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FULL COUNCIL

21 FEBRUARY 2024

Present: Councillors O’Callaghan (Chair), Bishop (Vice-Chair), Arthur, Barnett, Batsford, Beaney, Beaver, Cannan, Carr, Collins, Cooke, Edwards, Evans, Fernando, Foster, Haffenden, Hay, Hilton, Jobson, Marlow-Eastwood, Patmore, Pragnell (from 6.13pm), Rankin, Roark, Roberts, Rogers, Sinden, Turner, Webb, Williams, and Willis.

In attendance: Jane Hartnell (Chief Executive), Mary Kilner (Chief Legal Officer), and Kit Wheeler (Chief Finance Officer).

50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Bacon for absence, and from Councillor Pragnell for lateness.

51. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Full Council meetings held on 17th and 24th January 2024 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record of the proceedings.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Item	Interest
Rogers	53. Revenue Budget 2024/25 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27	Personal – Is a marshall for Jack in the Green, a member of Carnival Committee, Deputy Chair of Hastings Week Committee and a member of the Bonfire Society

53. REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25, AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25 TO 2026/27

The Mayor proposed suspending Rule 16.6b of the Council’s Constitution, seconded by Councillor Beaver.

RESOLVED that council suspends Rule 16.6b of the Constitution to permit the original motion and any proposed amendments to be on the table and open for discussion at the same time.

Councillor Barnett proposed a motion to approve the Revenue Budget 2024/25, and Capital Programme, seconded by Councillor Collins.

Councillor Patmore, Leader of the Conservative Group spoke in relation to the budget and capital programme, followed by Councillor Bishop, Leader of the Labour Group.

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Councillor Bishop proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Rogers, as follows:

1. Appendix K section 1.b) is amended to remove the deletion of the vacant warden post (1 FTE).
2. Appendix K Section 1.b) is amended to remove the deletion of the vacant Customer Services Officer (CCC) 1 FTE.
3. Appendix K Section 5. Remove the reduction of £15,000 to events budget & continue to support our well attended cultural events.

Councillor Barnett rejected the motion.

The amendment was rejected by 7 for, to 23 against with 1 abstention.

Councillors Arthur, Bishop, Carr, O'Callaghan, Roberts, Rogers and Webb voted for the amendment.

Councillors Barnett, Batsford, Beaney, Beaver, Cannan, Collins, Cooke, Edwards, Evans, Foster, Haffenden, Hay, Hilton, Jobson, Marlow-Eastwood, Patmore, Pragnell, Rankin, Roark, Sinden, Turner, Williams, and Willis voted against.

Councillor Fernando abstained.

The Revenue Budget 2024/25 and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27 was agreed by 14 for, to 6 against with 11 abstentions.

Councillors Arthur, Barnett, Batsford, Cannan, Collins, Evans, Haffenden, Hilton, Jobson, Rankin, Roark, Sinden, Turner, and Willis voted for.

Councillors Bishop, Carr, O'Callaghan, Roberts, Rogers, and Webb voted against.

Councillors Beaney, Beaver, Cooke, Edwards, Fernando, Foster, Hay, Marlow-Eastwood, Patmore, Pragnell, and Williams abstained.

RESOLVED (by 14 for, to 6 against, with 11 abstentions):

(i) Approve the draft 2024/25 revenue budget (Appendix B)

(ii) Approve a 2.99% increase in the Borough Council's part of the Council Tax (Appendix C).

(iii) Approve the detailed recommendations in Appendix C, which relate to the setting of Council Tax in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Act 1992 (Appendix C – to be provided/updated for full Council).

(iv) Approve the Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27 (Appendix E) and that any marked with an asterisk can proceed without further reference to Cabinet or Council.

(v) Approve the proposed use of Reserves as detailed in Appendix J that can proceed without further reference to Cabinet or Council. (vi) Approve that the budget be amended as necessary to reflect the final grant figures including Disabled Facility Grants - once received.

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(vii) Full Council adopt the existing Council Tax Support Scheme subject to amendments to allowances in line with any national changes. Determination of the allowances to be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer in line with prior year practice.

(viii) The application of the current premium of 100% for all dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (empty dwellings) from a period of one year with effect from 1st April 2024.

(ix) The application of a premium of 100% for all dwellings which are unoccupied but substantially furnished (second homes) with effect from 1st April 2025; and

(x) That the Section 151 Officer is given delegated powers to implement the policy in line with the Council's requirements and any guidance given by the Secretary of State or regulation.

Reasons:

1. The Council has a statutory responsibility to set a balanced Budget and Council Tax in advance of the start of the new financial year.
2. The report identifies that a balanced budget in 2024/25 can only be achieved by using £700k of General reserve funding.
3. The level of grant funding, Council Tax increases and income from fees and charges is insufficient to meet the annual increases in costs e.g. inflation, pay increases, demand pressures, in particular the costs of meeting our statutory homelessness.
4. The Council is only able to increase Council Tax by a maximum of 2.99% without a referendum.
5. The Council remains exposed to a much greater degree of volatility in terms of its income from Non Domestic Rates and expenditure in terms of Council Tax Support claims – the cost falling directly on the Council and the preceptors.
6. The Council needs to manage its Capital Financing requirements carefully to avoid unnecessary and costly interest charges. Therefore, it has been necessary to reduce the aspirations for the Capital Programme accordingly, and the council will need to continue to maximise any potential Capital receipts.

54. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Minute 42 of Cabinet on 12th February 2024, Cabinet appointments to committees, working groups and partnerships, was not called for discussion.

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(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.29pm)