

# **FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD**

19 OCTOBER 2020

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and was an online remote meeting in compliance with the Council Procedure Rules Relating to the holding of Remote Meetings and the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

### **Present:**

Councillor Shane Moore (In the Chair)

Councillors: Christopher Akers-Belcher, James Brewer, Paddy Brown, Jim Lindridge, Sue Little, Leisa Smith, John Tennant, Stephen Thomas and Mike Young.

Also Present: Councillor Tony Richardson.

Officers: Denise McGuckin, Managing Director  
Hayley Martin, Chief Solicitor  
Chris Little, Director of Resources and Development  
Jill Harrison, Director of Adult and Community Based Services  
Tony Hanson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services  
David Cosgrove and Denise Wimpenny, Democratic Services Team

### **39. Apologies for Absence**

Councillor Ann Marshall.

### **40. Declarations of Interest**

None

### **41. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2020**

A Member referred to Minute 32 'Community Safety Plan 2020-2021 and asked if a date had been set for the presentation by the Police. The Managing Director confirmed that a presentation by the Chief Constable would form part of the next scheduled Members' Seminar. The Member requested that the title of the Seminar invitation made it clear to Members the contents of the seminar.

Minutes confirmed.

## **42. Towns Fund Accelerated Funding Award** (*Director of Resources and Development*)

### **Type of decision**

Key Decision test (i) applies. General Exception Provisions Apply.

### **Purpose of report**

The report updated the committee on the award of £1m in accelerated funding from the Towns Fund. The report sought approval from the Committee to spend the funding on 15 Church Street and the former Shades Hotel in line with the recommendations of the Town Deal Board. The report also included the details of the revised costs and business case for 15 Church Street.

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Director of Resources and Development reported on the background to the Town's Fund which was managed by the Town Deal Board. The Town Deal Board brought together public, private and community sectors to provide strategic leadership to the Economic Regeneration of the town and the development of the Town Deal. The Town Deal Board served as an advisory function to the Council and is a Government requirement for the development of a Town Deal. The current allocated funding of £1m to fund capital projects was required to be spent by the end of the financial year

The Town Deal Board had approved the two schemes set out in detail in the report for the two buildings in Church Street. These projects were 15 Church Street, which had Planning Permission in place and was ready to start on site, and a targeted programme of works to 16 Church Street (the former Shades Hotel).

The Town Deal Board considered options for the £1m Accelerated Funding at the 23rd July Board meeting and agreed with the proposal to focus on 15 Church Street and Shades to continue the regeneration of the Church Street area. Alternative options were discussed, however, it was concluded that these schemes were the most deliverable and had the greatest alignment with the Town Deal criteria within the constrained timescales.

A full breakdown of the costs and funding for 15 Church Street were set out in the Confidential Appendix to the report. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, para 3; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

While there was general support for the proposals, there was concern expressed by a Member at the delay between the original scheme for

16 Church Street approved in March 2019 and the lack of communication with Members regarding the delay and the reasons for it. The Member suggested that a better communication mechanism needed to be implemented.

Reference was also made in relation to the conversion of business loans to grants to support local businesses. The Chair stated that the recently appointed Assistant Director, Development and Growth would be dealing with this issue and the matter would be discussed by Policy Committee Chairs later in the week.

A Member commented that for better clarity with the public, it needed to be highlighted this was Government Grant money being spent on these two buildings and not the Council's own money.

### **Decision**

1. The Committee noted that the Council has been awarded £1m from the Towns Fund Accelerated Fund.
2. The Committee noted the recommendation of the Town Deal Board to spend the funding on 15 Church Street and Shades.
3. The Committee approved the funding set out in the confidential appendix to the report to refurbish 15 Church Street and create residential and commercial accommodation. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, para 3; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. The Committee approved the funding set out in the confidential appendix to the report to carry out targeted repairs to the former Shades Hotel to help secure the future use of the building. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, para 3; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
5. The Committee delegated the approval of costs for 15 Church Street to the Director of Resources and Development, in consultation with the Chair of the Finance and Policy Committee, following the value engineering exercise outlined in the confidential appendix to the report. The appendix contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, para 3; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

## **43. Covid-19 Financial Position Update** *(Managing Director )*

### **Type of decision**

Non-Key.

### **Purpose of report**

To provide details of

- (i) decisions taken in relation to the delivery of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- (ii) Information in relation to the "Local authority test and trace service support grant";
- (iii) Information in relation the "Local Restrictions Support Grant";
- (iv) Information in relation to the " Test and Trace Support Payment" arrangements;
- (v) Information in relation to the "Reopening High Street Safely Fund"; and
- (vi) Information in relation to the "Emergency Active Travel Fund".

### **Issue(s) for consideration**

The Director of Resources and Development updated the Committee in regards to the published decision records in relation to the Covid-19 response since the meeting on 29 June. The report also set out the up-to-date position in relation to government funding received and proposed in relation to –

Local Authority Test and Trace Service Support Grant  
Local Restrictions Support Grant  
Test and Trace Support Payments  
Reopening High Street Safely Fund  
Emergency Active Travel Fund

Some of the financial information relating to the above grant/funding schemes was set out in confidential appendices to the report. These appendices contained exempt information under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) namely, para 3; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The Director highlighted how funding and associated guidance was still coming through from central government. For example, the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme of £500 for people on low incomes who were unable to work while they are self-isolating because they cannot work from home had indicated that local authorities were expected to validate applications within 3 working days was announced on 20 September but it

took a further five days before the guidance on the scheme was issued to local authorities who were already receiving contact from the public as to how they applied. The Government would meet the cost of payments to individuals and also indicated they would provide funding for council set-up and ongoing administration costs – although details had not yet been provided.

The Chair commented that he saw the situation as somewhat perverse in that in the Tier 2 restrictions some businesses were being hit unfairly but the public had some normality. However, in the Tier 3 restrictions the public would lose significant freedoms but businesses would get some financial support. It was as though the government was steering areas towards Tier 3 restrictions in order for them to get financial support for their business sector.

There were comments from Members that there was great concern that many businesses simply wouldn't survive a further lockdown period. The Council needed to look at whatever means it had to support the business community and jobs in the town. The Chair agreed but did feel the government should be providing the significant share of such funding with the Council 'filling in the gaps'.

The Chair commented that residents needed to be encouraged to go out and support their local businesses while they could – spending locally could save local businesses and jobs.

A Member raised the issue of a potential student accommodation development in the town where the developer was still awaiting a response from the Council on the scheme proposed which could have been bringing additional revenue. The Director stated that a response would be sent to the developer shortly as it had only been finalised last week.

### **Decision**

That the report be noted.

## **44. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent**

None.

The Committee noted the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Monday 30 November 2020 at 10.00 am.

The meeting concluded at 10.35 am.

**H MARTIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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