

Minutes

Policy Review Committee

Venue:	Microsoft Teams - Remote
Date:	Tuesday, 11 January 2022
Time:	5.00 pm
Present:	Councillors C Pearson (Chair), M Topping (Vice-Chair), M Jordan, K Arthur, J Chilvers, R Packham, J Shaw-Wright and M McCartney
Officers present:	Karen Iveson, Chief Finance Officer, Suzan Harrington, Director of Corporate Services and Commissioning, Stuart Robinson, Head of Business Development and Improvement, Peter Williams, Head of Finance, Drew Fussey, Operational Service Manager, Tammy Fox, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Aimi Brookes, Contracts Team Leader, Hannah McCoubrey, Housing Strategy Officer, Catherine Hickford, Low Carbon Officer, Victoria Foreman, Democratic Services Officer

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

23 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

24 MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021.

Members enquired as to whether there was any progress with tree planting in the district and if there was available stock and sites. Officers explained that no planting had been done, but suitable sites had been identified; an overarching strategy was needed. Members were disappointed that no planting had been done as there was a short window in which it could be successfully undertaken.

RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee meeting held on 14 September 2021 for signing by the Chair.

25 CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE

There was no address from the Chair.

26 UPDATE FROM THE LOW CARBON WORKING GROUP (STANDING ITEM)

Members received an update on the work of the Low Carbon Working Group, including the online workshop that was held on 9 December 2021.

Officers explained that the Low Carbon Strategy was due for consideration at full Council soon. The feedback from the Executive on the strategy had been that more work should be undertaken on identifying quickly deliverable actions.

Following the workshop, Members had identified the following priorities: tree planting, the retrofitting of social housing, biodiversity and greener energy tariffs.

The Committee were informed that LGR's (local government reorganisation) climate change working group would be held within the policy workstream, and that membership of the group would be drawn from climate leads across different North Yorkshire authorities.

Officers went on to give updates on various projects:

- The climate change training module for Members and Officers was complete and would be made available on the Council's online training system soon.
- The remaining data for the calculation of the Council's 2019-20 and 2020-21 carbon footprint was being collated.
- Officers planned to move the Council's energy tariff over to renewables from April 2022.
- Urbaser had been involved in a three-month trial using hydrotreated oil with waste collection vehicles.

Members asked if the renewable energy tariff would be tied in with the hospital; Officers confirmed that it would be, but that they were also looking at other buildings such as the Council's community centres.

The Committee were very keen to see some action with the identified projects but acknowledged the need for the carbon footprint calculations to be completed so that an accurate comparison could be made.

Members asked that at the following week's meeting of the Low Carbon Working Group details and figures were provided on energy efficiency of social housing.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the update.

27 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022-23 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (PR/21/7)

The Committee received the report of the Chief Finance Officer which had been brought before Members to provide comments on the Draft Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022-2023.

Officers presented the report which set out the draft revenue budget; capital programmes and the Programme for Growth for 2022/23. As a result of local government re-organisation in North Yorkshire from April 2023, this would be Selby District Council's last budget. The report also presented indicative budgets and planned programmes for 2023/24 and 2024/25, to enable the impact of recurring proposals to be viewed over the medium term and to support a smooth transition to the new unitary council in North Yorkshire. This approach provided the new council with an understanding of the pressures and opportunities facing Selby District, and investments planned by Members.

Members noted that subject to the confirmation of the Local Government Finance Settlement and Council Tax level, the 2022/23 budget was expected to require £4.25m of funds earmarked in the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve (BRER) for revenue support.

The Committee were also informed that for the purpose of the draft budget, a Council Tax freeze for 2022/23 was proposed. This was a departure from the approved Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and added £119k p.a. to the forecasted deficits. A CPI+1% increase was assumed for housing rents.

Officers went on to report that in 2021/22 the £9.2m of renewable energy business rates were transferred to the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve, and then subsequently applied to the Programme for Growth as part of the MTFS approved by Council in July 2021. For 2022/23 no assumptions had been made at this stage, pending the Local Government Finance Settlement. Current policy would be to allocate such receipts from 2023/24.

Members acknowledged that the Medium-Term Financial Plan (3-year draft budget) showed there was an underlying gap between 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. The Council continued to await the outcome of the Government's Fair

Funding Review, and reform of the Business Rates Retention System, to confirm the level of future savings.

Officers reported that there was capacity in reserves to smooth the impact of funding reductions, and that the draft budget confirmed the deferral savings until 2024/25. However, the ongoing 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. The budget proposals also included a number of discretionary growth bids, along with contingencies to support the LGR transition and ongoing Covid impacts.

The draft budget was subject to public consultation before the Executive finalised their proposals in February 2022.

Members asked a number of questions of Officers on the budget. Some Committee Members were pleased that a freeze on Council Tax had been proposed due to the rise in the cost of living; it was important to keep tax levels down.

The number of consultation responses was queried, as was the impact of the rise in interest rates, the 2% rise in Council employee salaries and the increase in National Insurance.

Officers explained that there had, so far, been around twenty responses to the budget consultation. The impact of the rise in interest rates for the Council was relatively minor, with no immediate impact on the cost of borrowing. The 2% rise in salaries had been awarded to the Council for 2022-23. The government's finance settlement included a great deal, but nearly all was covered by the Council. The National Insurance increase would be paid by the Council but had been factored into the local government finance settlement.

Some Members stated that whilst they could see why there were reasons to freeze Council Tax levels which were feasible at present, they may not be appropriate in the long term.

Members felt that the situation with the Council's reserves was very important; a clear understanding by Members was essential.

The Committee asked further questions on receipt of renewable energy business rates, the differences between the expected and awarded financial settlement, public sector pay restraint, if IT projects and the replacement of systems were truly necessary ahead of LGR, the spending of funds within the Programme for Growth, the increase in housing rents by 4% and levels of business rate relief.

Some Members felt strongly that housing rent decisions should not be taken by the Executive but by full Council; the 4% rise was unfair and unreasonable, and would be detrimental to tenants.

Officers explained that there was likely to be a review of business rates retention and as such the Council was likely to have more of an idea in the future. Despite the rates gradually being received, it would not be possible to spend them until the next financial year. The Council was not precluded from spending them, but it was LGR dependent as well as there being protocols to adhere to.

There had been £1m more than expected allocated to the Council as part of the local government financial settlement via the New Homes Bonus, which was a welcome boost. Members noted that a £750k one-off increase in staffing capacity and related support for the implementation of LGR had also been received, allowing the Council to play a full role in the transition.

It was clarified for the Committee that the IT projects covered a range of replacement and new systems, hardware and infrastructure, funding for which was from the ICT Replacement Reserve. The IT projects included were those that the Council had to fulfil in order to remain legally compliant with various systems.

Officers acknowledged that spending on Programme for Growth projects had been slow, with only £13m having been spent in the last few years, and that there was a huge amount to do if the remaining £17m was to be utilised.

Officers referred to business rate relief and clarified that it was not expected that these would increase. Members asked if the rates would be increased in the when the move to the new unitary authority had been completed, as the rates in the district seemed to be some of the lowest in the area. Officers explained that the thresholds for referendums on rate levels were determined by the government. What rates were to come would be for the new authority to decide it would be looked at as part of the forthcoming transitional arrangements.

The Committee recognised that the recurring deficit was unlikely to recover and as such, it was likely that the new authority would have to tackle the matter early on. There would be challenges ahead and savings would need to be identified at some point in the future.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the proposed budget was accepted by the Committee without amendment.

RESOLVED:

The Policy Review Committee endorsed the Executive's draft budget proposals for 2022-23, including the proposed freeze in Council Tax.

28 STREET CLEANSING IN SELBY DISTRICT (PR/21/8)

The Committee received the report of the Contracts Team Leader, which had been brought to Members to allow them to review the street

cleansing service. The report set out the details of the existing service along with an independent review of standards by Keep Britain Tidy that was carried out in 2019.

Officers explained that street cleansing services were carried out as part of an integrated environmental services contract that included domestic and commercial waste and recycling collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance. The current contract was due to expire at the end of March 2024 and work had commenced on the first stages of contract succession.

The street cleansing function was carried out in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA) and the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. Under those pieces of legislation every adopted road in the district was given a zone which determined frequency of cleansing; the zones reflected the amount of public usage/footfall:

- Zone 1 – Main retail
- Zone 2 – Other retail
- Zone 3 – High density housing (generally terrace housing)
- Zone 4 – Low density housing
- Zone 5 – Medium density housing
- Zone 6 – Industry / warehousing
- Zone 7 – Main roads (these are A roads such as the A19)
- Zone 8 – Rural roads
- Zone 9 – Other highways
- Zone 10 – Recreation areas (only those owned by SDC)

The Council was also responsible for the cleansing of around 950km of adopted highway by means of litter collection and mechanical sweeping.

Officers gave an update on the recent review of the street cleansing service. There had been a full consultation with the operatives and a shift to a new seven-day working pattern had begun that week. The new arrangement meant that operatives were able to undertake more high-risk cleansing when roads weren't as busy at weekends, including use of the mechanical sweeper. Members were encouraged by the change but expressed their concern about the amounts of litter on the edges of settlements, which seemed to be caused by the public throwing rubbish out of their cars. The Committee asked if clearance of the litter on the roadside was Selby District Council's responsibility. Officers confirmed that it was a district function, but that one of the benefits of the new arrangements was that more resource could be put into the harder to reach areas.

The Committee were pleased with the litter posters that had been produced and requested more copies for other areas, such as Gowthorpe in Selby, which was particularly bad near the school. Officers were aware of such areas but were pleased to report that the extended operative hours would mean more street cleansing in both Selby and Tadcaster. Further work with the schools was encouraged. Brayton was also

identified as a problematic area for litter; Officers confirmed that they would be able to share data on litter and dog bin collection with ward Members when available. When litter was reported by Members, a job was raised by Officers with the Council's waste contractors, with response time depending on where the litter was, i.e., it was easier to respond to rubbish in a town centre than on a busy road.

Members asked about the hotspots for the clearance of leaves on the highway. Officers explained that heavily wooded and treelined areas were addressed by a rolling programme of work, with sweepers working on roughly a three-weekly cycle.

The Chair welcomed Councillors M Jordan and M Topping joined to the meeting at this point.

The Committee were aware of some members of the public who cleared litter themselves, sometimes on busy roads. Officers explained that people could borrow the Council's litter picking equipment, but that a risk assessment was required and as such, a busy road would not be an appropriate place, as they would not be covered by the authority's public liability insurance.

Lastly, it was noted by Members that an assessment by the Keep Britain Tidy campaign had said that Selby district was a good and clear area for litter and fly tipping.

RESOLVED

The Committee considered and noted the report.

29 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) ADAPTATIONS POLICY 2021 (PR/21/9)

The Committee received the report of the Operational Service Manager and Housing Strategy Officer, which had come to Committee to allow Members to review the draft Adaptations (DFG) Policy 2021 and provide feedback as part of the consultation process. The report set out the Council's legal responsibility for the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). The draft DFG (Adaptations) Policy 2021 at Appendix A would provide residents and relevant stakeholders with a clear policy and process for delivering property adaptations, as well as providing suitable alternatives when adaptations were not appropriate or practicable.

Officers explained that the report allowed the Committee to consider current service provision and the ways in which the new policy could improve both services for residents, as well as make best use of current housing stock and maximise spend of the Better Care Fund allocation.

Members recognised the importance of a suitable and well adapted home, which could be the defining factor in enabling a disabled person to live well and independently. Selby District Council was committed to making sure that vulnerable and disabled residents had the ability to

remain in their homes for as long as it was safe and reasonable for them to do so, a provision provided for via the DFG process. As a two-tier administrative area, Selby District Council staff facilitated and administered the adaptation process, as well as carrying out any required work. However, this was done in partnership with North Yorkshire County Council and the Occupational Therapy team. They were responsible for the majority of visiting residents, assessing their needs and submitting the adaptation request for the Council's consideration.

Members asked if any consultation work had been undertaken with local disability groups; Officers explained that a number of people that they had spoken to included local disability forums.

There was general concern from Members as to the time it took to make adaptations to properties in order for people to stay in their homes, and how the Covid-19 pandemic could have made it worse. Officers described how referrals from North Yorkshire County Council had doubled in the last 12 months, and that it was taking an average of 80 days to do the work, which was above the national average.

Officers clarified that Personal Independence Payments were considered to be a passported benefit, administered by the government, not Selby District Council.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the draft policy and provided feedback as part of the consultation process, before the draft was returned to the Executive, expected in March 2022.

30 DRAFT PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY 2021-23 (PR/21/10)

The Committee received the report of the Operational Service Manager and Housing Strategy Officer which had come to Committee to allow Members to review the draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021-23 and provide feedback as part of the consultation process. Whilst responsibility for maintaining privately owned homes rested primarily with their owners, the policy recognised that some owners (particularly the elderly and vulnerable) did not always have the necessary resources to repair or improve their homes. The powers afforded under Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gave the Council greater freedom to provide financial assistance in these cases, for adaptations, essential home repairs or to improve housing conditions to benefit an individual's health and wellbeing.

Officers explained that the report enabled the Committee to consider current service provision and the ways in which the new policy could improve services for residents, helping to encourage improvement in private housing choice and quality across the district and enable independent living wherever possible.

Members recognised that stock condition work completed in the district in 2017 showed that there were 39,423 dwellings in Selby. Notably, almost 6,000 of those in the private sector were categorised as having a Category 1 safety hazard (equating to 17% of total private stock). The total cost of mitigating these hazards was estimated to be £20.9 million, whilst the cost to the NHS and wider society of treating accidents and ill-health caused by such hazards was estimated to be £14.4 million per year. However, it was often the case that removing Category 1 hazards required relatively inexpensive housing solutions, which could save organisations thousands if it prevented an accident or further health issues.

Officers went on to explain that with this in mind, the aim of this policy was to encourage improvement in private sector housing choice and quality across the district, primarily through support and assistance. The Council would seek to:

- help owner-occupiers maintain and repair their homes;
- remove or reduce housing related defects that were detrimental to health;
- assist people whose independence may be at risk, to remain in or return to their homes;
- boost domestic energy efficiency to reduce the number of households in fuel poverty, improve heating and reduce carbon dioxide levels;
- encourage and enable private landlords to provide good quality and well managed properties for their tenants;
- maximise the use of existing housing stock to increase housing choice across the district; and
- increase the number of empty properties brought back into use, particularly where this could be used to relieve homelessness.

Members asked how private homeowners would be aware of the assistance offered; Officers explained that it could be through North Yorkshire County Council, Selby District Council's website or social services.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the draft policy and provided feedback as part of the consultation process, before the draft was returned to the Executive, expected in March 2022.

31 COVID-19 GOVERNMENT GRANT (PR/21/11)

Councillor K Arthur left the meeting at this point.

The Committee received the report of the Revenues and Benefits Manager Housing Service Manager which had been requested by Members and set out business grants in September 2021 in order to give

further detail about the use of the remainder of the government's Covid-19 grant to the Council, and details of security, fraud, and data protection for previous payments of the grants.

Officers explained that from March 2020 onwards the Council had administered a number of business grants schemes on behalf of the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Most of these schemes had mandatory qualifying criteria and the guidance on administration of the schemes had been issued by BEIS. The guidance for all grant schemes had been comprehensive and included details of the process required for businesses to apply for the grants, the level of evidence required from businesses and the pre and post payment assurance work that local authorities should undertake.

The Chair asked what could stop a small business from applying for a grant; Officers explained that discretionary grants asked for evidence that losses did happen for a business, which could put some business owners off. The amount of the grant was set by central government.

Members were pleased that constituents had reported that the Revenues and Benefits Team had been very helpful and efficient. In response to a question about remaining funds, Officers explained that the £167k could be spent up to 31 March 2022, after which it had to be returned to central government. However, this date could be extended. The Council would urgently be looking at businesses in the district that may need help.

Members were disappointed that the recipients of the grants had to pay tax on the amounts; Officers acknowledged this and emphasised that they tried to make it very clear to all recipients that the amounts would be taxed.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the content of the report.

32 UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE (PR/21/12)

The Committee received an update from the Revenues and Benefits Manager Housing Service Manager in relation to Universal Credit.

Members noted that the previous rise in Universal Credit recipients in the Selby Jobcentre Plus area had now slowed.

In October 2019 there were 1936 recipients of UC in the Selby Jobcentre Plus area, October 2020 there were 4131 claimants in receipt of UC, the latest figures from October 2021 show there were 4020 recipients.

The natural migration due to change in customers circumstances from legacy benefits had now slowed down. The managed migration by the DWP of legacy benefit recipients onto UC had been paused due to the need for DWP to move resource in the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was therefore expected the numbers of UC claimants in the district would therefore remain quite static for some time. As such, it was suggested that future updates may not be needed by the Committee, and that the recurring item could be removed from the Committee's work programme going forward.

Members acknowledged that UC was now a wholly DWP function, but that it would still be useful for them to be aware if numbers of claimants was rising. Officers explained that the Council didn't report back on any other legacy benefits; however, the Committee agreed that the update should be kept on the work programme going forward, but only when there was a significant change in numbers, i.e., a shift of 10% each way.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report and agreed that the update on Universal Credit numbers should be kept on the work programme going forward, but only reported on when there was a significant change in numbers, i.e., a shift of 10% each way.

33 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the 2021-22 work programme presented by Democratic Services.

It was noted that as per the previous agenda item, an update on Universal Credit would be maintained on the work programme. The street cleaning item had been covered and as such would now be removed.

Officers explained that with reference to the Corporate Policy Framework, the development of this had been complicated by the upcoming local government reorganisation (LGR). As Selby District Council would be ending as an authority in 2023, there was little reason to develop or refresh existing policies for a soon to be defunct organisation. The exception to this was if the policies had to be updated to remain legally compliant. As such, it was suggested that this matter be removed from the work programme.

Members asked if a report on the Council's industrial units could be brought to the fore, including information such as the state of the units, how many there were, where, number that were vacant etc.

Officers advised the Committee that such an item had been suggested as a joint project between the Audit and Governance, Scrutiny and Policy Review Committees, as the matter had been raised at previous meetings of all three.

It was agreed by Members that the best way forward with the matter would be to receive an information report on all aspects of the industrial units for consideration by the Policy Review Committee, after which the matter could be, if appropriate, brought forward as a joint piece of work

between the three committees; it was acknowledged by Members that this work would be subject to the demands of LGR, specifically Officer time and availability.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted and agreed the work programme 2021-22, subject to the following changes, that:

- 1. the matter of Universal Credit would be maintained on the work programme for future updates;**
- 2. consideration of the draft Corporate Governance Framework item be removed;**
- 3. the item on street cleansing be removed as this had now been completed; and**
- 4. an information report on the Council's industrial units be submitted to the Policy Review Committee, including information such as the state of the units, how many there were, where the units were, the number that were vacant etc. after which the matter could be, if appropriate, brought forward as a joint piece of work between the Audit and Governance, Scrutiny and Policy Review Committees.**

The meeting closed at 6.31 pm.