

7 APRIL 2021

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 7 April 2021

* Cllr Edward Heron (Chairman)

Councillors:

* Diane Andrews
* Jill Cleary
* Michael Harris

Councillors:

* Jeremy Heron
* Alison Hoare
* Mark Steele

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Sue Bennison
Geoffrey Blunden
Steve Clarke
Anne Corbridge
Keith Craze
Steve Davies
Arthur Davis
Jacqui England

Councillors:

Allan Glass
David Hawkins
Maureen Holding
Martyn Levitt
Joe Reilly
Steve Rippon-Swaine
Derek Tipp
Christine Ward

Officers Attending:

Bob Jackson, Alan Bethune, Sara Hamilton, Grainne O'Rourke, Daniel Reynafarje, Claire Upton-Brown and Matt Wisdom

Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received from Cabinet Members.

173 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2021, be confirmed and signed.

174 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests made by Cabinet Members.

175 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no issues raised during the public participation period.

176 COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY - REPORT FROM THE ACTING LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Acting Leader of the Council provided a verbal update on the Council's latest progress in response to and recovery from COVID-19.

Going live the week of the Cabinet meeting, the Council's Revenues department would once again be working hard to get the £12m of government funded restart grants out to eligible businesses as soon as practically possible, after completing all the necessary pre-payment checks that were required to be undertaken. The Acting Leader spoke of how important grant funding had been to businesses in the New Forest to date, and welcomed the additional grants to support their re-opening.

With regard to Council meetings, the Acting Leader reported the news that the Government had confirmed that it would not extend the Regulations that permitted Virtual Meetings beyond 7 May 2021. Consequently, a review was being undertaken on the delivery of face to face meetings in line with Government restrictions. Councillors would be kept informed of this work. An option promoted by the Government for those authorities without elections in 2021, was to bring forward meetings ahead of 7 May 2021, when they could still be held virtually, providing more time to prepare for the safe return of face to face meetings.

Looking more broadly at a return to office working for the Council, a staff poll and a survey for Members were being considered to collect a broad range of views.

177 FREEPORTS BID

The Acting Leader of the Council was pleased to report that the Solent was one of eight Freeports announced in the March budget by the Government. Freeports were a Government flagship programme that would play an important part in the UK's post Covid economic recovery, contributing to realising the levelling up agenda. It was estimated that a successful Solent Freeport would attract £2 billion of investment with the potential to create 52,000 new local jobs. This provided a significant opportunity for the New Forest. Work was already ongoing both locally and with the Government to move the proposal forward.

178 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**RESOLVED:**

That the Strategic Risk Register be adopted, noting it will be under constant review.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

No.

PORTFOLIO:

All.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST(S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Chief Finance Officer highlighted the adoption of the document by the Cabinet as an important step in the Council's governance and risk management process. The specific risks had been considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Audit Committee would continue to routinely review the overall register.

179 FINANCIAL MONITORING - 2020/21 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN

RESOLVED:

That the latest budget forecasts of the General Fund (section 4), Capital (section 5) and HRA (section 6) of the report, be noted.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

No.

PORTFOLIO:

Finance, Investment and Corporate Services / All

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST(S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report and highlighted the significant work to produce an Emergency Budget in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The Portfolio Holder placed on record his thanks to all Council officers for helping to deliver against this revised budget. Attention was also drawn to the variations within the Outturn in the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services reported that the Council had been able to spend £10m on the acquisition of additional Council houses, £1m more than the original expectation. Furthermore, £700k had been spent on disabled facilities adaptations, allowing tenants to stay in their homes longer. The minor differences in revenue spending in comparison to the original budget highlighted how close monitoring enabled the Council to respond to new priorities. The new financial year would see an increased spend on new council properties in pursuit of the target of 600 new properties by 2026. In response to a question regarding the Housing Revenue Account and vacant garages, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council did look at garage sites where they could be acquired and developed as an option for more housing.

The Cabinet confirmed that the Barton drainage test within the report was the first test phase, not the full scheme.

Further detailed questions were asked in relation to the Council's net budget requirements moving forward. It was noted that the presentation given to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel in March 2021, gave a useful broad summary of the Council's financial position including the business grants administered by the Council.

CHAIRMAN