



Policy Review Committee Report to Council – 22 September 2020

The Policy Review Committee has met twice since the previous update given to Council in February 2020.

10 March 2020

Update from the Low Carbon Working Group (Standing Item)

There had been two meetings of the Low Carbon Working Group, at which presentations and benchmarking data on the Council's carbon footprint had been provided; however, there was still some outstanding data to be supplied. Officers were looking for a steer from Members as to the priorities for the actions and projects resulting from their research.

Members acknowledged that the six-month time period was a tight timescale to work to and present recommendations to the Executive and suggested that initial report to the Executive set out 'quick wins' and actions that could be taken as soon as possible. Members also requested that the Working Group continue its work throughout the rest of the year.

The Committee discussed the Northern Forest initiative and the importance of potential areas for planting in the district being identified as quickly as possible. Some parish councils had started to undertake similar work and had several ideas that could be fed into policies such as the Local Plan.

Members asked that a number of points be fed back to Officers relating to tree planting, engaging with local communities, benchmarking data, identifying 'quick wins', taxis idling at taxi ranks and campaigns against idling vehicles outside schools.

The Committee agreed at its next meeting in April they would want to be able to distil ideas into short and long term actions, working in conjunction with the 'Ideas Lab' that was agreed as part of the Council's budget in February 2020. Members also asked Officers to check the resources available for the low carbon work agreed at Council in February 2020 as part of new project bids within the Programme for Growth (P4G).

Work Programme 2019-20 and Planning For 2020-21

The Committee agreed that work planning for 2020-21 should be undertaken at the next meeting.

7 April 2020

This meeting was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

16 June 2020

This meeting was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

21 July 2020

This meeting was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4 August 2020

This meeting was postponed due to technical issues.

8 September 2020

Revised Estimate 2020-21 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

The main item of business for consideration by Members at the meeting was the proposed revised Budget for 2020-21 and updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It had been explained that for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) three scenarios, 'best', 'mid' and 'worst' case, had been modelled over the 10 years from 2021-22 to 2030-31, the mid-case scenarios were proposed as the framework for the forthcoming budget.

Members acknowledged that Covid-19 had, and continued to have, a significant impact on the Council's finances. As at the end of July 2020 the full year forecast for 2020-21 totalled £3.8m, it was confirmed that £1.068m had been received from the Government to help off-set these impacts. The key assumptions that underpinned the strategy had been updated, and this forecast had informed the revised estimate put forward for approval, with £1.44m New Homes Bonus proposed to be diverted from reserves to help mitigate the impacts.

Concern was raised regarding the proposal to divert the New Homes Bonus and it was suggested that Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) reserves be used for the purpose. Officers explained that the Council had no control over the CIL monies which were restricted to the uses specified through the planning process, and that it was for each Parish Council to make a claim.

Members queried the savings requirement which identified an estimated rise to between £2.4m and £2.9m over the next 3 years; with savings of £848k p.a. already planned from which area's would the further £2m be identified. It was confirmed that at this time the report was to highlight the potential savings identified and that it would be subject to discussion with Members.

The Committee heard that the MTFS mid-case scenario assumed a Council Tax rise of £5 (2.8%) for 2021-22, discussion took place regarding the proposed £5 increase, it was confirmed that the amount had not been agreed and that the final decision would sit with Council. There were mixed views about increasing Council Tax particularly when savings were needed but local communities had been hit by the pandemic and were struggling financially.

Members queried what effect the government's plans to introduce unitary authorities would have on the budget and were informed that the MTFS assumed that the Council was a going concern, and were assured that the Executive were keen to ensure that Selby District Council's resources would be used for the benefit of Selby District.

The Committee asked a number of questions regarding the furlough system operated by the Government, and whose decision it was not to furlough any of the Council's personnel, and the impact of the pay award which included one extra annual leave day. It was confirmed that the rules around furloughing staff had been very strict and that as local authorities had received government grants it was felt that it would be inappropriate to furlough staff. It was further confirmed that staff across the organisation had come together to help different teams to aid in the work of awarding government business grants and safeguarding vulnerable people within our community. In terms of the associated benefits within the pay award it was noted that beyond the estimates included within the revised budget there would not be a significant financial impact.

Members were assured that despite the challenges faced, the Council was in a strong financial position but savings remained a key feature of the budget going forward.

Annual Report of the Policy Review Committee 2019-20

The Committee agreed the annual report for 2019-20. Members felt that it was a very comprehensive report, and one member complimented the Committee on their work on the Taxi Licensing Policy.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their support and continued hard work.

Work Programme

Members noted the work programme for the rest of the 2020-21 municipal year.

Future Meetings: The next meeting of the Policy Review Committee will be on 13 October 2020.

Councillor Andrew Lee
Chair, Policy Review Committee