

Technical changes were also proposed. Council was being asked to agree a change to the borrowing strategy which meant that debt charges would be reviewed.

Reference was made to the Government restrictions that had applied at various levels across the country for the majority of the year in response to the coronavirus pandemic. At one point, Pendle had been placed in Tier 3 and had been advised by the Government that no council that entered into Tier 3 would be put in the position where it was unable to balance the budget this year and next.

Although this was something to be mindful of, the Chief Executive explained that there was still a statutory obligation to balance the budget and that savings would need to be made. Currently the predictions in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) did not take into account COVID. This would be overlaid with predictions on the impact of COVID over the next financial year.

At the Group's request, the Corporate Director provided information on discussions with town and parish councils regarding their contributions to grounds maintenance. Further clarification was sought regarding the contributions relating to the maintenance of the sports areas/pitches at Sough Park, Earby and Victory Park, Barnoldswick. It was agreed that this would be looked into.

9. STAFFING CHANGES PROPOSED FOR 2021/22

The Chief Executive submitted a report which sought the agreement of the Budget Working Group to changes in the Council's staffing establishment for 2021/22 as part of a contribution to the delivery of budget savings for the year. The report provided a summary of the posts that it was proposed should be deleted from the Council's staffing establishment with effect from 2021.

One of the proposals was to delete the post of Senior Engineer (Structural and Projects), and replace it with a Trainee Engineer. There was some concern over this proposal, bearing in mind the current workload. It was suggested that the post could be kept based on fee income.

AGREED

- (1) That Council be recommended to approve the savings arising from deletion of four of the posts from the Council's staffing establishment with effect from April 2021.
- (2) That the proposal to delete the post of Senior Engineer (Structural and Projects), and replace it with a Trainee Engineer, be considered further at the next meeting of this Group.

10. REVIEW OF THE ACE CENTRE

The Group considered a report of the Pendle Leisure Trust's Chief Executive which examined different options for the future of the ACE Centre in Nelson.

The report had been prepared at the request of the Council's Chief Executive, in view of the need to reassess the grant awarded to the Trust. There was a desire to protect the three leisure centres that were run by the Trust, therefore consideration had to be given to making savings elsewhere.

The report provided information on the range of facilities offered at the venue and details on usage prior to its closure due to the coronavirus pandemic. All activity had ceased on 23rd March 2020 and the decision had been taken not to reopen until 2021.

It was recognised that the Centre had been difficult to manage since it opened. Many factors had contributed to this, one of them being the lack of designated car parking for events. However, despite this, the Centre was seen as an important cultural venue within Nelson and was also seen

as an integral part of Pendle's new Arts, Culture and Creativity Strategy and the Nelson Town Deal Fund.

The options presented were as follows –

1. Reopen the ACE Centre as planned from March/April 2021
2. Reopen the ACE Centre Bistro only
3. Close the ACE Centre completely

The financial implications were detailed in the report.

AGREED

That Group Leaders discuss the options presented with their respective groups and feed back to the next meeting of this Working Group.

(Alison Goode withdrew from the meeting.)

11. REVIEW OF NELSON MARKET

The Chief Executive submitted a report which sought Members views as to the future of Nelson Market Hall.

The Group was provided with information on the Under-Lease held by the Council in relation to its Nelson Indoor Market operation; issues related to the viability of the market operation; and options for further investigation.

It was noted that informal discussions had been held with the owner of Pendle Rise Shopping Centre in which the Market was located. The property was also an integral part of the Future High Street Funding bid.

AGREED

That this Working Group –

- (1) notes the legal position regarding the restricted use as a market hall and the provision of a "keep open" clause within the Nelson Market Lease and its ability to Assign or Sub-Let the whole with consent of the Landlord;
- (2) notes the decline in occupancy levels, reduced income and increased net operating costs;
- (3) notes that the Chief Executive has held informal discussions with the owner of Pendle Rise Shopping Centre with regards to:
 - i) a possible negotiated lease surrender
 - ii) his response to a possible closure without lease surrender;
- (4) authorises the Chief Executive to seek new legal advice to inform a decision on whether to close the Nelson Indoor Market;

- (5) requests that the Chief Executive actively explores what assistance could be provided to existing market tenants, should a decision be taken to close the Nelson Indoor Market.

12. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

AGREED

That the next meeting of the Budget Working Group be held in December 2020.

CHAIRMAN _____