

Excerpt from the minutes of the Cabinet meeting 11 October 2023

174. Items of Urgent Business

Councillor Jefferies invited Councillors J Kent, N Speight and P Arnold who were sitting in the public gallery to come forward and join the meeting if they wanted to ask questions or comment.

Councillor Jefferies confirmed he had agreed to one urgent item of business which is an urgent report titled Resource to Support the Council's Budget Progress.

Councillor Snell introduced the report and explained that it concerned taking on PWC (Price Waterhouse Cooper). Councillor Snell stated that the Council is facing a wide range of financial challenges which it is currently addressing by divesting investments, capital asset sales, reducing the capital programmes and making revenue budget savings. Councillor Snell stated that it is a huge task, and it is therefore sensible to procure some short-term support in the area of revenue budget savings. Various options have been looked at internally and externally, but the decision has been made to procure PWC for 22 weeks to find 5.2 million pounds of savings recurring each year. The cost of procuring PWC is £800,000 and this will come from the Transformation Fund. Councillor Jefferies clarified that it is spending £800,000 to save 5.2 million pounds every year and they will also be looking at how to save 18.2 million for next year. Councillor Jefferies added that the Finance department is stretched and there is a restructure taking place, PWC have expertise that can be passed on to existing members of staff. Councillor Speight stated that in recent meetings members and the public have been told that the Council is making progress and is on track to make the savings required and now they are being told the Council will be paying £800,000 to an independent organisation and they might not be able to achieve the savings. Councillor Speight queried if members and the public can believe what they are being told. Councillor Snell clarified that it is an ongoing project, and the Council is well on its way to finding the 18.2 million pounds of savings for the year 2024/25. However, the finance team is poorly resourced and has been working absolute miracles. External advice has been provided on the investments and assets sales as we don't have that expertise within the Council. We are learning from the experts and ensuring our savings plan for future years is robust now. Councillor Snell stated that it is an £800,000 one off spend and the money is coming from the transformation fund of 12 million pounds. This is exactly what the fund is there for. The Council needs to recover, and it needs the best possible help to do that.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Council enter into a contract for services with PWC through to February 2024 for the value specified in the financial implications to support the Council's change and budget process.

Reason for the decision: As outlined in the report This decision is subject to call-in.