

One Corby Policy Committee

Tuesday 1st December 2020

At 7:00 pm via Zoom (virtual meeting)

Present: - Councillor Addison (Chair), Eyles, McGhee, McEwan, Elliston, Pengelly, Beeby, P Beattie, Dalziel, Sims & Wellings.

14. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors T Beattie, Watt, Keane & Latta.

15. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare any personal interests they may have in the business to be discussed and/or indicate whether this was prejudicial or non-prejudicial, the nature of any interest, and whether they intended participating in the relevant agenda item. No declarations were made.

16. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the One Corby Policy Committee meeting held on 3rd November 2020 had been circulated.

RESOLVED that: -

The minutes of the One Corby Policy Committee meeting held on 3rd November 2020 be approved.

17. Corporate Reasonable Adjustments Policy

Members noted that under the Equality Act (2010) all public sector organisations had a duty to ensure that their services were accessible to everyone that needed to use them. This meant that adjustments may have to be made to a service to ensure that someone who has a disability could still access and benefit from that service.

Whilst the Council had been complying with its duty to meet the obligations under the Equality Act (2010), the proposed policy formalised the process.

This policy provided guidance on identifying how and when to make 'reasonable adjustments' to Council services.

'Reasonable adjustments' were adjustments that were made specifically to remove barriers or disadvantage to enable someone that has a disability to access a service. For example:

- An alteration to how someone accesses the building, for example a ramp.
- A change to a policy or training to ensure someone with a learning disability can access a service, this may include giving additional assistance in booking an appointment or paying a bill.
- How we communicate with specific individuals, this may include booking a sign language interpreter when meeting a customer with a hearing impairment.

This policy aimed to equip employees with the knowledge and the confidence on how to apply reasonable adjustments when required to Council services.

The policy had been to the Joint Consultative Committee on 5th October 2020 and is supported by the trade unions.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The Reasonable Adjustment Policy be approved.

18. Parental Bereavement Leave – Jack’s Law

The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Regulations were known as “Jack's Law”, in memory of Jack Herd whose mother Lucy campaigned for mandatory leave for grieving parents.

The Act gives a statutory right to a minimum of two weeks' leave for all employed parents if they lose a child under the age of 18 or have a stillbirth from the 24th week of pregnancy.

This allowed parents to take the leave as either a single block of two weeks, or as two separate blocks of one week each taken at different times during 56 weeks after their child's death. This meant they could match their leave to the times they needed it most, including the first anniversary of the child's death. The right would exist irrespective of how long they had worked for their employer.

Parents with at least 26 weeks' continuous service would also be entitled to Statutory Parental Bereavement pay, paid at the rate of £148.68 per week.

In order to support Council staff, and to bring the council in line with other local authorities within North Northamptonshire, officers proposed that employees received normal pay for the statutory leave period, which would be above the statutory minimum entitlement. This would ensure additional support was offered to bereaved parents in their grieving process.

This proposal was tabled at the Joint Consultative Committee on 5th October 2020 and is supported by the trade unions.

Councillor Sims welcomed the report and felt that the Council provide as much support as possible to staff, who may find themselves in this difficult situation.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) Employees receive normal pay for the statutory leave period, rather than the statutory minimum.

19. Budget Monitoring April – September 2020

The report before Members set out the income and expenditure forecasts for the year in relation to the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Capital Programme based on April-September 2020 expenditure.

The General Fund showed an overspend of £729,000, as compared to £1.2m at the end of Quarter 1. This was almost entirely due to lost income because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The gross pressure from this was £2.1m, which had been partially offset by four tranches of Government funding that the Council had so far received totalling £1.4m. The £729,000 would need to be met from Reserves and this amount could reduce by a further £570,000 if the Council's submission for lost fees and charges income were successful.

It was noted that the predicted overspend did not take into account the current lockdown (ending 2nd December) or any future potential Government announcements.

The report indicated that there was a significant reduction in Council Tax and Business Rates income collection. This would be a cost in 2021/22 since this was how the technical treatment of income for these areas was accounted for.

The Committee noted that there were several projected over and underspends detailed in the report by service areas.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) showed a projected overspend of £404,000 at the end of September 2020, as compared to an overspend of £402,000 at the end of July 2020, against a gross budget of £23m. Details of the variances were included in the report before Members.

A breakdown of the latest Capital Programme for 2020/21 and expenditure to the end of September 2020 were included in the report and accompanying appendices. Whilst no adverse variances were being reported within either the HRA or the General Fund Capital Programme at this stage, there was a significant overall underspend. Only £1.2m of the £12m HRA Capital Programme had so far been spent, and only £126,000 of the £2m General Fund Capital Programme had been spent to date.

In addition, £2m of the £5m one-off schemes, approved in November 2018 and carried forward into the current year's budget was yet to be spent.

The report detailed additions to the Capital Programme which were being requested, all of which were externally funded: -

Disabled Facilities Grant	£110,451
S106 Funded Cycle and Pedestrian Works	£800,000
S106 Funded Play Areas	£2,160
S106 Funded CCTC Little Stanion	£5,070
S106 Funded CCTC Priors Hall	£33,848
S106 Funded CCTC Weldon	£17,331

The Chief Finance Officer did confirm that with regard to the Capital Programme, whilst it was hoped that the approved budgets would be spent before year end this was not certain. Any decision regarding carry forward of monies for projects into 2021/22 would be a decision for the new unitary council to consider.

Councillor Addison queried what financial support had been made available to residents during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that there had been an array of grants provided by Government to assist local businesses. In relation to the public there was some funding, for example to those who were required to self-isolate under Track and Trace.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The financial position of the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Capital Programme contained in the report be noted;

- (ii) The relevant Heads of Service and Director of Corporate Services be instructed to continue to review all areas of expenditure with the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account with a view to minimising any overspend; and
- (iii) The changes to the Capital Programme as detailed in the Capital Section of the report be approved.

(Councillors Pengelly & McEwan joined the meeting at this point)

20. Shire Lodge Cemetery Extension

The Committee were being requested to agree to the drawdown of reserves to fund the additional cost of extending Shire Lodge Cemetery.

Corby Borough Council's Shire Lodge Cemetery was approaching capacity and current projections suggested that it had between 18 months and 2 years of spare burial capacity.

APSE Solutions undertook a feasibility report in Feb 2019 to look at CBC's bereavement services and following an in-depth site search, case study and key stakeholder engagement identified an extension to the Shire Lodge Cemetery as the most appropriate location to offer new burial space. An indicative cost analysis was provided for an extension and chapel of £1.74million.

Planning permission had been granted to extend the existing cemetery into playing fields to the West of the existing cemetery and layout the new cemetery as a lawned cemetery. In addition to the cemetery extension it was proposed that a new welfare building was provided with a link to the Rockingham Triangle car park and refurbishment of existing public facilities at the site entrance. There was a long-term aspiration to construct a chapel of rest. The plans were sympathetic to this aim and allowed for a new car park extension to the east of the existing cemetery.

As a result of the encroachment onto playing fields, additional pitches had been brought into use across the Borough and an enhanced wildlife corridor was planned between the cemetery and existing houses to the south.

New rules and regulations would also be drafted and enforced to ensure that the new extension remained as a lawn cemetery.

The proposals provided for circa 25 to 30 years of additional capacity.

Capital funding of £750,000 for 2019/20 was approved for the cemetery extension with no provision for a chapel.

In securing planning permission, in addition to the expected design and feasibility fees, additional fees were incurred to address concerns over restrictive covenants on the land, service diversion and opposition from Sport England on the loss of playing fields. Spend to date was £99,500, with committed planned support costs of £120,000, for contract administration, service diversions and project management, providing a construction budget of circa £530,000.

A tender process for delivering the works was undertaken and despite sign posting to local contractors the Council received just 4 valid bids. They were as follows:

1. Tender One - £1,684,000
2. Tender Two - £1,764,000

3. Tender Three - £2,312,000
4. Tender Four - £2,495,000

This therefore left a large shortfall of £1,154,0000 against Tender 1. Officers had considered various options for revising the scope of works for the project and based on the tender prices received, estimated the project value of each, as below: -

Option One – Review scope of works against available budget of £530,000 and re-tender. Based on lowest tender bids it was likely to result in a scheme that simply provided an extension into the playing fields involving a new perimeter fence, some access roads and paths and limited planting both within cemetery and wildlife corridor. As the cemetery extended overtime costs would need to be budgeted to extend the roads and paths as the cemetery fills up.

Option Two (officer's preferred option) – Approve the additional funding of £570,000 from general reserves to deliver the core requirements of the scheme and re-tender. Based on lowest tender bids this would involve delivering most of the planned works (as detailed in Appendix 1), except for the car park extension to the East of the existing cemetery.

This was officers preferred option as it delivered the additional burial space and site facilities but removed the car park extension which was primarily to service a possible new chapel. Additional parking had been provided on-site by retaining the access link from Rockingham Triangle additional overflow car parking was provided. In addition, further value engineering of works would be undertaken to lower the specification for hard and soft landscaping for the cemetery extension and consider alternative procurement methods for soft landscaping.

Option Three – Approve the additional funding of £870,000 from general reserves to deliver the core requirements as per Option Two above but would continue to provide the car park extension to the east of the existing cemetery and re-tender. Based on lowest tender bids this would also involve value engineering the solutions with the aim of delivering most of the planned works in Appendix 1.

Option Four - Approve the additional funding of £1,235,000 from general reserves to deliver the current scope of works and specification and re-tender. There would be some simple value engineering of the requirements, such as rationalisation of landscaping provided but in the main this will see delivery of the scheme and specification as originally tendered.

The Committee was being requested to consider approving the additional funding of £570,000 from reserves to add to £750,000 of original budget to provide a working capital budget of £1,320,000.

Subject to the Committee's determination of this report, the report would be referred to the Shadow Executive Committee of the North Northamptonshire Shadow Authority under the agreed notification protocol. It was for the sovereign council to determine this matter, however given the amount of the proposed budget increase, and this increase being in addition to the agreed Capital Programme, a notification referral would be required.

Councillor Pengelly felt that the Council needed to invest additional money to ensure appropriate facilities and capacity was in place. Councillor Pengelly noted the original proposals had already been scaled down and would prefer to see Option Three supported and an additional £870,000 funding proved.

Councillor McGhee fully supported Option Three and expressed a preference for the additional car parking to be retained. Councillor McGhee also expressed hope that smaller local companies would be prepared to engage in any re-tender exercise.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Committee had the ability to agree Option Three and draw down £870,000 from Reserves.

Officers confirmed that local companies had been made aware of the original procurement exercise, however only larger national companies had submitted tenders.

Councillor Sims noted that the report indicated that currently there was 18-24 months additional capacity at the cemetery; was this still the case. Officers confirmed that there was still at least 18 months capacity.

Councillor Sims also queried whether there was still any covenant or legal obstacles in the project commencing. Officers confirmed that any covenant issues had been resolved regarding the site, and planning consent obtained for the project.

Councillor Sims also wondered whether by engaging local firms the procurement process would be lengthened. Officers confirmed it would not. Local firms had been made aware of the original procurement exercise; any re-tender exercise would also be brought to their attention. There would be no change to the proposed timetable of the project if Members preferred approving Option Three.

Councillor Addison asked whether the proposed extension made allowance for the diverse population in Corby. Officers confirmed it did, and local community groups had been engaged in discussions.

In conclusion, whilst the officer recommendation was to approve Option Two, it was **MOVED** by Councillor McGhee and **SECONDED** by Councillor Pengelly that Option Three be approved.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The funding of £870,000 from Council Reserves be approved to allow officers to re-tender works to extend the Cemetery, based on Option Three being the preferred way forward.

21. Close of Meeting

Meeting closed at 7:30 pm.