



## **MINUTES OF THE BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR**

### **PLACE AND ECONOMY**

#### **SESSION 1 - 7 JANUARY 2022 held using the Zoom platform**

##### **Attendees:**

Cllrs: Mark Pengelly, Richard Levell, Valerie Anslow, Lloyd Bunday, Scott Brown, Jim Hakewill, Ken Harrington, Ian Jelley, King Lawal, Anne Lee, Steven North, Malcolm Ward

Executive Members/Officers: Cllrs David Brackenbury, Harriet Pentland and Graham Lawman – George Candler, Executive Director – Place and Economy, Rob Harbour, Assistant Director – Growth and Regeneration, Graeme Kane, Assistant Director – Highways and Waste, Iain Smith, Assistant Director – Regulatory Services, and Jonathan Waterworth, Assistant Director – Assets and Environment

Finance Officers: Mark Dickenson, Claire Edwards, Janice Gotts and Katherine Hayward

Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Raj Sohal, Democratic Services Officer and Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Support Officer.

##### **1. Overview of presentation**

The group considered a presentation by George Candler, Executive Director of Place and Economy, which outlined each of the four key functional service areas of place and economy: growth and regeneration, assets and environment, highways and waste and regulatory services. The Executive Director explained that the net budget for place and economy was £54.6M (19% of the overall Council budget. This information had previously been circulated to the task and finish group.

##### **2. Summary of questions and comments including responses**

- “Regarding the cost of agency staff throughout planning departments, there is a concern that we, as an authority, are haemorrhaging staff in planning. What are we doing to reduce our dependency on agency workers and get the right staff in?”
  - Councillor David Brackenbury explained there existed a shortage of senior qualified planning staff nationally. Although the authority did not want to continue with a dependency on agency staff, the executive member emphasised the significance of having competent and experienced planning officers across all areas. The executive member assured the task

and finish group that the executive was aware of this issue and was seeking to resolve it.

- “The authority has experienced issues with recruitment and a dependency on non-permanent staff for a while now. What is the “Plan B”, moving forward?
  - The Executive Director explained that matters were being progressed and that the service areas had aimed to move towards maintaining a workforce of increased permanent staff. He posited that the challenge would be to ensure that service delivery continued at pace, while recruiting new staff.
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- The task and finish group requested a list of the vacancies in planning for the next session.
- “Will we be able to spend external funding in areas across North Northamptonshire, outside of Kettering?”
  - The Assistant Director of Growth and Regeneration explained that external funding had been made available to North Northamptonshire Council through the Heritage Action Zone, on the basis that it would be invested in town centre improvement in Kettering. As a result, this funding could not be invested outside of Kettering.
- The Chair expressed concern regarding the recent cancellation of Corby town board meetings. He posited that these town board meetings should be planned well in advance and could not continue to be cancelled, as they were important to determine how funding would be spent in Corby
- “How much did the work to calculate the Council’s carbon footprint cost?”
  - The Assistant Director of Growth and Regeneration explained that the work that has been commissioned is not just looking at the councils carbon footprint, but a wider range of work. An update on this would come to the next meeting of the Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panel, to be held on 19<sup>th</sup> January. The Assistant Director explained that the authority would not know the full cost of the work until a response was received from the suppliers, as it was still under procurement at the time of meeting. He confirmed a sum of £25,000 had been budgeted for the work.
- “Why is the ‘employees staffing’ cost budget the same for next year, despite ongoing issues which should’ve created a rise in this cost?”
  - The Assistant Director of Growth and Regeneration explained that the authority was intending to restructure and redesign teams within this service, to achieve a net zero position. Rather than seeking to make a saving on this cost within the budget, as many other service areas were doing, Growth and Regeneration aimed to work within this existing financial envelope hence no change for next years budget.
- “Some capacity funding was intended for the delivery of Tresham Garden Village. is this funding now being directed elsewhere in the budget?”

- The Assistant Director of Growth and Regeneration explained that while the authority had previously committed funding for Tresham Garden Village, it would no longer receive capacity funding for garden village projects from Homes England. Nevertheless, there would be an opportunity to bid for future funding for Tresham Garden Village in the coming year.
- “Will we be using Norse for any highways and waste services?”
  - The Assistant Director of Highways and Waste explained that a decision had been taken that all services provided by Wellingborough Norse would now be provided by NNC directly. Nevertheless, while the authority would no longer be using Norse for these services, Norse colleagues would join North Northamptonshire, under the direct management of the local authority.
  - The Assistant Director also explained that there would be no change in the contractual cost of the disposal of waste. This was due to the fact that pre-Vesting Day the existing contractual agreements had been split geographically, between North and West Northamptonshire. Therefore, there would be no financial pressure for the North.
- “Regarding green waste collection across North Northamptonshire, is there a price program in place?”
  - The Assistant Director for Highways and Waste explained that the current arrangements for charging garden waste in the budget was the same and would be continued for 2022/23.
- “Are fines for people driving in bus lanes enforced 24/7?”
  - The Assistant Director of Assets and Environment explained that these fines were not enforced at all times but at times between 9am to 4pm (Mondays to Saturdays). The authority had set a budget of £482k for the forthcoming year.
- What are the ‘advertising and publicity’ costs, listed in the presentation, used for?”
  - The Assistant Director of Highways and Waste explained that the description of this cost was a wide one, encompassing other aspects of the budget, not just advertising and publicity.
- Regarding home-to-school transport, the Assistant Director of Highways and Waste explained that if a family were eligible for free transport, there would be no change nor disruption to the system. There existed a number of strands in home-to-school transport, run by various procured contractors.
- “In the past it was difficult to find a recycling contractor. Is there a live recycling contract shown in this budget, which will show no change in pressure?”
  - The Assistant Director for Highways and Waste explained that the authority was in the process of procuring a new dry and mixed recycling contract.

- “How many employee vacancies currently exist within regulatory services?”
  - The Assistant Director of Regulatory Services explained that 140-145 staff were employed in regulatory services. The total number of vacancies amounted to around 5-10.
  
- “Will the countywide Travellers Unit remain properly funded and continue to be supported?”
  - The Assistant Director of Regulatory Services explained that he did not foresee any changes to the operations of this service.