renewable energy business rates windfalls ceasing. Beyond 2021/22 the Council awaited the outcome of the Government's Fair Funding Review, further consultation on the future of New Homes Bonus and reform of the Business Rates Retention System, to confirm the need for and level of future savings.

Members acknowledged that there was capacity in reserves to smooth the impact of funding reductions and the draft budget proposed deferring savings until 2023/24 when the outcome of the Fairer Funding Review should be known. However, the on-going use of reserves to support the revenue budget was not a long-term sustainable solution and therefore achievement of efficiency savings and additional income generation remained crucial as plans for Business Rates and Council Tax growth were brought to fruition, and opportunities for savings would continue to be captured as they arose.

Officers confirmed that the draft budget was subject to public consultation

before the Executive finalised their proposals in February 2021.

Members were pleased to note that the proposal was to freeze council tax for the 2021-22 year, as many people were under a great deal of financial pressure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was suggested by some Members that rents should also have been frozen.

The Committee asked a number of questions relating to the improvement of industrial units, grants, loans, savings and rents.

Officers confirmed that numerous Council resources would be directed towards tackling Covid-19 in the coming year, and that the majority of proposed savings would be pushed back. Members were reminded that with regards to housing rents, this was a ringfenced account and as such these monies would go directly back into the service in order to invest in the planned improvements to tenants' homes.

RESOLVED:

The Policy Review Committee endorsed the Executive's draft budget proposals for 2021-22 including the proposed freeze in Council Tax.

22 PREFERRED OPTIONS LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION DOCUMENT (PR/20/10)

The Committee received the report of the Planning Policy Manager which asked Members to consider and endorse the Preferred Options Local Plan Consultation Document.

Officers explained that the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the requirements in relation to the preparation of Local Plans. Although no longer a formal requirement of the Regulations, the consultation on the Council's Preferred Options allowed for proper engagement with local communities and stakeholders on the emerging spatial strategy, potential allocations and policy approach for the Local Plan. The current Local Development Scheme set out the timetable for the preparation of the new Local Plan and included consultation on preferred Options between January and March 2021.

The report and presentation given by Officers provided the Committee with a summary of the Preferred Options Local Plan Document and outlined the proposed consultation arrangements.

Some Members expressed concerns relating to the consultation, in that there were members of the public that did not have access to the internet and as a result would not be able to respond if they could not attend in-person events. Officers acknowledged that this may be the case for some residents but explained that a great deal was being done to ensure that people could still engage with the consultation and submit their views for consideration. It was also essential that the development of the Local

Plan continued in order to give clarity and certainty to planning and development arrangements in the district.

The Committee suggested that further communications work be undertaken on the consultation to ensure that as many residents as possible were aware that it was going ahead. Members agreed that maintaining control of strategic planning in the district was very important in order to prevent inappropriate development.

Officers were thanked for the work they had done on the Local Plan so far; Members emphasised the importance of encouraging responses to the consultation in their local communities.

RESOLVED:

The Committee endorsed the Preferred Options Local Plan Consultation Document.

23 DRAFT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING (PR/20/11)

The Committee received the report of the Housing Service Manager which introduced the new Draft Development Strategy for Affordable Housing and asked Members to consider and submit their comments on it.

Officers explained that the proposed strategy set out the Council's plans to build new Council homes and the support and delivery by Selby and District Housing Trust (SDHT). It aimed to strengthen and build on the aims for Selby District Council to increase its supply of affordable housing stock through direct development, as set out in the original Affordable Development Strategy in 2013.

Members noted that the Council was a stock-retaining local authority that owned 3000 homes, and which took pride in its strong landlord management service. The strategy aimed to strengthen the service by increasing the number of homes.

The Committee were informed that the new Affordable Development Strategy linked to a number of other strategies and associated policies and procedures, including the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Housing Strategy.

Officers went on to explain that in February 2019 the Strategic Housing Market Needs Assessment (SHMA) highlighted the requirement for more affordable housing in the Selby district and calculated the net need for affordable housing, including social rented housing, intermediate rented housing and low-cost home ownership housing products, as 134 units per annum. There was also an identified lack of supported housing in the district.

Members asked about the Council's relationship with housing associations and how many houses had been built by the Council in the last three years; Officers confirmed that they would check and supply this figure to Members outside of the meeting.

Officers explained that the Council did work with housing associations and that the question of competition with them had been raised before, but that delivery of housing through new developments was not the only way forward; the purchase of empty homes was also an option.

The Committee expressed the view that the Council should be pursuing new housing stock alongside housing associations. Officers confirmed that they would be able to look into this approach in more detail, but that some types of units were harder to bring forward than others. The Council needed to ensure that there was sufficient flexibility and opportunities that could be identified as they arose; the build costs for local authorities were often high, but that it was possible to find a solution to the delivery of housing with the right resources.

The Committee agreed that as a local authority, the Council was best placed to know what development the area needed and where, but that developers needed to offer affordable housing and it should be pursued accordingly.

Councillor R Musgrave, Deputy Leader and Lead Executive Member for Place Shaping who was also in attendance at the meeting, explained that it was costly for the Council to build housing compared to buying it. In the last year 120 affordable homes had been built in the district, but they had all been procured by housing associations. Members were informed that there was approximately £8m in reserves with which the Council could buy or build homes, and he was determined to see more done in this regard.

In response to a query, Officers explained the process for Right to Buy buybacks, and acknowledged that in some circumstances it was viable, but not always.

The Committee thanked Officers for the information and asked that the matter be brought back to the Committee again when more work had been undertaken on the policy.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report and requested that the matter be brought before them again in the future when further work had been undertaken on the policy.

24 EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (PR/20/12)

The Committee received the report of the Housing Service Manager which asked Members to consider the content and submit comments on the Empty Property Strategy and Action Plan.

Officers explained that the North Yorkshire Empty Property Strategy and local Selby District Action Plan was agreed and adopted in January 2018. The strategy aimed to reduce the number of long-term empty homes through a co-ordinated approach and the local action plan set out how the Council would target empty homes across the district, and encourage, support and enforce owners to bring empty homes back into use.

Members noted that the report provided an update on the progress of the implementation of the strategy and the action plan.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report.

25 WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21

The Committee considered the Policy Review work programme for 2020-21 and made a number of suggestions and amendments:

- That following a recent decision by the Licensing Committee, the Licensing Policy be brought back to the Policy Review Committee for further consideration by the next meeting in March.
- Regarding the provision of business grants during the Covid-19 outbreak to ask Officers to give an overview to Committee about the scheme, when grants were being paid out, to how many businesses, how many fraudulent or erroneous applications there had been etc. Members agreed it would also be useful for the Committee to understand the Council's policies and protocols in relation to business grants as it was a live issue.
- Members asked if a summary of public consultation comments on the Council's 2021-2022 Budget and the Local Plan could be brought to Committee to give them a more complete picture of the process and residents' thoughts on both matters once the consultations had closed. It was also suggested that a summary of comments on the Local Plan should be sent to all Councillors.

RESOLVED:

To amend the work programme for 2020-21 as detailed above.

The meeting closed at 6.57 pm.