

2 NOVEMBER 2016

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 2 November 2016

* Cllr B Rickman (Chairman)

* Cllr E J Heron (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

Mrs S V Beeton

* J E Binns

Councillors:

* Mrs J L Cleary

* J D Heron

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

G C Beck

Mrs S M Bennison

G R Blunden

S J Clarke

S P Davies

R L Frampton

A T Glass

M R Harris

D Harrison

Councillors:

Mrs A J Hoare

A K Penson

W S Rippon-Swaine

Mrs A M Rostand

M A Steele

Mrs C V Ward

M L White

C A Wise

Officers Attending:

R Jackson, A Bethune, Miss J Debnam, Mrs R Drummond, C Elliott, Mrs L Evans, Mrs S Hamilton, Miss G O'Rourke, C Read, Mrs M Sandhu, R Topliss and Mrs K Williams

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Beeton.

29 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2016 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Harrison – Minute 33

31 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised in the public participation period.

32 COUNCIL HOUSING BUY-BACK AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE 2012/13 - 2015/16 AND FUTURE STRATEGY 2016/17 - 2018/19

The Cabinet evaluated the Council's performance in securing additional Council housing through housing buy-back, the development of new dwellings on Council-owned land and the purchase of dwellings from private sector developers through partnership arrangements.

Over the past 4 years the majority of new dwellings had been obtained through buying back former Council properties. The original target of 100 had been exceeded and a total of 135 had been acquired by this means by the end of the 4th year. The lead-in time on new developments meant that this had, to date, only made a modest contribution, but was expected to play an increasing role in the future.

While, in theory, purchasing housing units from private developers as their S106 affordable housing contribution should have been relatively easy, in practice it had proved more complex and time consuming than expected and had only so far contributed 4 two-bedroom units in Milford on Sea. This option would however continue to be explored, particularly associated with larger developments, such as that under Policy Ring3 at Ringwood.

The Council was currently losing around 30 properties per annum through the Right-to-Buy and it was important that this housing stock was replaced. The Cabinet welcomed the progress now being made.

Changes to Government policy were being monitored and assessed for their potential effect on the Council's ability to maintain its housing stock. Recent policies had already had a significant effect on the financial context, with rents being required to be reduced by 1% per annum from 2016/17 for the next 3 years. Planning policy changes meant that the Council could no longer require social housing contributions for developments of fewer than 10 dwellings, reducing the funding available from that source. The Council Housing Finance Regime had allowed the Council, as part of the overall financial package, to borrow funds to allow the provision of additional Council housing, but the annual repayments, of £4.1million, would become due from 2017/18. The repayments would be met from Housing Revenue Account reserves.

Other options for the provision of additional housing would continue to be explored as they became available.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Housing Strategy 2016/17 - 2018/19, as set out in Agenda Item 4 considered by the Cabinet, be adopted.

33 REVIEW OF TOURISM SERVICES

Cllr Harrison disclosed a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the New Forest National Park Authority which had an interest in this matter.

The Cabinet considered detailed reports following a review of the delivery of two aspects of the tourism service. At this stage it was intended to establish the principle of the model for future delivery, which would allow more detailed negotiations to continue with key partner organisations over the coming months. It was also emphasised that the Council had a continuing commitment to promoting business development in the area and the tourism industry would remain a key component of that.

With the growth in the use of the Internet and electronic means of accessing information about an area and to book accommodation, the role of visitor information centres had reduced considerably over recent years. The number of visitors to the Visitor Information Centre at Lyndhurst had reduced by around 50% and they no longer had a meaningful role in the booking of accommodation. The main residual roles for the Visitor Information Centre's staff were therefore in sales and in providing information and advice to visitors. It was noted that negotiations were continuing with the 9th Centenary Trust on what additional roles they might be prepared to take on. The sales element of the business generated opportunities to earn commission and could be attractive to the Trust. It was noted that in other parts of the District other models had emerged for the targeted delivery of visitor information in a more cost-effective manner.

It was emphasised that the proposal to withdraw the Visitor Information Centre did not affect the overall operation of the New Forest Visitor Centre in Lyndhurst, which was run by the 9th Centenary Trust. It was emphasised that the Trust would not be prejudiced financially by the withdrawal of the Visitor Information Centre from their building.

Consultations with the New Forest Tourism Association had established that they did not consider that the Visitor Information Centre was essential to support the tourism industry, provided that the Forest continued to be marketed effectively as a destination for visitors.

The Cabinet was advised of the comments of consultees and employees, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Cabinet went on to consider proposals for changes to the marketing of the New Forest as a destination for visitors to the area. The proposals, together with consultee responses, including the views of employees, were set out in Appendix 2 of Agenda Item 4 to the Cabinet.

It was noted that the New Forest Tourism Association considered that destination marketing, and the promotion of information to allow visitors to access local businesses and attractions, was essential. The website run and hosted by this Council was particularly important in this respect. The Association supported the recommendations set out in this report.

Members were advised that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel had considered this issue in detail. The Panel strongly supported both the withdrawal of the council-run visitor information centre in Lyndhurst and the transfer of destination marketing to a stand-alone company under the auspices of the New Forest Tourism Association. They had suggested that the New Forest National Park Authority should be requested to redeploy some of its mobile visitor information resource to Lyndhurst; and also that the Council should seek observer representation on the Board of the proposed new Company to ensure proper oversight of the public funds invested in the enterprise in the first 3 years of operation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Lyndhurst VIC withdraw its services by the end of the current financial year, with discussions to continue with partners to see if some of the services that the VIC provides can be continued by other organisations;
- (b) That it be agreed that the New Forest Tourism Association should take on an enhanced role in determining the way in which the area is marketed and promoted as a destination for visitors for the benefit of businesses. The detail of the new arrangements to be negotiated over the next 5 months, but to include transitional funding over a 3 year period to enable this change to be implemented smoothly; and
- (c) That the post of Employment and Tourism Manager be made redundant on 31 March 2017, with responsibility for tourism destination and marketing strategy passing to the New Forest Tourism Association at that point.

34 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The strategic risk register had been reviewed following the introduction of the Council's new corporate plan "Our Corporate Plan 2016-2020" to ensure that it reflected the most significant risks to the Council in achieving the priorities set out in that Plan. The continuing financial constraints imposed by Government policy remained the over-riding risk to the delivery of the Council's objectives.

The strategic risk register was part of the Council's overall risk management framework, which was required by Government Regulations.

The revised risk management register, which again reflected a pragmatic and proportionate approach to this requirement, was attached as Appendix 2 to the report. The strategy adopted in 2013 (Cabinet Minute 25 4/09/13 and Council Minute 23 of 9/09/13 refer) was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

RESOLVED:

That the revised strategic risk register, as set out in Appendix 2 to Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet, be approved.

35 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT BASED ON PERFORMANCE TO OCTOBER 2016

The Cabinet was advised of the Council's financial performance to October 2016.

Further positive variations of £1.061 million had been identified against the General Fund budget, together with new budget requirements of £279,000. Further details were set out in Section 3 of the report. The estimated outturn on the General Fund was now £15.756 million. Once again there were significant elements of rephasing projects into future years, which would affect future year's budgets.

A combination of additional budget requirements of £100,000 and the rephasing of £2.95 million to future years had reduced the Capital Programme to £21,343 million, as set out in Section 4 of the report.

The Housing Revenue Account currently showed a variation of £1.9 million, largely as a result of delays in the major repairs programme under the Capital Programme, which was financed from the revenue account. Further details of the variations were set out in Section 5 of the report.

RESOLVED:

That the latest budget forecasts for the General Fund, Capital Programme and Housing Revenue Account as set out in paragraphs 3.2, 4.2 and 5.1 of Report Item 7 considered by the Cabinet be noted; and

RECOMMENDED:

That the new budget requirements set out in sections 3.5 and 4.3 of Report Item 7 considered by the Cabinet be approved.

CHAIRMAN