

Appendix D – Place and Economy 18 January 2022



**MINUTES OF THE BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR
PLACE AND ECONOMY
SESSION 2 - 18 JANUARY 2022 held using the Zoom platform**

Attendees:

Cllrs: Mark Pengelly, Richard Levell, Valerie Anslow, Wendy Brackenbury, Lloyd Bunday, Scott Brown, Jim Hakewill, Ken Harrington, Larry Henson, Ian Jelley, 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 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 task and finish group considered the remainder of the presentation, delivered at the previous session by George Candler, Executive Director of Place and Economy, which outlined the Assets and Environment service and the capital programme.

2. Summary of questions and comments including responses

- One member referenced previous Council plans to establish an authorised permanent traveller site in Desborough and questioned whether the local authority still intended to create this site.
 - **The Executive Director of Place and Economy explained that a ‘transit’ site was being looked at by the authority, as a stop-over site, to prevent unauthorised encampments. The Council had canvassed land across North Northamptonshire, to determine how this could work from a planning perspective. The Executive Director assured the task and finish group that once the options for this site were clear, the authority would seek to carry**

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out a consultation.

- Councillor Lloyd Bunday explained to the group that North Northamptonshire Council was in the process of dealing with inherited aspirational work, from the legacy authorities, and working to resolve this work.

- Members suggested that at some point in the near future, scrutiny should look at the Council's development pool. They posited that it would be useful to see what the authority aimed to deliver and what would be considered aspirational.
 - Councillor Graham Lawman explained that while some work had been progressed further, other projects remained in the development pool. A clearer picture of the wider progress of this work, within the development pool, would be made available when scrutiny would analyse the full budget.
- Regarding commercial income, members stated their desire to look closer into this and gain a further understanding of performance. The task and finish group requested a full breakdown of commercial income, for assurance that buildings owned by the authority would be properly maintained.
 - The Executive Director informed the group that more information concerning Council assets and asset rationalisation, would be made available at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission.
- One member expressed concern that certain lines of the capital programme of Place and Economy appeared to be too aspirational. He posited that the capital programme should outline the authority's realistic aims, rather than its aspirations. The member also suggested that if certain Council projects required urgent capital, then the programme should not prohibit this.
- The Vice Chair questioned whether 15% of allocated pressure on the total budget would be sufficient for utility costs.
 - The Assistant Director of Assets and Environment explained that this service area had looked at its contractual agreements, to determine what possible pressures could arise. He clarified that the authority had allowed for a 15% increase in pressure on this budget and would continue to monitor this, whilst also seeking to identify and enact any mitigations.
 - The Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy further clarified that the Council was looking at a movement of 15% of utility costs (£228K) and building provision within the budget for this.
- Councillor Harriet Pentland explained, in updating on the Climate Change proposed budget of £1m over three years, that if the allocation of the budget was not spent within the financial year, it would be possible to carry this funding over to the next. (£500k in the first year, then £250k for the two subsequent years.)
- One member of the group requested further information regarding work in the Capital Programme at the Kettering Warren Hill crematorium, which amounted to approximately £150,000.

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- The Assistant Director of Regulatory Services clarified that the majority of the work to be undertaken at Warren Hill was for the improvement of the cremators. A portion of this sum was also to be allocated to progress plans for an extension to the cemetery.
- The Chair questioned whether the local authority had achieved further progress regarding the development of the A43 Corby link road.
 - The Assistant Director of Highways and Waste explained that the spend concerning the Corby link road listed in the programme, related to the section of the road that had already been completed. The authority was engaging with private landowners of other sections of the road, to determine their aspirations and ambitions for this land.
- Regarding the ‘super-fast broadband’ line of the report, members questioned why this cost had no allocation for 2024/25 and also questioned whether the service could guarantee a spend of £1.562M in 2022/23.
 - The Assistant Director of Growth and Regeneration explained that the authority could not absolutely guarantee the broadband spend for 2022/23, as the direct installation of broadband was carried out by third party contractors. Therefore, the spend listed in the report at the time of the meeting was a forecasted figure and would depend on the capacity of third-party contractors. That said, and based on previous years performance, there were no expected risks forecast in this regard.
 - Regarding the 2024/25 allocation, the Assistant Director clarified that North Northamptonshire Council would have to wait for new contracts to seek additional funding from central government.
- Members questioned whether a lack of permanent staff had caused a delay in the progression of planning applications.
 - The Assistant Director of Growth and Regeneration updated scrutiny that any shortfall in staffing can adversely impact the service area however this was being mitigated through a number of agency staff being employed. . He explained that one of the downsides on a dependency of agency staff was that they could leave at short notice which can cause delays until they are replaced..
 - Councillor David Brackenbury stated that authority did not desire a reliance upon agency staff. While the Councillor acknowledged that planning policy was not yet under strategic pressure, the workload would increase therefore, the Council would need to address vacancies in this area. Nevertheless, he assured the task and finish group that the executive was fully aware of the issue and was in the process of finalising a review, regarding all planning services.
- A Member emphasised the importance of addressing staffing issues in all departments and questioned why the employment committee of the Council had never met.
 - Councillor Scott Brown informed the group that the employment committee was due to meet later in January to elect a chair, to take them through to May 2022.

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- The Chair questioned whether officers anticipated income, generated through driving fines, would decrease over time, as these fines were intended to serve as a deterrent against motorists driving in bus lanes.
 - The Assistant Director of Assets and Environment explained that as service areas received more data, budgets would remain under review to determine any potential impact on future budgets.

- Regarding home-to-school transport, one member expressed concern that changes to bus arrangements would affect 1,000 people across North Northamptonshire and questioned whether the authority had engaged in dialogue with families to address this early and allow them to make alternative arrangements.
 - The Assistant Director of Highways and Waste assured the member that the authority fully appreciated the potential impact of these changes to home-to-school transport and explained that officers were working closely with the Department for Transport (DfT), to minimise this impact. The Assistant Director felt that at the time of meeting, it was not appropriate to communicate with individuals, until further DfT guidance had been received. Nevertheless, he clarified that communication was already underway with schools, colleges and operators.