

Cabinet Issues

From the meeting of 22 January 2013

1. Financial Overview as at the Third Quarter

The Cabinet received an updated assessment of the financial position of the Council in 2012/13, based upon the position at the third quarter stage.

Members noted that the situation was pleasing, with projected under spends of some £25m (revenue) and £26m (capital) or slightly greater at year end.

The following actions were agreed:

- 1) That the current revenue outturn forecast, which is a projected under spend for the year of **£25.059m** as detailed in Appendix A (ii) to report FP/987/12/12, be noted. Within this projection the Emergency Contingency of **£8m** is currently assumed fully spent, whilst no usage has as yet been proposed or agreed. If this remains the position at year-end, the underspend will therefore be **£33.059m**
- 2) That a projected under spend of **£28.306m** against the approved capital payments guideline, after proposed adjustments, also be noted.
- 3) That approval be given to appropriate:
 - a. **£408,000** to the Waste Reserve from Health and Well Being Portfolio.
 - b. **£55,000** to the Transformation Reserve from Deputy Leader Recharged Support Services (Human Resources) Portfolio.
 - c. **£354,000** to the Transformation Reserve from Leader Portfolio.
 - d. **£421,000** to the General Balance from Deputy Leader Recharged Support Services (Information Services).
 - e. **£899,000** to the A130 PFI Reserve from Highways and Transportation Portfolio.
 - f. **£1.360m** to the Future Capital Funding Reserve from Highways and Transportation Portfolio.
 - g. **£200,000** to the Transformation Reserve from Highways and Transportation Portfolio.
 - h. **£320,000** to the Transformation Reserve from Economic Growth and Waste and Recycling Portfolio.
 - i. **£500,000** to the General Balance from Deputy Leader Recharged Support Services (Asset Management) Portfolio.
 - j. **£602,000** from the Redundancy Reserve to Deputy Leader Recharged Support Services (Information Services).
 - k. **£104,000** to the General Balance from Customer Services, Environment and Culture Portfolio.

- l. **£90,000** to the General Balance from Deputy Leader Recharged Support Services (Information Services).
 - m. **£97,007** from the Insurance Reserve to the Future Capital Funding Reserve within the Other Operating Costs portfolio.
- 4) That approval be given to create a net nil budget within the Adult Social Care Portfolio in respect of Assessment and Care Management NE projects as shown on page 5 of report FP/987/12/12, to be funded by **£666,000** from North East Essex PCT.
- 5) That within the Capital Programme approval be given for slippage of **£19.188m**, budget additions of **£9.874m**, budget reductions of **£16.123m** and advanced works of **£1.198m**. These are in addition to the budget changes approved in the 2012/13 Half Year Cabinet Report.
- 6) That the net revenue under spend of £25m, after proposed actions, be transferred to the general balance, in order to fund the 2013/14 revenue budget. The budget has been drafted on the basis that £25m of this funding is made available on a one-off basis from this source.

2. Corporate Plan Progress Report – Quarter 3

The Cabinet has received an updated assessment of the progress made in delivering the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities in 2012/13. This set out for the third quarter stage (up to November 2012) progress against the measures of success and specified aspirations.

Members were pleased to note successes and also to be informed where work was in progress where necessary to address areas of challenge.

3. Award of Lease for Marsh Farm Visitor Attraction

Marsh Farm is one of nine sites within the County Council's country parks estate. A report on a proposed new operating model for Marsh Farm was considered by the Cabinet in September 2012 when it was agreed to advertise for bids for a commercial lease for it to be run as a family visitor attraction. Subsequently, the opportunity for the lease was advertised in local and national media and a rigorous evaluation process was undertaken to select the preferred tenant, Partyman Company Limited.

The Cabinet has agreed to award the commercial lease for Marsh Farm to the preferred tenant on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Director, Essex Property and Facilities, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme.

4. Delivery of an Assessment and Award Function within a Localised Social Fund Scheme

From April 2013 the Welfare Reform Act 2012 removes two discretionary elements of the 'Social Fund', Community Care Grants (CCGs) and Crisis Loans (CLs) from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who currently administer them nationally via Job Centre Plus. The DWP has allocated upper tier authorities a non-ring fenced grant to compensate local areas for the end of the national scheme.

The provision of a Social fund scheme incorporates two aspects of delivery; a requirement to assess applicants against defined eligibility criteria and, subsequently, a need to provide the applicant with the award that has been defined in the assessment process. In 2011-12 it is estimated that around 31,000 applications were made for DWP assistance from Essex residents. Approximately 20,340 of these were successful, resulting in £2.8m of expenditure. The average sum payable was around £300-£400 for Community Care Grants and £50-£60 for Crisis Loans

Engagement with other upper tier councils has highlighted a number of approaches for the assessment process. However a common decision is the creation of an in house team to deal with assessment and award within an existing call centre. Further to this, there is a requirement for the Unitary Councils of Southend and Thurrock to provide a localised scheme. Their agreed approach is to develop a partnership arrangement with Southend providing the assessment function on behalf of Thurrock.

Following a consultation and benchmarking exercise, a number of options for delivery of an assessment function in Essex were identified and reviewed for suitability against a number of factors, including a set of key design principles. The proposed solution is to develop an arrangement with Southend Council to provide the assessment and award function on behalf of ECC.

The Cabinet has agreed to adopt this proposal and to delegate authority to Southend on Sea Borough Council to exercise the assessment and award function on behalf of the County Council. It has delegated authority to the Executive Director for Environment, Sustainability and Highways to finalise the arrangements which will underpin the implementation of the scheme including an appropriate delegation agreement and other documentation. It has also agreed that the delegation of functions should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it is delivering high quality services and meeting the Council's requirements.

Peter Martin
Leader of the Council