

**7 NOVEMBER 2018**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 7 November 2018

- \* Cllr B Rickman (Chairman)
- \* Cllr E J Heron (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

- \* Mrs D E Andrews
- \* J E Binns
- \* Mrs J L Cleary

**Councillors:**

- \* M R Harris
- \* J D Heron
- \* Mrs A J Hoare

\*Present

**In attendance:**

**Councillors:**

W G Andrews  
Mrs S M Bennison  
S J Clarke  
A T Glass  
A A Gossage  
A D O'Sullivan

**Councillors:**

L R Puttock  
W S Rippon-Swaine  
Mrs C V Ward  
M L White  
C A Wise

**Officers Attending:**

R Jackson, Miss G O'Rourke, C Read, Mrs M Sandhu, A Bethune, Mrs D Bruton, M Cole, Miss J Debnam, Mrs S Hamilton, R Lane and R Stevens

**Apologies**

None were received.

**41 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**42 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs E J Heron and White – Minute 44.

**43 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No issues were raised in the public participation period.

**44 CIVIL ON STREET PARKING ENFORCEMENT AND TRANSPORTATION - AGENCY AGREEMENTS**

Cllrs E J Heron and White disclosed interests on the grounds that they were both County Councillors, and the agency agreements were with the County Council. They each had a dispensation to speak and, in the case of Cllr E J Heron, to vote. Cllr White did not have a vote.

The Cabinet was advised that the County Council had reviewed the operation of their on-street parking arrangements as part of their programme to achieve savings and, following discussions with officers in the Borough and District Councils in Hampshire, were proposing revised terms for the operation of the on-street parking enforcement agency with effect from 31 March 2020. In addition, in future, the Council would only be able to operate a traffic management agency if they also undertook the on-street parking function.

Members were advised of the current arrangements and also the proposed terms of the new agency agreements, as set out in Section 2 of Report Item 4 to the Cabinet. Members considered that the proposed terms would place an undue level of risk on this Council arising from factors that would be outside this Council's control. Members were also concerned about the effect of the County Council's proposals on the cost and viability of small scale residents' parking schemes, such as those operating in this District. The proposed arrangements were disappointing in the light of the success of the current arrangements, which had operated since 2002.

Members were advised that the 1.6 FTE staff allocated to the traffic management function would be entitled to TUPE transfer to the County Council should this Council cease to operate the agency. It was however anticipated that the 5.3 FTE reduction in the number of staff needed for parking enforcement would not be covered by TUPE and this Council would have to pay any costs associated with redundancy.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Executive Head of Operations write formally to the County Council to reject the current proposed terms for the agency agreements for On-Street Parking Enforcement and Traffic Management on the grounds that the District Council is not prepared to take the financial risks identified on a function that it does not have a statutory duty to provide.

**45 STRATEGIC FIRE SAFETY REVIEW**

The Cabinet was advised that the Council's existing fire safety policies had been reviewed to ensure that they remained robust to protect residents, staff and visitors to the Council's buildings. A proposed overarching Strategic Fire Safety Policy was attached as Appendix 1 to Report Item 5 to the Cabinet. Detailed policies for the Council's buildings would be prepared in accordance with this strategic approach and would be approved by the relevant portfolio holder by March 2019. The first priority area of work was the Council's housing stock where, because people lived and slept in the buildings, there was the greatest degree of vulnerability.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the strategic approach to fire safety, as set out in the report and the Strategic Fire Safety Strategy attached as Appendix 1 to Report Item 5 to the Cabinet, be approved; and
- (b) That the additional resource of £60,000 required within the housing service to implement the improvements set out Section 4 of Report Item 5 to the Cabinet be approved.

**46 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2019/20**

The Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group for the scheme to be applied from 1 April 2019. The Task and Finish Group had considered a limited range of amendments to the current scheme which was designed to assist vulnerable persons of working age in the District. The options were set out in Section 5 of Report Item 6 to the Cabinet. The necessary consultation exercise had been undertaken on the proposal that the main scheme should remain unaltered, but a de minimis rule should be introduced under which any change in entitlement of less than £1 per week should in future be disregarded. At present 30% of variations were under £1, but required a disproportionate administrative burden to implement. A saving of £10,000 per annum was expected. Only a limited number of responses had been received to the consultation, but these had been supportive.

**RESOLVED:**

That, in so far as it is empowered to do so by law, the Cabinet agrees that the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1 April 2019 be amended as set out in Option E in paragraph 5.1 of Report Item 6 to the Cabinet to introduce a de minimis rule to disregard changes of less than £1 per week; and

**RECOMMENDED:**

***That, in so far as it is empowered to do so by law, the Council agrees that the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1 April 2019 be amended as set out in Option E in paragraph 5.1 of Report Item 6 to the Cabinet to introduce a de minimis rule to disregard changes of less than £1 per week.***

**47 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS, VOLUNTARY PAYMENT AND RELATED POLICIES**

Members considered the recommendations of the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group with respect to various council tax exemptions and discounts. They also considered the introduction of an empty homes premium and also a Voluntary Payment Scheme for Band H properties.

The current council tax discounts were set out in Section 2 of Report Item 7 to the Cabinet. The proposed changes, and the Task and Finish Group's conclusions on them, were set out in Section 3 of the Report.

The Group proposed that, in line with Government aspirations to bring empty homes back into use, a premium payment should be introduced, initially at 50% from 1 April 2019, with the potential to increase the premium, after a review, to 100% from 1 April 2020.

The Group had been sympathetic to the objective of providing support to persons leaving the care system, the Children's Society having recommended that such young adults should be exempt from council tax payments up to the age of 21. The Group had evaluated the proposal and had been satisfied that the Council's existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Exceptional Hardship Fund already provided a greater level of assistance, should the young person be in need.

The Group was also recommending the adoption of policy documents bringing together the Council's existing policies into a National Non-Domestic Rate Relief Policy and a Fair Collection and Debt Recovery Policy as attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively to Report Item 7 to the Cabinet.

The Group had not supported the introduction of a voluntary additional payments scheme in respect of Band H properties. The return was likely to be small in comparison to the additional administrative costs, and could deter alternative charitable donations.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That, insofar as it is entitled to do so by law, the Cabinet approve the discretionary discounts to and premiums on council tax as set out in options A to E in paragraph 3 of Report Item 7 to the Cabinet;
- (b) That the Empty Homes Premium be reviewed by the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group in 2019;
- (c) That, insofar as it is entitled to do so by law, the Cabinet approve the Non-Domestic Rate Relief Policy, and the Fair Collection and Debt Recovery Policy, attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to Report Item 7 to the Cabinet.
- (d) That the proposal by Cllr D Harrison, in respect of voluntary additional Council Tax payments, as referred to in Section 6 of Report Item 7 to the Cabinet, be not supported, for the reasons stated.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (a) *That, insofar as it is entitled to do so by law, the Council approve the discretionary discounts to and premiums on council tax as set out in options A to E in paragraph 3 of Report Item 7 to the Cabinet;*
- (b) *That, insofar as it is entitled to do so by law, the Council approve the Local Non-Domestic Rate Relief Policy, and the Fair Collection and Debt Recovery Policy, attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to Report Item 7 to the Cabinet.*

**48 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2018 ONWARDS**

The Cabinet considered the latest projections for the Council's financial position to the year 2022/23.

Prior to the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, the Prime Minister had already made 2 key announcements that affected the Council's finances, removing the borrowing cap on local authority Housing Revenue Accounts and suggesting that times of austerity were over. The Autumn Statement had not however included any measures that would assist District Councils.

Members were advised that the provisional financial settlement for 2019/20 should be announced on 6 December 2018. The Medium Term Plan currently made the assumption that negative support grant of £612,000 would apply in 2019/20, but it was hoped that the Treasury would respond to the pressure from local government to improve this position. With the provisional financial settlement the Council should also hear if the bid for the Hampshire Wide Business Rates pilot had been successful. Any benefits arising from the success of that bid would be included in the next Medium Term Plan.

The 3 yearly actuarial review of the Hampshire Pension Fund would take place in 2019/20. For the period 2017/18 - 2020/21 the Council's employee contributions were increasing by 1% per annum. Current financial indications suggested that future increases would not be necessary, or at least of a much lesser degree.

Since August the budget deficit position for 2019/20 had been reduced to £109,000, as set out in Table 2 to Report item 8 to the Cabinet. The projected budget shortfall over the period to 2022/23 had also improved, having reduced from £1.35 million to £1.136 million. It was proposed to further eliminate this budget gap through savings from the review of the delivery of Leisure and the generation of additional commercial and residential property income. Any shortfall would be met from reserves, to maintain flexibility to develop further plans. Further details were set out in Appendix 1 to Report item 8 to the Cabinet.

Members were updated on the ICT investment and asset maintenance and replacement programmes. Members were requested to approve the overall asset management and replacement programme budget in advance of consideration of the full programme by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel, to allow initial preparatory works to begin. Members were also advised of the projected use of General Fund reserves in 2018/19. The annual review of the Housing Revenue Account business plan would be considered in February 2019.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the emerging draft Medium Term Financial Plan to 2022/23, as set out Report Item 8 to the Cabinet, be approved to form the basis of the Council's 2019/20 General Fund Budget to be reported in February 2019; and
- (b) That, subject to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel supporting the Asset Maintenance and Replacement Programme for 2019/20, the commencement of the initial preparatory works be approved.

CHAIRMAN