

4 OCTOBER 2017

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 4 October 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
Mrs S M Bennison
G R Blunden
Ms L C Ford
A T Glass
L E Harris

Councillors:

M R Harris
D Harrison
Mrs A J Hoare
Mrs M D Holding
M A Steele
Mrs C V Ward
M L White
Mrs F Carpenter

Also In Attendance:

Cllr A Proctor (Leader Broadlands District Council and member of Peer Review Group) and Mr M Green (Director of Finance and Business Improvement Maidstone Borough Council and member of Peer Review Group).

Officers Attending:

R Jackson, Mrs F Churchill, Miss G O'Rourke, C Read, A Bethune, Ms L Buis, Miss J Debnam, Mrs L Evans, Mrs S Hamilton and R Stevens

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Beeton.

29 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2017 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Harrison, E J Heron and White – Minute 32

31 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

32 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Cllrs Harrison, E J Heron and White disclosed non-pecuniary interests as members of Hampshire County Council, insofar as this item related to partnership working arrangements with other partner organisations. They concluded that there were no grounds under common law to prevent them from remaining in the meeting to speak, and in the case of Cllr E J Heron, to vote.

Members were updated on developments within the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2017 onwards.

At the national level, although the Queen's Speech in the summer had not mentioned the future of local government finance, the Fair Funding Review was continuing and, through a number of factors, had the potential to generate significant change to the funding received from the Government. In addition, the outcome of the 2018 pay claim was yet to be determined. The Government also maintained its commitment to balancing the budget by 2025, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies concluded would require further significant cuts in real public service spending per person. The proportion of the forthcoming cuts to be met by local government was currently unknown.

The Medium Term Financial Plan had been developed on the assumption of a further £1.776m reduction in funding by 2022 compared to 2017/18, but there was still considerable uncertainty. The Government's ethos that local taxes should pay for local services shifted future increases towards Council Tax, and the Medium Term Plan assumed an increase of £5 per annum per Band D property, which would have a significant cumulative effect on local Council Taxpayers in the longer term.

The further assumptions that had been incorporated into the Medium Term Plan were set out in Section 5 of Report Item 4 to the Cabinet, with the anticipated financial position summarised as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Council's developing Business Model, as set out in Section 6 of Report Item 4 to the Cabinet, focussed on aligning the services being provided with the Corporate Plan, a wider consideration of the best operational delivery model, maximisation of income and a move towards more efficient methods of customer interaction. Members welcomed the intention to adopt a widely-based approach to closing the anticipated budget gap. The Council had a long history of working successfully with partner organisations and these relationships would be further strengthened in the future.

A draft resource plan had been developed for each portfolio, as attached as Appendices 2-7 of Report Item 4 to the Cabinet. These draft plans would be reviewed by the Budget Task and Finish Group and their recommendations would be reported to the Cabinet in due course.

The 2018/19 programme for asset maintenance and replacement was still under development, within a defined budget of £2.3 million, and would be subject to review by the Executive Management Team and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

Panel. This would include year 1 of a 2 year ICT investment programme focussing on frontline service delivery.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel had made a number of comments, as set out in Section 10 of the report.

RECOMMENDED:

That the actions and development of the plans for options to support the Medium Term Financial Plan, as set out in Report Item 4 to the Cabinet, be supported, to include a budgeted sum of up to £250,000 to be made available to drive forward the operational business model set out in Section 6 of the Report, designed to achieve the required savings.

33 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES POLICIES

The Cabinet was advised of Government Guidance, as attached as Appendix A to Report Item 5 to the Cabinet, on three rate relief schemes to support businesses following the recent revaluation of rateable values. The 3 rate reliefs available were for public houses; small businesses and a discretionary relief scheme. The schemes for public houses and small businesses were relatively well defined and would support 120 public houses and 50 small businesses locally. The discretionary rate relief scheme had Government funding for 4 years. There was guidance, but it was for billing authorities to decide on their own schemes. The local scheme would be considered by the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group, which would make recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the policies for rate relief for public houses and for supporting small businesses, as set out in Appendix A to Report Item 5 to the Cabinet, be adopted; and
- (b) That the Revenues Manager and the Service Manager be given delegated authority to make decisions in respect of these policies.

34 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME EXCEPTIONAL HARDSHIP PAYMENTS POLICY

The Cabinet considered an Exceptional Payments Policy to assist residents who had applied for and were entitled to Council Tax Reduction, and who were experiencing exceptional financial hardship.

It was noted that exceptional hardship payments were designed as short term assistance and all applicants would be expected to engage with the Council and take positive steps to help themselves.

The proposed policy had been considered by and endorsed by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Task and Finish Group.

Members considered that it was essential that the Council offered a safety net to meet the needs of the most vulnerable local residents and welcomed the flexible approach that was proposed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Exceptional Hardship Payments Policy, as set out at Appendix A to Report Item 6 to the Cabinet, be approved and adopted; and
- (b) That the Service Manager be authorised to make decisions in accordance with the policy.

35 DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY

The Cabinet considered the overall approach and consultation arrangements for production of a housing strategy to cover the period 2018 – 2023. The draft strategy was attached as Appendix 1 to Report Item 7 to the Cabinet and the housing strategy delivery action plan as Appendix 2 to that report. The proposed consultation arrangements were set out in Appendix 3.

Members were advised that, as the strategy was still in an early stage of preparation, any significant initiatives that were set out in the Prime Minister's speech to the Conservative Party Conference later that day could be incorporated.

The housing strategy would influence and support the future planning and delivery of housing within the District, to facilitate a thriving housing market and address local housing needs. Delivery of a range of affordable housing choices could be achieved by the inclusion of appropriate policies in the Local Plan, which was currently under review. In addition it was suggested that the Council's new-build programme for council homes would continue to be a feature of the new housing strategy. The strategy would also seek to address the issue of affordability and, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, lower cost home ownership and shared ownership options would be explored to provide a stepping stone between renting and moving into home ownership. Research commissioned locally had established that starter homes in this District were relatively unaffordable, requiring an annual income in excess of £42,000 per annum.

Members were encouraged to submit their comments, at this early stage in the process, in order to influence the content of the strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the overall approach set out in the draft housing strategy and delivery plan, as attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to Report Item 7 to the Cabinet; and the proposed consultation arrangements as set out in Appendix 3 to Report Item 7 to the Cabinet, be approved.

CHAIRMAN