

# CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

18 July 2023

- \* Councillor Phil Bellamy (Chairman)
- \* Councillor Bob Hughes (Vice-Chairman)
  - \* Councillor Joss Bigmore
  - Councillor James Jones
  - \* Councillor George Potter
  - \* Councillor James Walsh
  - \* Councillor Fiona White

## Independent Members:

Murray Litvak

## Parish Members:

Julia Osborn

Ian Symes

\* Tim Wolfenden

\*Present

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Julia McShane, the Lead Councillor for Finance & Property, Councillor Richard Lucas, the Lead Councillor for Community and Organisational Development, Councillor Carla Morson, the Lead Councillor for Commercial Services, Councillor Catherine Houston and Councillors Yves de Contades, Jason Fenwick, Joanne Shaw, and Howard Smith were also in attendance.

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Sallie Barker MBE, and Councillors Dawn Bennett, Ruth Brothwell, Amanda Creese, Angela Goodwin and Katie Steet were in remote attendance.

## **CGS8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor James Jones and from Murray Litvak, Julia Osborn, and Ian Symes.

## **CGS9 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT - DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

## **CGS10 GENERAL FUND BUDGET UPDATE**

The Committee noted that, at its budget meeting on 8 February 2023, the Council had approved the 2023-24 budget and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP),

which had included an £18.3m projected deficit to be resolved, underwritten by an estimated £32m cash backed usable reserves and £3.75m General Fund working balance reserve. The reasonable worst-case scenario, at that time, was that the Council's expenditure could be met by the resources currently available to it in the immediate term. Council asked the Joint Management Team to undertake a comprehensive financial review to identify a set of measures to address this deficit and present a revised budget and MTFP to Full Council in July 2023. That work had progressed, and the Committee considered the Section 151 Officer's report which set out the findings and recommended actions to be taken, including a 2023-24 General Fund budget revision for Full Council approval.

The Committee had been asked to consider the report and submit its own comments to the Executive at its meeting on 20 July, and to the Council at its meeting on 25 July, in respect of the recommendations contained in the report.

The Lead Councillor for Finance presented the report to the Committee summarising the position the Council was in financially, including the recent historical background highlighting the various factors and circumstances that had contributed to that position, together with the serious implications for the Council. The Lead Councillor also outlined the remedial measures recommended in the report and the anticipated timeline for their implementation.

During the debate, the Committee asked a number of questions and made a number of comments on the contents of the report. The Committee also made the following key points in the debate on this matter which it was proposed to put to the Executive on 20 July:

- It was noted in the discussion on an accountancy treatment of a grant that these sums had been erroneously applied to a reserves heading and were otherwise correctly spent and disposed of.
- It was suggested that the business case for investment in Planning Services should be circulated to councillors in advance of the Full Council meeting and added as a supplementary paper
- It was felt that the findings in the report should be noted rather than endorsed.
- It was suggested that, rather than having an informal cross-party reference group, the Executive should establish its own working group, to receive and comment on regular updates on the Council's preparations for the Medium-Term Financial Plan restatement in October and its implementation; and to consider options to close the projected financial gap.

- It was noted that the table in paragraph 7.12 of the report showing the increase in the capital programme since 2016 had erroneously shown the capital cost to the Council on the Ash Road Bridge project in 2024 as being £24.573m. The correct figure would be reported to Council.
- It was also noted that paragraphs 14.2 and 14.3 of the report (Climate Change/Sustainability implications) had erroneously repeated the earlier paragraphs 13.2 and 13.3 (Equality and Diversity Implications). Any further information on Climate Change/Sustainability implications should be reported to the Council.

The following changes to the recommendations in the report were therefore suggested for consideration by the Executive:

- (a) Paragraph 2.1 of the recommendation be amended to read:  
 “To approve the restated 2023-24 General Fund Revenue Budget, *including the business case for planning resources*”
- (b) Paragraph 2.3 of the recommendation be amended to read: “To *endorse note* the findings in this report.”
- (c) Paragraph 2.7 of the recommendation be amended to read: “*To note that the Executive will set up an executive working group for the following purposes:*
  - *to receive and comment on regular updates on the Council’s preparations for the Medium-Term Financial Plan restatement in October and its implementation;*
  - *to provide a sounding board for the Executive and officers on the options that are coming forward to close the projected financial gap;*
  - *and to guide wider communication with councillors and beyond”*

The Committee

RESOLVED: That the key points referred to above, together with the suggested amendments to the recommendations as indicated above be approved for consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 20 July 2023.

Action:	Officer to action:
To submit the Committee’s comments and recommendations to the Executive at its meeting on 20 July 2023.	Democratic Services & Elections Manager

The meeting finished at 9.09 pm

Signed .....

Date .....

Chairman