

1 FEBRUARY 2017

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 1 February 2017

* 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:

Mrs D E Andrews

W G Andrews

P J Armstrong

G C Beck

Mrs S M Bennison

S P Davies

S J Clarke

Councillors:

A T Glass

L E Harris

M R Harris

Mrs A J Hoare

A K Penson

W S Rippon-Swaine

M L White

Also In Attendance:

Mr G Waters, Tenant Cabinet Representative

Officers Attending:

R Jackson, C Elliott, Miss G O'Rourke, C Read, Mrs M Sandhu, R Beere, A Bethune, Miss J Debnam, Mrs S Hamilton, Mrs J Stainer and Mrs K Williams

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Beeton.

52 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2017 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs D E Andrews and Penson – minute 56.

54 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised in the public participation period.

55 ICT STRATEGY

The Cabinet considered an ICT Strategy to cover the next 12 -18 months. A short time frame was necessary to allow the Council to respond flexibly in a rapidly changing context. It was important to be able to adjust the Strategy to respond to new opportunities, take advantage of new technology and respond to the evolving needs of the organisation.

The Strategy, which was attached as Appendix 1 to Report Item 4 considered by the Cabinet, covered the ICT Projects Portfolio; the structure and organisation of the ICT team; the ICT Technology Roadmap and an operating model. Special consideration was being given to Members' ICT requirements. Members welcomed the action that was being taken to update this Council's ICT systems to reflect the advances being made elsewhere. Although significant investment would be needed this would promote greater efficiency and allow savings to be made in the longer term.

RECOMMENDED:

That the ICT Strategy, as attached as Appendix 1 to Report Item 4 considered by the Cabinet, be approved.

56 COMMUNITY GRANTS

Cllr Penson disclosed a disclosable pecuniary interest as one of the Trustees of Citizens' Advice. He took no part in the consideration. He did not have a vote.

Cllr D E Andrews disclosed a non-pecuniary interest as this Council's representative on Community First New Forest and Citizens Advice. She took no part in the consideration. She did not have a vote.

The Cabinet was advised that the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel had established a task and finish group that had reviewed the process for receiving and evaluating applications for community grants; and had then evaluated the 17 applications that had been received against the criteria they had developed. Each applicant had been invited to make a presentation to the task and finish group to provide key information to support their case. The group had made recommendations to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel on each application. With respect to Community First, the task and finish group had suggested that this organisation should attend the Panel's meeting as they had not provided to the group adequate information to justify the full amount of the grant requested. The Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel had considered the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, together with a further presentation from Community First, at their meeting held on 17 January 2017.

With respect to support for Citizen's Advice, the Panel had supported the view that, in future, their funding should be through a formal agreement, separate to the grants process, in light of the significant amount of funding involved. A task and finish group was being established to progress this.

Members noted that the total proposed expenditure of £459,500 was a not insignificant investment that acknowledged the important role that the voluntary sector played in meeting the needs of diverse groups within the local population.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That the criteria for assessing the eligibility of community grants, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report Item 5 considered by the Cabinet, be approved and published on the Council's website; and***
- (b) ***That the grant awards set out in Appendix 2 to Report Item 5 considered by the Cabinet be approved for inclusion in the Medium Term Financial Plan.***

57 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND ANNUAL BUDGET FOR 2017/18

Members considered the Medium Term Financial Plan, which had been updated in the light of recent developments, together with the Budget for 2017/18. Summaries of the funding sources available and of the key movements identified in the budget were set out in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively of Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet.

The General Fund net budget requirement for 2017/18, as set out in Appendix 4 to Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet, was £16.587 million, a reduction of £604,000 against the 2016/17 budget requirement. The council tax for a Band D property would be increased by £5 (3.16%) compared to 2016/17.

Details of the proposed General Fund Capital Programme were set out in Appendix 5 to the report and totalled £5.976 million.

The Cabinet also considered the indicators for the treasury management function, as set out in Appendix 6 to Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet.

Members were advised that the Government's Financial Settlement was expected within the following week and it was likely that there would be changes affecting 2018/19 and 2019/20.

With respect to the Members' concerns that the Government's current policies on Right to Buy unfairly prejudiced this Council's ability to maintain and increase its housing stock to meet the needs of tenants and residents in need of housing, the draft letter to the two local Members of Parliament, raising these concerns, had been approved by Cllr M Harris.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That there is a General Fund Net Budget Requirement in 2017/18 of £16,587,280, as set out in Appendix 4 to Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet, including the use of reserves to finance 'Business Development' and the 'ICT maintain and protect frontline services' projects, and one-off construction grants as set out in Appendix 3 to Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet;***
- (b) ***That the site licence fees and service charges at Stillwater Park be increased by 2.0% in line with RPI inflation;***

- (c) *That the Band D Council Tax for 2017/18 shall be £163.36;*
- (d) *That the General Fund Capital Programme for 2017/18 of £5.976m, as set out in Appendix 5 to Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet, be approved; and*
- (e) *That each of the prudential indicators, the Limits for 2017/18 to 2019/20 and the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement as set out in Appendix 6 to Report Item 6 considered by the Cabinet, be approved and adopted.*

58 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND HOUSING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME 2017/18

Members considered the Housing Revenue Account budget, as set out as Appendix 1 to Report Item 7 considered by the Cabinet, and the Housing Public Sector capital expenditure programme for 2017/18. This was the sixth year of the HRA self-financing system, with the first £4.1 million instalment of principal repayment of the settlement loan due to be made.

In accordance with the Government's requirement rents would again be reduced by 1%, with the average weekly rent now being £99.97. It was however proposed to increase the service charge for hostels in line with inflation to continue to achieve full cost recovery from the users of the service. No increase was proposed for the service charge for older persons' accommodation where the inflationary increase had been offset by other budget savings.

A summary of income sources was set out in Section 3, with the proposed expenditure in Section 4 of Report Item 7 considered by the Cabinet. Of particular note was the proposal to increase the Disabled Facilities budget by £191,000 to £700,000 to meet the anticipated demand. It was reported orally at the meeting that it had now been concluded that the proposed increase of £56,000 in the reactive maintenance budget, as shown in Appendix 1, was not needed and should be deleted. This increased the contribution to Capital supporting the Housing Strategy to £9.091 million.

The proposed budget would leave the HRA reserve balance unaltered at £1.043 million.

The proposed capital programme, as set out in section 6 of the report, totalled £15.290 million, reflecting the housing buy-back and development strategy, which was approved by the Cabinet in November 2016 (minute 32 refers)

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That the Housing Revenue Account budget as set out in Appendix 1 of Report Item 7 considered by the Cabinet, as amended by the increase in the contribution to capital supporting the Housing Strategy to £9,091,000, be agreed;*
- (b) *That from 3 April 2017 a reduction in rents of 1% from the 2016/17 rent level, in accordance with Government requirements, be agreed;*
- (c) *That from 3 April 2017 an increase of 1.25% in hostel service charges be agreed;*

- (d) *That from 3 April 2017 no change in older persons' accommodation service charges be agreed;*
- (e) *That from 3 April 2017 no increase in garage rents be agreed; and*
- (f) *That a 2017/18 Housing Capital Programme of £15.290m, as set out in paragraph 6.1 of Report Item 7 considered by the Cabinet, be agreed.*

59 SOUTH EAST EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATION - OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENT

RESOLVED:

That Cllr J D Heron be appointed as one of this Council's representatives on the South East Employers' Organisation, in the place of Cllr Wise.

CHAIRMAN