

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, duly convened and held at the Council Chamber, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Wednesday, 1 March 2023

### PRESENT:

**The Mayor Councillor Godfrey Bland (Chair)**

**Councillors Allen, Atkins, Atwood, Bailey, Barrass, Barrington-King, Brice, Britcher-Allan, Chapelard, Dawlings, Ellis, Everitt, Fairweather, Fitzsimmons, Funnell, Goodship, Hall, Dr Hall, Hayward, Hickey, Hill, Holden, Knight, Le Page, Lidstone, March, McMillan, Moon, Morton, Ms Palmer, Patterson (Vice-Chair), Poile, Pope, Pound, Rands, Roberts, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Wakeman, Warne, White, Willis and Wormington**

### IN ATTENDANCE:

### IN MEMORIAM TO BOB BACKHOUSE

FC17/22      The Council observed a minute silence following the death of former Councillor Bob Backhouse. Bob served as a Councillor for Sherwood from 2010 until May 2022.

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

FC18/22      Apologies were received from Councillors: Johnson, Lewis, and Neville.

### MINUTES OF THE 1ST EXTRAORDINARY MEETING DATED 14 DECEMBER 2022

FC19/22      No amendments were proposed.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the first extraordinary meeting dated 14 December 2022 be approved as a correct record.

### MINUTES OF THE 2ND EXTRAORDINARY MEETING DATED 14 DECEMBER 2022

FC20/22      Councillor Christopher Hall has asked for the following amendment:

#### RESOLVED –

1. That FC52/22 be amended to say 64% respondents which replaces the statement 64% electorates.
2. And the statement £200k savings over 4 year period on all out election be added to the minutes
3. That, subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting dated 14 December 2022 be approved as a correct record.

### MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING DATED 14 DECEMBER 2022

FC21/22      No amendments were proposed.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the ordinary meeting dated 14 December 2022 be approved as a correct record.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

FC22/22 No declarations of pecuniary or significant other interest were made.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

FC23/22 **The Leader of the Council announced:**

- Councillor Pope would be nominated for Deputy Mayor in 2023/24

**The Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities: Councillor Warne**

- Reminded all that a £100k fund has been created in response to the cost-of-living crisis, charities and similar organisations were invited to apply for funding.
- To date the following grants have issued as of: (31 January 2023)
  - Charlies Angels Kitchen - £15,000
  - Nourish - £20,000
  - Number One Community Trust - £15,000
  - Tunbridge Wells Volunteer bureau - £10,000
  - Parish Larders - £15,000 (£2,500 for each larder)
  - West Kent Mind - £25,000

**The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning: Councillor Pound**

- SE water draft resources management plan and Southern Water management plan, have set out their long-term plan for ensuring that there are sufficient water supplies for the respective areas over the next 50 years
- Thanks were given to the following officers Sharon Evans and Ellen Gilbert for their work in preparing the councils response.
- The Council acknowledges the challenges faced by both companies. It is explicit that it would be unable to meet the level of service customers expect unless there is investment in new schemes, an increase in supply and or a reduction of demand.
- The council provided the following three responses to South-East Water:
  - TWBC is concerned that the document does not address current needs and deficits particularly within the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells and surrounding areas and will be a deficit of water within Kent region by 2030
  - The Council would query whether this is already an issue where it has been evident that demands exceed supply and there is little resilience within the system to cope under certain circumstances
  - TWBC does find this lack of schemes appropriate, considering the recent situation referred to above in December 2022, and the It is noted that schemes are identified within the borough during the period from 2035 to 2075.
- TWBC would welcome further engagement with SE Water in relation to these projects, so the council will continue to work closely with now things water in developing its water resources management plan

**The Portfolio Holder Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction: Councillor Everitt**

- I am pleased to say that we are currently going through the processes to allow this Council to join the UK 100.
- Which is a cross-party local network of those who have pledged to work towards a transition to net zero within local government.

- Membership of the UK 100 would not only publicly reaffirm our Council's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and pollution, but also allow us to build upon a wealth of experience and expertise of other existing members of the UK 100.
- Councillor Chapelard, and I met representatives from the UK 100 and we hope to have our request for membership of this sector accepted and an announcement to be made next week.

**Announcement by the Chief Executive:**

- Confirmed that Dr Philip Whitbourn has accepted his Freedom of the Borough Award
- A Civic Ceremony will be held middle of April, more details to follow.

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

FC24/22      The Mayor advised that four questions from members of the public had been received under Council Procedure Rule 8.

**1. Question from Robert Banks**

“The Household Recycling and Waste Collection Service provider (Urbaser) has asked this Council to contribute a maximum of £150,00 towards the early lease termination costs associated with a number of the existing fleet, in order to lease circa forty-four vehicles new vehicles on an 8-year lease which will extend beyond the end of the existing service contract. If this proposal is accepted, what will the Council's additional annual financial liability be for the initial 4 years, the subsequent 4 years after the existing contract has expired and the estimated cost of converting the vehicles to use biofuel rather than diesel”

**Answer from Councillor Everitt**

This one-off payment, will allow for the re-rounding and re-fleeting which will enable a more efficient use of resources to meet the changing demands on the service, reducing travel distances, carbon emissions and vehicle down time and improving the stability of the service. I know members in this room will greet that news favourably and our residents equally, given that they have expressed the importance they place on this service in the recent budget response. This payment is one off and there are no additional annual financial liabilities attached to the proposal.

I am also happy to say that forty-four vehicles to be leased would require no further conversion costs to use HVO fuel as opposed from diesel.

Once again thank you for your question.

**Supplementary question from Robert Banks**

So, I did not catch show of the amount of changing into biofuel, and also I was under the impression that at the present rate we will not be carbon neutral by 2030 and other measures were going to have to be taken.

**Supplementary Response from Councillor Everitt**

To clarify your question of other vehicles there were no costs and no costs for

those new vehicles on the new lease to use HVO in relation to reaching our 2030 commitment to be carbon neutral in the work the Council does we haven't produced a new carbon reduction pathway to 2030 but certainly reaching the 2030 commitment I hold and everyone in the Chamber holds, but to reach that goal, we have to produce a new carbon reduction pathway and that will have to take account of any decisions we make, thank you.

## **2. Question from Charlie Keeling**

“How much will the preparation of 'Suggested Changes' to the local plan cost – could that be itemised by consultant/other 3rd party, and this is against the backdrop that all Councils currently appear to be very cash-strapped?”

### **Answer from Councillor Pound**

Thank you Mr Keeling for your question.

There are some specific pieces of work are being undertaken such as on the Stage 3 Greenbelt study which is being done by consultants LUC and will be at a cost to the Council of £57,496.00.

Further work is being undertaken on Master planning, Transport and Flood Risk, which is evolving, and the final cost will depend on the complexity of this work so no final figure is available at this stage.

Nevertheless, the Council has prudently set up a Local Plan Reserve which has £851,000 available to ensure the adoption of a sound Local Plan and future work associated with it.

### **Supplementary question from Charlie Keeling**

Thank you Councillor Pound.

Bearing in mind that so far, all the local plan has cost Tunbridge Wells Borough Council £1.27million as I understand from the minutes you approved this evening.

to get to a position yeah yet more of the council's under-pressure budget is being allocated if you'll pardon the expression to flog a dead horse, will the council now removed Tudley Village from the local plan, as clearly preferred by the Inspector, if not, what is the further additional cost of providing further evidence in pursuing Tudley Village. Including a fourth Green Belt study and revisions to the transport modelling, especially in regard to journeys to and from Tonbridge, and the justification for the 5 Oak Green bypass.

### **Supplementary response from Councillor Pound**

I have to admit Mr. Keeling, I probably did not capture all of the points that you were asking about and I will ensure that you get a written reply to that supplementary in full, I would, however. challenge that the local plan, as it is currently under examination and is in the submission stage, is not flogging a dead horse, it is a Plan that everybody in this Chamber, or almost everybody in this Chamber, wishes to see being adopted by the council because it will provide us with housing and infrastructure for the future of the whole borough, but I will provide a fuller answer to all of the points you have made.

## **3.Question from Sarah Hamilton (read out by Caroline Britt)**

"I am KCC Member for Tunbridge Wells Rural Division, Chairman of Heritage Paddock Wood and Member of Paddock Wood Town Council.

In line with my letter to the Times of Tunbridge Wells, and presentation to Cabinet I express grave concern about the Wesley Centre in Paddock Wood

It is surprising the Wesley Centre faces the risk of potential disposal in the current times, and many are rightly very concerned. It is protected in the Towns Neighbourhood Plan which the Borough Council has not challenged.

Paddock Wood Town Council supports the Wesley Centre is retained. The Paddock Wood Neighbourhood Plan supports it is retained and so do all four of the Borough Cllrs for Paddock Wood.

There is no heritage-based facility in an area with a substantial amount of housing development. Needs are evolving. The value of green space for emotional health & wellbeing becomes even more important. Heritage and the arts deliver on that for social value.

Now the Amelia can serve as inspiration and direction will this Council be open to constructive discussions about the potential of this valuable facility.

Are you willing to remove the Wesley Centre from any risk of disposal at this time, or the near future. Using some words from your documents will you 'explore develop and exploit opportunities for collaborative working with bodies such as KCC and partner agencies' to build on existing relationships and facilitate a viable opportunity.

To be outgoing and enabling in line with your own aspirations and the strategic direction of both authorities.

### **Response from Councillor Hall**

I believe my answer may be somewhat shorter than the question.

The Wesley Centre has been deemed a surplus asset for a number of years, as you will be aware.

I will consider all the comments and representations made to Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> February and during the consultation. I believe there were one hundred or so responses and comments on this particular site. I would be open to proposals to continue to utilise the site as a community building and for other parties to take it over from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and would welcome it transferring to the local community, provided a suitable valuation can be met.

However, I would not be willing to remove it from the Asset Management Plan and would prefer instead to maintain our current schedule of assets so that it can be reviewed on its merits along with other assets owned by the Council, in the best interests of residents.

### **4.Question from Robert Banks**

Has this council consulted other Councils, who have contracted Urbaser for House Recycling and Waste Collection Services, to ascertain their level of

satisfaction with this provider and whether they have received similar requests for further funding?

Approached other providers of council refuse services, to determine whether any of them could provide a similar or improved service without the requirement for this Council to be obligated to provide further funding to assist in assessing new vehicles?"

### **Answer to question From Councillor Everitt**

Thank you for your question Mr Banks.

Firstly, just to clarify, in your question just to be clear that as a council we are not obligated in this matter, and it is a proposal that has been put forward to us.

After careful consideration with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, our partner in this contract, we have collectively agreed to a proposal put forward by our service provider to undertake changes to the current food, recycling and refuse collection rounds and introduce of a new fleet of collection vehicles.

Having consulted with Tonbridge and Malling we have pooling the expertise of both Officer teams who have excellent knowledge of the refuse provider market and what else is practical and available in that market. Given this concrete understanding of the current refuse collection market both partners have agreed that this proposal is an opportunity to bring about a number of benefits that our residents should expect.

I would add that in tune with our commitment to transparency that we are committed to this decision has gone through various meetings that place this squarely within the public realm. But in a further positive step we will be publishing a VEAT (Voluntary Ex-Ante Transparency Notice) notice, or a form of procurement notice that will, given how small the market in waste collection is, inevitably inform other providers of the details of this proposal.

Given that we are in an agreed existing contact and the nature of local government procurement it would not be best practise to approach other service providers asking them if they can provide our service.

### **Supplementary from Robert Banks**

You have not approached the councils at the moment because of your negotiations have I got that correct?

### **Supplementary response from Councillor Everitt**

In terms of approaching other councils, we have certainly approached Tonbridge and Malling who are our partners, but in terms of a formal approach to other councils to discuss this proposal, that's not been part of the process,  
thank you.

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

FC25/22 The Mayor advised that there were three questions from members of the Council had been received under Council Procedure Rule 10.

### 1. Question from Councillor McMillan

Please can an explanation be given that a Local Plan that was four years in the making, agreed and permitted the traffic consultant SWACO to submit approximately 40 documents relating to traffic mitigation at Kipping's Cross to the Inspector during his review without any opportunity for residents and parish councils to review or comment? Is it because the recommendation of narrowing the B2160 to mitigate all the extra traffic from building large estates in Paddock Wood, Horsmonden and Matfield is so clearly flawed that it would mean the local plan has to and should be properly reviewed?"

### Answer from Councillor Pound

The Local Plan is a project that has been in production for a number of years and has evolved during this time and was **not** incomplete at the time of submission to the Secretary of State for Examination.

The Vision of the local plan is to deliver growth in new homes, jobs, and supporting infrastructure that will be achieved over the plan period in a manner that respects the distinctive qualities of the entire borough.

The examination of the local plan is supported with a wide-ranging evidence base some of which is prepared in an iterative way, like transport evidence, which has come forward at different stages of the plan's preparation.

The indicative mitigation scheme for Kipping's Cross was brought forward by the council's consultants Sweco following lengthy discussions and agreement with National Highways and Kent County Council as Highways Authority.

The specific Sweco report you make reference to is supplemental to the most recent Statement of Common Ground between TWBC and National Highways which was submitted at the same time.

It is not uncommon for local authorities to progress their local plans in these ways.

I'll just quote from the Submission Local Plan's supporting Infrastructure Development Plan

#### 2.44 Status of the Infrastructure Development Plan

*"As the work progresses on the Local Plan, further discussions will take place with the various infrastructure providers to firm up the requirements, timescales, associated costs, etc. and will be updated if necessary alongside the Examination of the Local Plan during 2021/2022. For the above reasons, this Infrastructure Delivery Plan is termed a 'Live Document' as by its nature it requires to be regularly updated to ensure it has the most up to date information and requirements in it to support the growth proposed in the Local Plan."*

At 3.8 the plan states "NH has acknowledged the peak hour congestion issues at the A21/B2160 junction at Kipping's Cross and also at Flimwell, which impacts back into the borough beyond the junction with the B2079."

The detail of the Sweco report relating to Kipping's Cross was put forward to the Inspector and the Council acknowledged that there had not been time to consult on the detail. This is now with the Inspector for review, and he identified at the Hearing on 12th July 2022 that he would consider how and when to consult the public on the content of the report.

However, it is clear from the Kipping Cross report that further detailed work **will** be required to refine the mitigation scheme as future development comes forward and that options other than the narrowing of the B2160 may well prove more appropriate.

### **Supplementary question from Councillor McMillan**

Given the previous Tory administration responsible for the direction of the Local Plan and the previous head of planning Steve Baughen who's now with a major developer was responsible and for the production and reporting to the chief executive on that issue. I'm slightly at a loss to understand how, a £4 million pound plan in four years in development, with traffic and infrastructure, clearly being the key issues for any major developments that we're talking about can have this ongoing issue around traffic now, Councillor Pound you know I have asked your

multiple occasions to meet with you and SWECO and the TWC offices so I and other Councillors, could understand how this submission happened. and why it happens so late.

However, you have refused on multiple occasions for us to meet with SWECO and therefore I sought further advice and help, and I'm going to read back from a letter here from the Greg Clark MP,

(The Mayor interjected and asked Councillor McMillan to keep the supplementary in line with the answer provided by Councillor Pound).

Councillor McMillan continued with – This submission contained a proposal to narrow the B2160 at its Junction A21 at Kipping's Cross to one lane from 2, it was put forward very late to the day at nearly the end of the examination in public in order to mitigate the impact on the A21 or traffic arising from proposed new housing development contained in the plan to be candid, I am astonished that the Borough Council should have submitted such a plan.

(The Mayor stopped the supplementary on the grounds the response has become a speech)

Councillor McMillan continued – The question is when this was submitted can I ask who was the person who authorised the late submission of these documents, was it the cabinet was it Councillor Pound, was it Steve Baughen, or was it Mr William Benson, or was it any, and all of you?

### **Supplementary answer from Councillor Pound**

I try and untangle one or two bits, first of all, just to be clear, the direction of the local plan was not solely the responsibility of the previous administration. The planning policy working group has been working as a cross-party group



for many more years and I have been a member and the Local Plan, and its adoption has been, or the proposed adoption has been supported by members of all parties, so it is not right to assume that all of the direction of the local plan has resided elsewhere in relation to the previous head of planning and to whom he reported and that relationship that is not for me to comment on if you wish to discuss that you can talk to the Head of Paid Service. In relation to the fundamental question about who authorised the submission of the SWECO report, I return to the point which is very clearly stated in the infrastructure development plan, which is that it is a live document and I recognise that there is frustration that as yet that document has not yet been consulted on but the Inspector has recognised that it needs to be so and as a live document it is not unreasonable as part of the development of the Local Plan that documents are regularly updated to ensure that the most up-to-date information is available to the inspector, and on that basis I think I've tried to answer the question, thank you.

## **2 Question from Councillor Wormington**

Much of this year's budget is targeted towards addressing the inherited deficit. Can you please explain the deficit it's origin and why it's important to tackle it?"

### **Answer from Councillor Hall.**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Wormington..

I'm sure members have drawn their own conclusions from Lee Colyer budget briefings, but this is my own take on it. I believe the budget deficit has risen because of several factors.

Firstly, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the closure of whole sectors of our economy, and employees being moved to working from home has so cruelly exposed the council's reliance on parking income and an office worker commuting into Tunbridge Wells to work and shop in the town centre. That in itself created a new structural problem. As a world returned to more hybrid ways of working offices and businesses, business units remained underutilised and unlet and parking income recovered steadily and slowly.

Second, this country is over-centralised and at a local level, under-resourced, so that, unlike many other countries in Europe, the government does not delegate the necessary financial means for local authorities to properly plan and forecast income and expenditure, the revenue support grant was reduced to zero in 2018 and councils have continued to be denied, either the resources or the scope for raising their spending power to keep up revenue handouts from central government. that are kept under wraps until they're announced in December are no way to support the financial position of local authorities like ours. add double-digit inflation to the mix and you have a multi layered problem that we're now needing to confront failure to tackle this issue could lead to grave consequences for this Council. Running our reserves down to lower and lower levels means more severe cuts to services further down the road, our capital assets beginning to fall,

apart with insufficient funds to maintain them. and pushing the council into a stall quashing our capacity for growth and development, failure to meet a clean bill of health with our auditors would be bad enough, but the worst case scenario would mean spending on all, but essential services would have to cease, that is, of course the very worst case scenario which I'm sure every Member of the Council would be keen to avoid at any cost.

### **3.Question from Councillor McMillan**

Greg Clark MP, Paddock Wood Town Council, Brenchley and Matfield PC, Horsmonden PC, The Pembury Rat Run Group and many others have all commented that SWACO 's recommendation is unworkable. KCC Highways have no solution and National Highways have stated it is not their problem. Can the Council now commit to reviewing ALL planning applications taking clear note that there is no plan for traffic mitigation!

### **Answer from Councillor Pound**

Thank you Councillor McMillan, for your question, as has been made public, I think

we all are now aware the Council is undertaking a review of evidence supporting the local plan to respond to the Inspector's initial findings letter. This review will look at the matters raised by him, including, amongst other things, highway mitigation delivery across the road network associated with these strategic housing sites. The Local Plan is supported by a high-level evidence base and then, as development comes forward, more refined work on mitigations is undertaken in a much more detailed way at the application stage.

Transport assessments are necessary, which look at impact or more precise mitigation planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, planning applications are considered having regard to relevant material planning considerations, including the highways impact from a scheme.

This is how officers make recommendations to the Planning Committee of which I have over, which I have no influence, and they will continue to do so.

### **Supplementary Question from Councillor McMillan**

As we've seen with the recently from the Local Plan that the Right Now developers are seeing that the local plan is in some sort of. trouble, I believe, trouble, and they're starting to independently put through their new applications without waiting for the local plan. Given that Greg Clark has asked national highways to undertake no further work, to implement the this proposal and has written to the Planning Inspector asking him to disregard this risk but does risk up this regard, the proposed from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, which has avoided democratic scrutiny, he's also written to the secretary of state to ask him to disregard any recommendation from the inspector if it continues to rely on this proposal from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. I struggle to understand how we as a council cannot restart to review

in a more dynamic, more dynamic way the local plan, taking into account these issues around traffic

### **Supplementary answer from Councillor Pound**

I'm unsure that there was a question, and I certainly am not in a position to respond on behalf of all local MP, Greg Clark. thank you.

## **TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL'S PLAN**

FC26/22 Councillor Chapelard moved, and Councillor Warne seconded, the recommendation set out in the associated report.

Councillor Chapelard advised:

- The Plan will carry the administration into 2022/24
- The plan makes clear the administrations priorities – Focus on Five
- Advised the name of the plan has been changed to reflect input from Councillors and will now be known as The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Plan.
- Confirmed that further detail would be made available via web site following consultation and will feed into the Strategic Plan.

Debate included:

- The report is nothing strategic it is nothing more than a political pamphlet
- What has been proposed was built around the previous administration and the borough partnership has nothing new to add
- The coalition rejected cost saving of £200,000 by rejecting all out elections and ignored what the local Parishes wanted.
- Doubling the size of the Cabinet will nor please some residents
- Building vibrant and safer towns, by putting up a few cameras in car parks does nothing for public safety.
- The BP are just duplicating other people's efforts.
- The Plan needs to have more recognition to the Heritage which is found in the borough
- Tunbridge Wells and much of the rural areas have many grade one listed buildings as well as many protected landscapes and this needs to be adopted within the plan.
- It was highlighted that the report was intended to be a short to medium term report
- Although Heritage is recognised in many areas of the report it perhaps needs one specific area to be made clearer.
- The administration had hoped other parties would provide positive feedback to feed into the report rather than just provide negative statements.

- The lack of detail will be addressed and applied within the 2023 plan

The Mayor took a recorded vote.

**Members who voted for the Motion:** Councillors Atkins, Britcher-Allen, Barras, Brice, Chapelard, Ellis, Everitt, Fitzsimmons, Funnel, Hayward, (Christopher) Hall, (Linda) Hall, Hickey Hill, Knight, Le Page, Lidstone, McMillan, Moon, Morton, Patterson, Pope, Poile, Pound, Rands, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Wakeman, Warne, Wormington, Willis.(32)

**Members who voted against the Motion:** Councillors: Allen, Attwood, Barrington-King, Bland, Dawlings, Fairweather, Goodship, Holden, March, (Ms) Palmer, Roberts, White (12)

**Members who abstained from voting:** Councillor Bailey (1)

Councillor Holden requested a recorded vote:

## **BUDGET 2023/24 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

FC27/22 The Mayor exercised his discretion under Council Procedures Rule 13.4.4 to allow leaders of each political party more than 10 minutes to speak.

Councillor Hall moved, and Councillor Hayward seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

Mr Robert Banks had registered to speak, which included the following comments:

- The draft Budget consultation was presented to the finance and governance CAB earlier this year, Mr Colyer gave a verbal summary of the result, there is no record in the minutes of any discussion relating to this consultation
- The results were formally presented at subsequent Cabinet meeting, the three main areas where the responded wish to reduce the budget on 11 discretionary services
- Band D council, Amelia Scott property and development and the Assembly Hall and reallocate the increased funding to recreational and climate change initiatives. Ranked the 3 most important not surprisingly was Rubbish, Recycling and Street Cleaning
- Public should be used to inform the significant changes to the range of services that can be afforded

Debate on the motion included the following comments:

- Thanks were given to officers who had provided input into the 2023/24 Budget report (Candlin, Colyer, Fineman)
- Thanks, was also shown to Councillor Hickey for laying the groundwork which provided the starting point of the report.
- 2023/24 Budget has been set during turbulent times.
- Income and expenditure are no longer safe and predictable, and new ways of managing finances must be called upon.
- The war in Ukraine, and the immediate impact on energy costs, rampant inflation of over 10%, labour market shortage and erratic and

unpredictable revenue support from central government have made the task of running a business challenging.

- Financial year 2022/23 called upon £944k from reserves to bridge the funding gap from the previous administration.
- Previously stated the predicted losses in the Mid Term Financial strategy are concerning and appear to have no viable associated mitigation plan.
- The Borough Partnership made, Safeguarding the Councils Finances is one of the Focus on Five priorities, choosing not to 'Wait and See.'
- Raising fees and charges including car parking fees, since 2017, was a necessary measure to address the deficit and protect the councils' services.
- Council delivered a Community Support Fund of £100K of grants to help the neediest, which was delivered in time for winter.
- Additional revenues from car parking charges will raise more revenues in the coming financial year
- Other Council fees and charges for services were uplifted by an average of 5.9% in November.
- After some excellent treasury management by the Finance Team our expected return on Council's investment led to an additional £750,000 in income.
- Despite this, impact of inflation in the economy has wiped out most of these gains with energy costs to the Council doubling over the financial year to £300k
- Costs to the council of contract indexation and additional payments to maintain statutory services, driven by inflation have equated to £1.29m.
- Revenue support from central government remains sporadic, uncertain, and overly centralised.
- The New Home Bonus is unclear, our contribution was significantly reduced with a one-off minimum support grant to ensure councils have a 3% increase in spending power.
- 50% of the public consultation support the approach to increase Council Tax by 2.95% from Ap1 April 2023.
- Key priorities are 1) Exploring new revenue streams and raising extra revenue where possible 2) Finding efficiencies within the budget and delivering a saving plan 3) extracting more value from our assets and rationalising those that are no longer in the interest of the public or the Council.
- Since the coalition took power in May the projected budget deficit for 2023/24 stood at £2.64m, was down to £1.4m in December, and now stands at £943k to be drawn from reserves.
- Safeguarding the Council's Finances are on track, but given the situation inherited it will take longer than a 1 year in budget cycle.

The Mayor took a recorded vote on the motion in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7.

**Members who voted for the Motion:** Councillors Atkins, Britcher-Allen, Barras, Brice, Chapelard, Ellis, Everitt, Fitzsimmons, Funnel, Hayward, (Christopher) Hall, (Linda) Hall, Hickey Hill, Knight, Le Page, Lidstone, McMillan, Moon, Morton, Patterson, Pope, Poile, Pound, Rands, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Wakeman, Warne, Wormington, Willis.(32)

**Members who voted against the Motion:** Councillors: Allen, Attwood, Barrington-King, Bland, Dawlings, Fairweather, Goodship, March, (Ms) Palmer, Roberts, White (11)

**Members who abstained from voting:** Councillor Bailey (1)

## **RESOLVED**

1. That Council considers the changes to the base budget along with the assumptions and approach detailed throughout the report.
2. That Council considers the responses to the budget consultation.
3. That Council approves the use of £943,000 from reserves to balance the revenue budget.
4. That Council approves the rolling forward of the capital programme including additional gross funding of £620,000 for new schemes listed within the report
5. That Council approves an increase in the 'Basic Amount' of Council Tax of £5.71 (2.95 per cent) for 2023/24 for a Band D property.
6. That Council approves the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 set out in Appendix E; and
7. That Council approves the implementation of 100 per cent Council Tax premium on second homes from 1 April 2024 and to approve the application of 100 per cent Council Tax premium on properties that have been empty for at least 1 year (currently 2 years) from 1 April 2024, should the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill receive Royal assent.

## **COUNCIL TAX 2023/24**

FC28/22 Councillor Hall moved, and Councillor Chapelard seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

The report was taken as read.

The Mayor took a recorded vote on the motion in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.7.

**Members who voted for the Motion:** Councillors Allen, Attwood, Atkins, Barrington-King, Bailey, Britcher-Allen, Barras, Bland Brice, Chapelard, Dawlings, Ellis, Everitt, Fairweather, Fitzsimmons, Funnel, Goodship, Hayward, (Christopher) Hall, Hickey Hill, Knight, Le Page, Lidstone, March, McMillan, Moon, Morton, (Ms) Palmer, Patterson, Pope, Poile, Pound, Rands, Roberts, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Wakeman, Warne, White, Wormington, Willis.(43)

**Members who abstained from voting:** Councillor (Linda) Hall

**Members who voted against the Motion: (0)**

**RESOLVED –**

That the Council Tax for 2023/24 as set out at Appendix A to the report be approved.

**ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023/24**

FC29/22 Councillor Hall moved, and Councillor Chapelard seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

Mr Jeremy Thompson had registered to speak, which included the following comments:

- Concern was raised over the fact that the Wesley Centre has been included within TWBC Asset Surplus.
- Objection was raised at a council meeting on the 9 Feb 2023.
- Wesley Centre along with its gardens need to be removed from the list this proposal is supported by the Paddock Wood Town Council and four borough councillors and a County Councillor.
- The Wesley centre is afforded protection through the Paddock Wood Neighbourhood Plan and the local Plan
- With the proposed new housing planned for Paddock Wood it does not make sense to dispose of the asset.
- A consultation of over one hundred responses all supported retaining the Wesley Centre
- A request was made to the Leader of the Council and the Council to commit to the removal of the Wesley Centre from the Asst list.

Debate included:

- Wesley Centre is an important part of Paddock Wood (PW) heritage and is used extensively by various community groups
- The Wesley centre is one of two community spaces run by TWBC
- Given the planned growth of the town it was surprising to see this property on the asset disposal list
- Paddock Wood already losing a large percentage of green space with the proposed new houses and increase in traffic PW are feeling like they are getting a rough deal from TWBC
- Not only are community centres planned for disposal, but the administration is also planning to sell of five town centre car parks which is a drastic move.
- No strategy has been given to the disposal of car parks, surely a car parking strategy should be developed before any thought is given to disposal of them
- Concern was raised over the fact that Parish or Town Councils would be informed of rather than consulted on any decision.
- If the report this evening in its current form is approved you are giving the green light for up to eleven assets to be sold therefore support cannot be given.
- Full Council needs to see details of the parking strategy and we need to see details of the short and long-term financial implications of any proposed asset sale

Councillor Bailey moved a revised recommendation to read as follows: Full Council approves and adopts the Asset Management Plan for 2023/24 excluding the list of assets deemed surplus in Appendix 4, which was seconded by Councillor Goodship.

Debate on proposed amendment to Appendix 4.

- Councillor Pound disagreed with the amended on the grounds that the asset management plan is a means of identify assets where the benefits of those assets and the benefits that they accrue from their utilisation need to outweigh the ongoing insignificant costs of maintaining them.
- Or they are they are just no longer useful to the council in the provision of its services. It does not necessarily mean that they are being sold, it means that they are being disposed of by the Council.
- If there are alternative methods of disposals, then they will be explored. Putting an asset on the asset management plan means that officers have the opportunity to work through a process to identify whether assets are still of value to the Council or not
- The five car parks that have been identified and as of, yet the outcome is not known until the strategy review has taken place.
- Concern was raised over the lack of a Car Parking Strategy being in placed before being listed on the Asset Disposals list.
- Disappointment was raised that the Wesley Centre had been added to the Asset list as it did not meet the selection criteria
- The Community Storehouse (Food Bank) and the PW Children's Centre heavily use the Wesley Centre use the centre two times per week demonstrating the Wesley Centre is not a surplus asset.
- It was acknowledged that there could be some lessons learned with wording within the report could be improved and comments will be noted for the next report submission.

A recorded vote was requested by Councillor Chapelard

**Members who voted for the Motion:** Councillors Allen, Atwood, Atkins, Bailey Barrington-King, Dawlings, Fairweather, Goodship, (Linda) Hall, March, Moon, (Ms) Palmer, Patterson, Roberts, Wakeman, White (16)

**Members who voted against the Motion:** Councillors Britcher-Allen, Barras, Bland, Brice, Chapelard, Ellis, Everitt, Fitzsimmons, Funnel, Hayward, (Christopher) Hall, Hickey Hill, Knight, Le Page, Lidstone, McMillan, Morton, Pope, Poile, Pound, Rands, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Warne, Wormington, Willis. (28)

**Members who voted against the Motion:** Councillors: Allen, Attwood, Barrington-King, Bland, Dawlings, Fairweather, Goodship, March, (Ms) Palmer, Roberts, White (11)

**Members who abstained from voting:** (0)

**AMMENDED NOT CARRIED**



The debate proceeded on original motion

Debate

- It was raised that the lack of maintenance from the previous administration had led to the neglect and cost increases of the assets.
- Concern was expressed that the PAOP now only represented by members of the Cabinet, this is an oversight, and a very bad call should it continue in this way.
- It was clarified that each individual asset will be reviewed, and this is a process officers will undertake to determine whether the asset is surplus or not
- It was reiterated that the review of assets was required to safeguard the finances of the Council
- It was raised that PW were asked some 10 years ago to produce a plan for the Wesley Centre and as of, yet nothing has materialised, TWBC are open for conversation.

Councillor Chapelard requested a recorded vote

**Members who voted for the Motion:** Councillors Britcher-Allen, Barras, Brice, Chapelard, Ellis, Everitt, Fitzsimmons, Funnel, Hayward, (Christopher) Hall, Hickey Hill, Knight, Le Page, Lidstone, McMillan, Morton, Patterson, Pope, Poile, Pound, Rands, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Warne, Wormington, Willis. (28)

**Members who voted against the Motion:** Councillors: Atkins, Bailey, Fairweather, Goodship, (Linda) Hall, March, Moon, (Ms) Palmer, Roberts, White Wakeman (11)

**Members who abstained from voting** Councillors: Allen, Attwood, Barrington-King, Dawlings, Bland (5)

**RESOLVED** - That Full Council approves and adopts the Asset Management Plan for 2023/24.

## **CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/24**

FC30/22 Councillor Hall moved, and Councillor Chapelard seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

The report was taken as read

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation

**RESOLVED** – That the Capital Strategy 2023/24, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

## **TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY 2023/24**

FC31/22 Councillor Hall moved, and Councillor Chapelard seconded, the

recommendations set out in the report.

The report was taken as read

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation

**RESOLVED** - That the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2023/24, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be adopted

#### **URGENT BUSINESS**

FC32/22      There was no urgent business

#### **COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL**

FC33/22      **RESOLVED** – That the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to any contract, minute, notice or other document arising out of the minutes or pursuant to any delegation, authority or power conferred by the Council.

#### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

FC34/22      The next scheduled meeting was Wednesday 5 April 2023

#### **NOTES:**

The meeting concluded at 10pm  
An audio recording of this meeting is available on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council website

#### **NOTES:**

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified.