

COUNCIL MEETING HELD THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2025

Table of Contents

No	Item	Decision
1.	Apologies	<i>Alderman McAuley, Councillors Chivers, MA McKillop, McShane and Watson.</i>
2.	Declarations of Members' Interests	<i>None</i>
3.	Consider the Rates Estimates for 2025/26	<i>That Council accept all the recommendations laid out for the purposes of setting the Rate and strike at 3.65%.</i>
3.1	General Estimate of Rates return for Department for Communities	<i>That Council approve the General Estimate of Rates return for submission to the Department for Communities.</i>
3.2	Chief Executive report on Adequacy of Reserves	<i>That Council approve the Chief Financial Officer's report on the adequacy of reserves.</i>
3.3	Chief Executive report on Robustness of Estimates	<i>That Council approve the Chief Financial Officer's report on the robustness of the estimates.</i>
3.4	MRP Policy Statement	<i>That Council review the policy detailed in Appendix 1 and approve the statement.</i>
3.5	Prudential Indicators	<i>That Council approve the Prudential</i>

		<i>indicators as tabled in the appendix.</i>
3.6	Treasury Management Strategy	<i>That Council approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 as tabled in the appendix.</i>

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER ON
THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2025 AT 7.00 PM**

In the Chair : The Mayor, Councillor Ciarán McQuillan

Members Present : Alderman Boyle, Callan, Coyle, Fielding, Hunter,
Knight-McQuillan, S McKillop, Scott, Stewart

Councillors Anderson, C Archibald, N Archibald,
Bateson, Callaghan, Holmes, Huggins, Kane,
Kennedy, Mairs, Jonathan McAuley, McCully,
McGurk, McMullan, Peacock, Schenning, Stirling,
Storey, Wallace, Watton, Wilson, Wisener

Officers Present : D Jackson, Chief Executive
D Wright, Chief Finance Officer
P Mulvenna, Director of Leisure and Development
J Culkin, Management Accountant (R)
L Clyde, Financial Accountant (R)
S Duggan, Civic Support & Committee & Member Services Officer

In Attendance: J Winfield, ICT Operations Manager
A Lennox, Mobile Operations Officer (C)

Press 3 No. (R)

Key – R = Attended Remotely

The Mayor advised Council of its obligations and protocol whilst the meeting was being audio recorded; and with the remote meetings protocol.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were recorded for Alderman McAuley, Councillors Chivers, MA McKillop, McShane and Watson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. CONSIDER THE RATES ESTIMATES FOR 2025/26

Report, previously circulated presented as read.

The Mayor invited Chair Finance Committee, Councillor Huggins to address Council.

Chair Finance Committee, Councillor Huggins addressed Council on behalf of the Finance Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Huggins

Seconded by Councillor Wisener

- That Council accept all the recommendations laid out, for the purposes of setting the Rate and strike at 3.65%.

The Mayor put the motion to the Council.

RESOLVED - That Council accept all the recommendations laid out for the purposes of setting the Rate and strike at 3.65%.

3.1 General Estimate of Rates return for Department for Communities

Report, previously circulated presented as read by The Chief Finance Officer.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to approve the General Estimate of Rates return for submission to the Department of Communities (DfC)

Background

Council must annually consider its Rates Estimates and agree a budget on before 15 February

A general estimate of rates return must be agreed, signed and returned to DfC for this purpose by 15 February in line with legislative requirements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council approve the General Estimate of Rates return for submission to the Department for Communities.

Proposed by Councillor Schenning

Seconded by Councillor Peacock and

RESOLVED - that Council approve the General Estimate of Rates return for submission to the Department for Communities.

3.2 Chief Executive report on Adequacy of Reserves

Report, previously circulated presented as read by The Chief Finance Officer.

Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with an update in relation to the adequacy of Council's projected reserves for 2025/26.

Background

This report is prepared to facilitate Council's duty under Section 6 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which states:

(1) Regulations may make provision requiring a council to maintain financial reserves in accordance with the regulations.

(2) The chief financial officer of a council shall submit to the council a report on the adequacy of any proposed financial reserves for a financial year – it should be noted that the Chief Executive is the Council's nominated Chief Financial Officer in accordance with Section 2 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(3) A council shall have regard to that report when considering the estimates for that year under section 3(2)(a).

Report of the Chief Financial Officer on the adequacy of reserves

At 31st March 2024 the General Fund balance of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council amounted to £5.164m (2023 - £4.591m) equating to 8.33% (2023– 7.73%) of the Net Operating Expenditure.

Department for Communities (DfC) guidance indicates that the General Fund Level should be between 5% and 7.5% (£3.097m and £4.645m) of the Net Operating Expenditure.

Although the 2024/25 financial outturn is not yet known, the officers estimate that when the financial commitments that the 2024/25 Rate income was intended to fund are accounted for, Council's General Fund Balance and other usable reserves will be increased with the residual applied balance figure being overturned by favourable variances against budget. This will allow the level of the General Reserve to remain comfortably above the required minimum level of 5% of Net Operating Expenditure.

There continues to be significant cost pressures on Council revenue budgets but this will potentially be added to by income pressures as the Borough and it's economy recovers from economic and inflationary pressures. It is vital therefore that a rate estimate budget is approved that allows Council to minimise the use of reserves.

In year forecasts of the Actual Penny Product for 2024/25 produced by Land & Property Services show a projected positive outturn in the region of £710k.

After considering all the information above I am of the opinion that Council reserves will be adequate.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council approve the Chief Financial Officer's report on the adequacy of reserves.

Proposed by Councillor C Archibald
Seconded by Alderman Hunter and

RESOLVED - that Council approve the Chief Financial Officer's report on the adequacy of reserves.

3.3 Chief Executive report on Robustness of Estimates

Report, previously circulated presented as read by The Chief Finance Officer.

Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with an update in relation to the robustness of the 2025/26 Rate estimates.

Background

This report is prepared to facilitate Council's duty under Section 4 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which states:

(1) The chief financial officer of a council shall submit to the council a report on the robustness of the estimates – it should be noted that the Chief Executive is the Council's nominated Chief Financial Officer in accordance with Section 2 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(2) A council shall have regard to that report when considering the estimates under section 3(2)(a).

(3) In this section "the estimates" means the estimates submitted to the council under section 3(1).

Report of the Chief Financial Officer on the 2025/26 estimates

The 2025/26 Rate estimates have been prepared, in so far as possible, on a zero-base basis. This is generally accepted as a more robust method of preparing budgets than the more usual practice of incremental based budgeting.

The amounts included within the Rate estimates have been prepared based on extensive discussions with the relevant Directors and associated budget holders and have regard to the officers' best estimates of known financial pressures and the resource requirements of continuing to deliver Council services in 2025/26.

The recommended rate estimates expressly provide for the:

- Annual pay award of 3%.
- Projected utility (Gas, electricity, water) costs
- Projected waste management costs
- Capital financing costs of approximately £8.3m
- Additional income as per officer recommendation
- Service adjustments as agreed during the presentations to the Finance Committee during the autumn

Uncertainties

As in all budget estimate processes, senior officers have utilised their professional judgment where appropriate and had regard to market forces in so far as it has been practicable to do so.

The estimation of future financial requirements has also had regard to the projected financial outturn in 2024/25 and the desire to utilise prior period favourable variances, where possible, to deliver outcomes in the Borough as agreed with Council.

Members should note that the proposed estimates have been prepared on the basis of assumptions and information provided to Council by third parties such as the Department for Communities and Land and Property Services previously notified to the Council.

Members will be aware of the continuing uncertainty surrounding the quantum of Rate Support Grant (RSG) which will ultimately be allocated to Council. As previously reported both the Departmental allocation to this grant and Council's allocation of the grant have reduced meaning the projected income from this source has reduced to £230,545.

The on-going situation with regards the economy and continuing, albeit reducing, inflationary increases continue to disrupt all facets of daily life including the local economy. It is too early to be able to project the long-term effects this will have but the potential remains high for a longer-term adverse effect on the local economy and consequently the non-domestic rates base in this Borough.

Conclusion

Subject to the ongoing inflationary pressures and on the assumption that Council approves rate estimates which make provision for the cost pressures as set out in 3.3 above I am satisfied that the recommended rate estimates as presented are sufficiently robust to allow Council to deliver all its services in 2025/26.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council approve the Chief Financial Officer's report on the robustness of the estimates.

Proposed by Alderman Scott
Seconded by Councillor Schenning and

RESOLVED - that Council approve the Chief Financial Officer's report on the robustness of the estimates.

3.4 MRP Policy Statement

Report, previously circulated presented as read by The Chief Finance Officer.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to review the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement and seek Members' approval of this statement.

Background

Under regulation 6 of the Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, Councils now have a statutory requirement, to charge to its general fund, an amount of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) which it considers to be "prudent". This replaced the previous requirement whereby the revenue charge was broadly equivalent to the amount of loans and leasing principal paid in any one year.

The regulations also state that authorities are required to prepare an annual statement of their policy on making MRP for approval by Council. This report sets out Council's policy for 2025/26.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council review the policy detailed in Appendix 1 and approve the statement.

Proposed by Alderman Coyle
Seconded by Alderman Hunter and

RESOLVED - that Council review the policy detailed in Appendix 1 and approve the statement.

3.5 Prudential Indicators

Report, previously circulated presented as read by The Chief Finance Officer.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform members and review the Prudential Indicators for this Council.

Background

In setting the rate Council should also consider its Prudential Indicators which summarise the cost of servicing its loan finance.

The prudential indicators summary for the period 2024/25 to 2027/28 attached as an appendix to this report are for review and adoption

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council approve the Prudential indicators as tabled in the appendix.

Proposed by Alderman Callan
Seconded by Councillor Kane and

RESOLVED - that Council approve the Prudential indicators as tabled in the appendix.

3.6 Treasury Management Strategy

Report, previously circulated presented as read by The Chief Finance Officer.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform members and review the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26.

Background

In setting the rate Council should also consider its Treasury Management Strategy for the year ahead.

The Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 is attached as an appendix to this report.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 as tabled in the appendix.

Proposed by Alderman S McKillop

Seconded by Alderman Callan and

RESOLVED - that Council approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 as tabled in the appendix.

This being all the business, the Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 7.08 pm.

Mayor