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Budget Setting and Corporate Plan (Task and Finish Panel)  
6 January 2021

## WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the BUDGET SETTING AND CORPORATE PLAN (TASK AND FINISH PANEL) held on Wednesday 6 January 2021 at 6.00 pm via zoom

PRESENT: Councillors G.Hayes (Chair)

J.Boulton, J.Broach, P.Smith and P.Zukowskyj

ALSO Councillor D.Bell (Executive Member, Resources)

PRESENT:

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K.Ng)

PRESENT: Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) (N.Long)

Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) (S.Russell)

Head of Resources (R.Baker)

Service Manager (Financial Services) (H.O’Keeffe)

Governance Services Manager (A.Marston)

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### 15. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor P.Zukowskyj declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being a Hertfordshire County Councillor.

### 16. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020 were approved as a correct record.

### 17. 2021/22 BUDGET

A verbal update was given by officers:

- the local government provisional finance settlement has now been incorporated into the budget
- a further £124k lower tier services grant has been received
- the £610k support received from Government for ongoing pandemic pressures has been put into earmarked reserves until areas of budgetary need are identified as the pandemic impact has not been incorporated into the baseline budget
- the New Homes Bonus is broadly as expected
- Proposed Council Tax increase for 2021/22 is 1.97%
- after the collection fund deficit, £220k of general fund reserves are used to support the budget

Officers reminded the panel that the purpose of this meeting is to make recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is meeting next week.

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The following points were raised during discussion:

- the council has a policy of maintaining 9000 council homes; could we look at changing that with a view to increasing the number? The Executive Member (Resources) agreed that he could discuss that with Cabinet but noted it does not fall into the scope of budget discussions
- further explanation may be required around the reserves so there is clarity for Members regarding their purpose and the differences between ringfenced and non-ringfenced reserves
- potential overlaps between reserves could be investigated to ascertain whether there are any risks that have been covered multiple times by different reserves. This will be taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a recommendation.
- the percentage rise in Council Tax to 1.97% was queried, specifically why that figure was chosen rather than opting for a £5 increase

Further discussion was held around future council housing developments and the potential option of 2 for 1 initiatives where for each two properties built, one is sold to provide capital for further developments. Officers confirmed that this is something that could be considered but advised that as it takes so long to bring developments through there are various factors that need to be considered. The need for social rented accommodation is high, with the biggest shortage being for small family homes (two- or three-bedroom houses). The team is constantly looking for opportunities and has an active acquisition programme.

A further suggestion was for consideration to be given for any area of potential development to ensure that the right development for the area is chosen; with the example given of building flats in a suitable location and potentially selling those to fund the acquisition of 2 bedroom houses on the open market. This would have the advantage of spreading council housing across the entire urban area.

It was also noted that there is always a need to be careful of risks with property developments and sales.

Officers agreed these discussions can be taken away for consideration by the appropriate teams but were outside the scope of the budget recommendations being sought.

Therefore, the recommendation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to investigate potential overlaps between the reserves to ascertain whether there are any risks that have been covered multiple times.

18. DATE AND TIME FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Panel is scheduled for Monday 25 January at 6pm.

Meeting ended at 6.30 pm  
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