

was for Members to consider, formulate and recommend the Budget 2022/23 to Full Council. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) indicates the possible extent of the budget and funding shortfall that the Council will face in the future. It is an aid in identifying the extent of service changes that the Council will need to make to achieve a balanced budget in each financial year up to 2026/27.

A detailed and informative slide presentation was given by the Section 151 Officer highlighting the salient points in the report.

Members were asked for any questions and the following discussions took place.

Following a question regarding how Torridge compares with the picture nationally a discussion took place regarding the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement.

It was highlighted that the Torridge has seen its Core Spending Power (CSP) increased by 1.1%, which is a cut of 4% in real terms when inflation is considered. The Section 151 Officer also highlighted the comparison with other Shire Districts (4.3%) and with those Authority areas in the same deprivation grouping (7%); showing the CSP for Torridge to be significantly lower than average.

The Chief Executive advised members of a meeting last week with the MP for Torridge & West Devon, Sir Geoffrey Cox. It was confirmed that the issue of the CSP rise was discussed and the Section 151 Officer had also challenged the Department for Leveling Up Housing and Communities. It was stated that Sir Geoffrey Cox MP indicated he would raise the matter with Michael Gove MP on behalf of Torridge.

Members queried the revised assumptions regarding New Homes Bonus funding, detailed on page 15 of the report, as it was understood the scheme was due to be phased out. The Section 151 Officer explained that this was an assumption and based on a replacement model being put in place. It was requested that members are advised of any new model.

A question was raised in relation to charges for second homes and holiday homes, and whether there was scope to increase council tax or business rates for these properties. It was confirmed that business rates could not be raised by the council and that internal scrutiny had already previously raised Council Tax for second homes to 200%, the maximum level increase, and there was no further scope for an increase.

Asked if the issues had been raised with the MP for Torridge & West Devon the Chief Executive stated it was raised and this was also a concern that had been raised by several Local Authorities and the Local Government Association. It was confirmed that changes to the process will be introduced from April 2022 to make it more robust.

Councillor Hodson addressed the meeting and stated that Sir Geoffrey Cox MP was made aware of the Council's disappointment regarding a settlement of 1.1% and the decision-making process had been challenged on behalf of members. She

explained that concerns were also raised regarding this being a one-year settlement, as this made it hard to plan for the future and develop a medium term plan.

Following questions regarding the potential impact of a freeze in Council Tax the Section 151 Officer explained the financial impact of a previous freeze in Council Tax and how no rise in council tax would impact future budgets for the council.

Following member discussion on potential future projects the Chief Executive highlighted 'recommendation d' on page 23 of the report. That subject to member approval a working group is to be established, which would investigate and consider these issues going forward.

Following concerns raised about the potential impact of a rise in Council Tax and affordability for people at the current time the Household Hardship Fund was discussed. The Chief Executive went on to explain that the Council Tax Support Scheme was approved at last Full Council and a working group will be looking at the reintroduction of the scheme for 2023-24.

Following further discussion around the impact of a rise in Council Tax Councillor James addressed members, highlighting the financial impact of not rising Council Tax in 2014, and the potential impact of no rise in 2022-23 for services and the community.

It was proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded by Councillor Lock and –

Resolved:

That Members recommend to Full Council -

- a) That Torridge's Band D Council Tax for 2022/23 be increased by £5 (2.90%) from £173.66 to £178.66 per year.
- b) That Torridge's Net Revenue Budget 2022/23 is £7.983m.
- c) That the contributions to the Council's reserves as outlined in paragraph 11.4 are approved.
- d) That a working group be established the membership to be agreed by Full Council to be tasked with reporting back to Community and Resources for options to bring the Council's finances back into balance.

That members note:

- The Chief Finance Officer (s151 Officer) assurance of the robustness of the budget 2022//23 set out in section 13 of the report.
- Note the assumptions and forecast applied to develop the MTFS outlined in section 8.
- Note the risks associated with the Budget 2022/23 and MTFS outlined in section 12.

Recorded Vote:

Councillor	For	Against	Abstain
Brenton, D			X
Bright, C		X	
Bushby, D	X		
Christie, P	X		
Dart, A		X	
Hicks, R		X	
Hodson, C	X		
Hurley, D	X		
James, K	X		
Laws, N	X		
Lock, R	X		
McGeough, D			
Total:	7	3	1

(Vote: For 7, Against 3, Abstain 1)

221. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/23 TO 2026/27

The Chief Executive introduced the Senior Capital Accountant and provided some background to the PID (Project Initiation Documents) process and the scoring mechanism that is used. It was explained that the process has been updated following the recommendations of a task & finish group who reported to Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee in September 2021 – this PID process has now been approved and used.

Members were advised that the Section 151 Officer, the Chief Executive and the Leader had all separately scored the PIDs that were submitted using the 4 Core Areas of Deliverability, Value for Money, Association or Commitment to the Strategic Plan and Funding. It was confirmed that the scores detailed in the subsequent table on page 32 of the report are the result of this scoring but were not binding.

The Senior Capital Accountant introduced the report, the purpose of which was for members to consider, formulate and recommend updates to the Capital Programme 2022/23 for Full Council. The Capital Programme includes authorised projects which require updating due to inflationary pressures, along with new PIDs (Project Initiation Documents) which require authorisation from members before inclusion.

A detailed and informative slide presentation was given by the Senior Capital Accountant highlighting the salient points in the report.

Members were asked for their questions and a discussion followed.

Councillor Hodson endorsed the recommendations on page 33 of the report, with specific mention to 'recommendation d'. She drew attention to the potential need to review the PID process, and the considerations this should involve.

Members raised the costs of Victoria Park and whether the figure of £173k included money from the Bideford Trust and Bideford Town Council. The Senior Capital Accountant confirmed that this was included and £173k was the total cost of the project, however the financial scoring took these factors into account.

Councillor Lock endorsed Councillor Hodson's proposal of the recommendations and queried why the Fish Dock was not listed on the scoring table. It was explained that this would be going to Full Council as a separate report and would be going through the Capital Programme for this financial year.

Members asked for more clarity regarding the contribution from Bideford Town Council and The Bridge Trust for Victoria Park Play Area. The Head of Communities and Place confirmed there is £51k available for play in Bideford, but this is not all available to Victoria Park Play Area. It was understood that the contributions to Victoria Park would be £10k from the Town Council and £10k from the Bridge Trust.

Councillor Christie clarified the funding allocation from Bideford Town Council and The Bridge Trust for members, stating the total of £51k was available to Torrington.

There followed a further discussion regarding the list of PIDs and their scoring. Members discussed possible changes and their potential impact. During these discussions members raised concern about making changes to the scoring of PIDs when an agreed process had already been followed to reach the recommendations put before members.

As part of the discussions it was proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded by Councillor Brenton and recommended that Sandymere Road be removed from the list of projects recommended to Full Council and replaced with Torrington Pannier Market.

Councillor Hames asked to address the Committee in regard to the climate crisis. He raised his concern that the PID for electric vans was below the score required to recommend to Full Council. He asked members to reconsider Sandymere Road stating the potential impact and he asked members to consider the electric vans instead.

Following a discussion regarding Torrington Town Council taking over ownership of the Pannier Market it was confirmed that the Chief Executive and the Leader were

due to meet the Town Mayor and Clerk. It was agreed that this could be explored at the meeting.

Councillor Lock reconfirmed her endorsement of the proposal from Councillor Hodson, which agreed the recommendations as they stand.

Councillor Hodson re-emphasised the clause regarding the capacity to review those PIDs that have fallen below the line. It was also requested the minutes note that reassurance was needed regarding the voluntary contributions going towards Victoria Park Play Area.

Following a further discussion regarding the proposals it was formally proposed by Councillor Christie that Sandymere Road be replaced by the request for 2 Electric Vehicles. There was no seconder and the proposal was not carried.

The Chair called for a vote on the formal recommendations under section 1.9 of the report. It was explained that if members wished to vote on the additional proposal made at the meeting they would need to vote against the formal recommendation first.

It was proposed by Councillor Hodson, seconded by Councillor Lock and

Resolved:

That members recommend to Full Council:

- a) The Capital Programme is updated for building cost inflation
- b) The Vehicle Programme is updated for inflation
- c) The Vehicle Programme is Balanced long term, by increasing the contributions from revenue.
- d) Recommend PIDs that meet the minimum recommended project score of 65, for inclusion in the Capital Programme:
 - o C202 Core Server
 - o C201 Grounds Maintenance
 - o C200 Caddsdow Disabled Access Pathways
 - o C199 Revs & Bens Digitisation
 - o C204 Sandymere Road

With the PIDs that fall below this score being referred back to officers for further work/refinement, and possible future consideration.

(Vote: for 6, against 5, abstentions 0)

222. RECOMMENDATION FROM EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

A discussion took place regarding the recommendation from External Overview and Scrutiny to uplift funds for Citizens Advice in the next financial year. Members

empathised with the request but asked that this return to External Overview & Scrutiny. It was requested that a full report be drafted and options for additional assistance explored; specific mention was made of unspent Councillor grants.

It was proposed by Councillor Hodson, seconded by Councillor James and –

Resolved:

That the request to consider an uplift of the grant provided to Citizens Advice increase from £38,000 to £50,000 be referred to External Overview & Scrutiny Committee for a full detailed report.

Vote: for, unanimous.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 11.50 am

Chair:

Date: