

At a Meeting of the **RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Kilworthy Park, Drake Road, **TAVISTOCK** on **TUESDAY** the **26th** day of **MARCH 2013** at **2.00pm**

Present: Cllr P R Sanders – Chairman
Cllr R E Baldwin – Vice Chairman
Cllr W G Cann OBE Cllr T J Hill
Cllr J R McInnes Cllr C R Musgrave
Cllr T G Pearce Cllr L B Rose

Substitute: Cllr R J Oxborough for Cllr P J Ridgers
Cllr D Whitcomb for Cllr C M Marsh

In attendance: Cllr Benson Cllr Clish Green
Cllr Hockridge Cllr Horn
Cllr Leech Cllr Moody
Cllr Morgan Cllr Sampson
Cllr Sheldon

Chief Executive
Acting Head of Finance & Audit
Member Services Manager
Economy Manager
Economy Officer

***RC 40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C M Marsh, Cllr P J Ridgers and Cllr E H Sherrell.

***RC 41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed, but none were made.

***RC 42 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 29 January 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

RC 43 MEETING THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGE

The Leader presented a report of the Chief Executive and Acting Head of Finance and Audit (page 1 to the agenda) which offered a way forward to overcome the 2014/15 budget gap of £728,000 and to build an approach that guarantees West Devon Borough Council's longer term viability.

He took Members through the report, and paid particular attention to the table of assumptions on how the 2014/15 budget gap may be bridged. The Chief Executive added national context to the report by advising that Local Government was expected to need to make a further 1% cut in 2014/15 and there would be a Comprehensive Spending Review in 2016/17. Members were advised that this was a living document and would be presented to each Resources Committee with updated

information. Progress would be tightly monitored. Finally, he added that there was an amendment to the presented Appendix A and the total of Earmarked Reserves and Capital Programme underspends should read £452,391 (not £602,391).

Members raised queries relating to the long term viability of West Devon Borough Council, and were also concerned that whilst a vacancy freeze would save money it was important that services were appropriately staffed.

The Head of Finance and Audit was able to answer a number of questions in relation to the assumptions made. The Chairman of Community Services and the Economy Manager were able to provide information in relation to the TICs. Members had a full and detailed debate in relation to the potential savings deferred from the 2013/14 budget (as detailed in para.3.4.3 of the presented report), and as part of this debate the proposal to reduce the grant to the CVS was **MOVED** but **NOT SECONDED**. **Therefore this motion FELL.**

It was then **RESOLVED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** that:

- (i) The broad thrust of the presented report be accepted to bridge the 2014/15 gap by a combination of measures including the use of New Homes Bonus; a presumption not to fill vacant posts as they arise in 2013/14 and further efficiency savings;
- (ii) The following potential savings discussed at paragraph 3.4.3 of the presented report should be pursued to enable early notice to be given to affected staff, stakeholders and partners;
 - a) Cessation of Borough Council funding to the TICs and officers to pursue alternative means of innovative service delivery
 - b) Economy service reduction
 - c) Discretionary Rate Relief

In addition, a further report be brought back to the Resources Committee outlining the overall impact of ending Giro payments, and the above list is not exhaustive and does not preclude additional initiatives for identifying potential further savings or additional income; and

- (iii) Those elements of earmarked reserves and capital where expenditure trends or commitments indicate it is safe to do so be stripped out, as set out at Appendix A, to free up New Homes Bonus.

***RC 44**

TRANSFORMATION 2018 – PROOF OF CONCEPT WORK

The Chief Executive presented a report of the Corporate Directors (page 15 to the agenda), which asked Members to approve a request for up to £25,000 to enable the Council to engage external assistance to prove the concept of a new operating model for future delivery of its services. In introducing the report, he reminded Members of the recent presentation and workshop that had taken place, at which the concept which was the subject of the report had first been introduced.

A number of Members raised concerns about the request to spend money on an external consultant, particularly when they felt that the Corporate Directors would be able to undertake the work. Members also queried the level of savings that could be made, but the Chief Executive explained that this feasibility work would give an indication of the potential savings for West Devon Borough Council. He added that if the work was not undertaken then there was no other way to generate the savings that the financial outlook demanded. Other Members supported the recommendation and stated that some external challenge was necessary and that radical savings had to be made to protect the long term future of the staff.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

- (i) That up to £25,000 from the Invest to Save Fund be invested in proof of concept work to enable a business case to be developed to be presented to Council in the autumn of 2013; and
- (ii) That the decision as to which organisation to engage, to deliver the proof of concept work, be delegated to the Chief Executive.

***RC 45**

OLD MILL SITE, OKEHAMPTON

The Economic Development Officer presented a report (page 19 to the agenda) that outlined the current position with regard to the Old Mill Site in Okehampton and asked Members to agree to appoint agents to re-market the site. In introducing the report he gave Members a brief history of the site, and also advised of the specific matters that needed consideration such as the covenant and potential procurement issues.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

- (i) That officers be instructed to appoint agents to re-market the Old Mill Site in accordance with the criteria listed in the presented report; and
- (ii) That the cost of this appointment be met from the capital budget for the Old Mill Site as outlined in the presented report

***RC 46**

WRITE OFF REPORT

The Acting Head of Finance and Audit presented a report (page 25 of the agenda) which informed Members of the debt written off for revenue streams within the Revenue and Benefits Service. Debts up to the value of £5,000 are written off by the Head of Finance and Audit under delegated authority. These debts were listed in the presented report for information. The report sought authority to write off individual debts with a value of more than £5,000, details of which were outlined in Table 3 of the report. In introducing the report, he advised Members that a rigorous process is followed to do everything possible to recover a debt before it is written off.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. In accordance with Financial Regulations, the Acting Head of Finance and Audit had authorised the write-off of individual West Devon Borough Council debts totalling £101,914.83 together with £13,309.71 of Non Domestic Rate Debt which was collected on behalf of the Government, as detailed in Table 1 and 2 of the presented report be noted; and
2. Authority to write off individual debts in excess of £5,000 as detailed in Table 3 of the report, which totalled £13,066.92 for Council Tax and £6,770.00 for Non Domestic (Business) Rates, be granted.

***RC 47**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100(A)(4)

It was **RESOLVED** that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the Meeting for the undermentioned item of business on the grounds that exempt information may be disclosed as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act.

***RC 48**

RATE RELIEF APPEAL - (PARAGRAPH 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE AUTHORITY HOLDING THAT INFORMATION))

The Acting Head of Finance and Audit presented a report of the Chief Revenue Accountant (page 32 of the presented agenda) that outlined the detail of an appeal against the Rate Relief Panel's earlier decision to reject an application for discretionary hardship rate relief.

Following questions of clarity and a brief debate, it was then **RESOLVED** that Section 49 Hardship Rate Relief for 2011/12 and 2012/13 as detailed in the presented report be not awarded to the applicant.

(The Meeting terminated at 4.30 pm)