

Northern Rother District Councillors' Report

February 2022.

Draft Revenue Budget 2022/23.

The 2022/23 referendum principles allow for an increase for Shire Districts of up to 2% or £5 whichever is the greater.

Inflation of between 1.8% and 2% had been applied except for contracts where specific indices were applied. Salaries had been assumed to increase by 1% from September 2022.

Net expenditure for 2022/23 will amount to £16.736m partly financed by drawing down an amount of £3.108m from Reserves.

Council Tax for 2022/23 at Band D will increase by £4.67 (2.47%) on a band D property and be set at £193.38.

The draft Revenue Budget has been balanced for 2022/23 by the planned use of £3.108m from Reserves. However, this is not a sustainable approach and it is imperative that the Council delivers on key initiatives such as the Financial Stability Programme and Property Investment Strategy, which are aimed at generating additional income and cost savings. Without such action, the financial forecast shows **Reserves will be under considerable pressure and will fall below acceptable levels** over the next five years. This also increases the Council's vulnerability to being able to cope with unexpected cost increases.

The Local Enforcement Plan (LEP) adopted in July 2016 was consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance and described how the Council investigated allegations of unauthorised development within the district. As a result of several factors, namely updates to the NPPF, adoption of the Council's Development and Site Allocations Local Plan in 2019 and consequences of COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to update the document. All Members had the opportunity to consider the draft Plan in November and contribute to its revision and several Member suggestions had been incorporated into the draft. A copy of the revised draft LEP is attached to the report at Appendix A of the Cabinet agenda for 10 January 2022.

The proposed updated plan drew on current good practice and current working practices as well as up-to-date legislation and planning policies to both set out how the Planning Enforcement services managed investigating alleged planning breaches proactively, but also what it could and could not do including when some factors may be beyond its control. In addition, the revised LEP provided

appendices which should assist visually with setting out the investigation and action processes and the 'toolkit' of powers at the Service's disposal.

Whilst formal consultation with the parish and town councils across the district had not taken place on this draft, it was agreed that a remote meeting would be held following full Council's adoption of the plan. Consultation with the parish and town councils would take place in subsequent reviews of the plan in two/three years' time.

Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping strategy.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee had considered in detail the update on the progress of the Improvement Delivery Plan of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2014), in particular the three strategic priorities: Increasing the Supply of Housing; Rough Sleeping, Homelessness and Meeting Housing Aspirations; and Improving the quality and suitability of existing housing and new build housing. The OSC had been particularly keen to ensure that the use of pre-fabricated buildings for Temporary Accommodation (TA) on suitable Council owned was considered.

It was confirmed that it was already adopted Council Policy to consider modular construction / pre-fabricated etc housing. It was noted that whilst the number of empty homes that had been brought back into use was just five, it was in its infancy as an approach and finding owners and solutions was a challenge; it was also noted that many empty homes in the district were as a result of probate, a lengthy legal process and there would always be a significant number in any given year that were in that category.

Carbon Baseline Approach for Council's activities.

It had been recommended to use the pre-pandemic year 2019/20 as the baseline year and data would be collected, where possible, of direct emissions generated from the Council's own operations from an assessment of electricity, gas and water usage and business travel.

The Greenhouse Gas Protocol identified three types of emissions, referred to as Scopes 1, 2 and 3 and were reported as carbon dioxide equivalents:

Scope 1 Direct emissions from sources owned or controlled by Rother District Council.

Scope 2 Indirect emissions from the generation of energy purchased by Rother District Council.

Scope 3 Indirect emissions that result from the other activities that occur in the supply chain of the Council's activities.

It was intended to include the outsourced services of leisure, waste collection and grounds maintenance services within Scope 3, but would be dependent on the data available. Carbon emissions generated by Council tenants, where the responsibility for the payment of the utility bills lay with the tenant, would be excluded from the asset baselining, as they were included within the districtwide emission calculations.

It was anticipated that baseline emissions for Scopes 1, 2 and some Scope 3 activities would be in place no later than 31 March 2022. The Council was currently recruiting to the post of Climate Change Project Officer, who would review the baseline data, further scope 3 activities, including data capture, and progress projects to reduce carbon emissions.

Rother Built Leisure Facilities Strategy.

In July 2020 Cabinet suspended the Bexhill Leisure redevelopment project given the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on leisure facilities and the uncertainty surrounding Council finances, with a view to reviewing the leisure requirements in the longer-term, including the possibility of a new facility in Bexhill, as demand for leisure services and the financial climate became clearer.

Contracts to maintain the existing leisure services up to 31 March 2024 were agreed with Freedom Leisure (FL) for Bexhill Leisure Centre and Bexhill Leisure Pool (the separate Rye Sports Centre contract, also operated by FL, expired on 31 March 2026). The Bexhill buildings needed major refurbishment or replacement prior to a new contract beyond 31 March 2024.

In order to undertake the review, it was recommended that the Council appointed a strategist to undertake a full and thorough review of existing built

leisure facilities across the district and provide an evidence-based (including full market research) proposal on a strategy that was realistic and achievable, and supported an active and healthy lifestyle across the district. It was hoped that all sources of information would be gathered, including the research carried out as part of the Healthy Ageing through Innovation in Rural Europe project. The report gave details of the strategists' brief and a high-level indicative timeline in which to complete the Strategy by December 2022. Members requested that the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Tourism and Leader of the Council were consulted on all necessary actions to appoint the strategist and market research company.

Members were keen to ensure that the leisure services offer responded to all residents' needs across the district and not just those centrally focused in Bexhill; this could include leisure services being delivered in a variety of ways across numerous locations in the district.

It was anticipated that the Strategy and market research work would cost in the region of £50,000 which could be funded from £140,000 included in the existing Capital Programme for minor refurbishments at Bexhill Leisure Centre.

Councillors Martin Mooney and Tony Ganly.