

16 FEBRUARY 2022

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 16 February 2022

* Cllr Edward Heron (Chairman)

* Cllr Jill Cleary (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Diane Andrews
* Geoffrey Blunden
* Steve Davies

Councillors:

* Michael Harris
* Jeremy Heron
David Russell

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Alan Alvey
Steve Clarke
Keith Craze
Allan Glass
David Hawkins
Alison Hoare
Christine Hopkins

Councillors:

Alan O'Sullivan
Joe Reilly
Steve Rippon-Swaine
Derek Tipp
Malcolm Wade
Christine Ward

Officers Attending:

Grainne O'Rourke, Alan Bethune, Richard Fudge, Manjit Sandhu and Matt Wisdom

Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Russell.

An apology for absence was also received from the Chief Executive, Kate Ryan.

61 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2022, be confirmed and signed.

62 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

The Monitoring Officer had granted a dispensation to all Members of the Cabinet under Section 33 (2) (d) of the Localism Act 2011 to enable them to speak and to vote on item 5 – Members' Allowances – Scheme to apply from 1 April 2022 and

Independent Remuneration Panel and item 7 – Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget 2022/23, considered at minutes 65 and 67 respectively. These items were the subject of recommendations to the Full Council.

63 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no issues raised during the public participation period.

**64 REPORT ON PROPOSED CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN AND THE ROLE THE COUNCIL WILL PLAY GOING FORWARD
RESOLVED:**

1. That the Cabinet:-

- (a) endorse the Strategic Actions set out in the Action Plan 2022-23;
- (b) endorse the approach set out in the report for the development of a Climate Change and Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028;
- (c) agree that the Action Plan is reviewed by Cabinet on an annual basis; and
- (d) agree the principle of creating a permanent Climate Change role noting the likelihood of required dedicated supporting resource as outlined within the body of the report.

2. That the Cabinet recommend to Council that the governance arrangements outlined in the report be endorsed, with relevant issues being addressed through each Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the establishment of a cross-cutting officer board to oversee delivery.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Yes. Report to Cabinet and Full Council.

PORTFOLIO:

Leader.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST(S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Leader introduced the report and referred to the Council's declaration of a Climate Change and Nature Emergency in October 2021, which set the direction for the action plan. Significant work from Council officers in partnership with the climate team at Hampshire County Council had taken place.

The Cabinet acknowledged the significant work the Council had already progressed on the sustainability agenda and the action plan would provide an opportunity to demonstrate this work, collect more data and evidence and drive further improvements.

With the cost of living increasing, and issues such as insulation becoming ever more important, it was time for the Council to move in a balanced way to further the sustainability agenda and act as community leaders for positive behaviours across the District.

A number of Members welcomed the action plan and spoke of the ongoing work of the Council's Greener Housing Task and Finish Group which looked at a range of sustainability issues for the Council's own housing, including air sourced heat pumps. A balance between good quality, sustainable housing at the right cost would need to be struck to ensure the Council's ambitions in the wider Housing Strategies could be delivered.

The Leader of the Opposition welcomed the report and the commitment to bring forward dedicated resource to support the implementation of the action plan. It was highlighted that the delivery of the action plan would be the key to the success of the Council's declaration of a Climate Change and Nature Emergency.

The Leader summarised and highlighted the 2050 net zero commitment shared by all the main political parties in the United Kingdom. The Council would now need to focus on what is right for the UK, the New Forest and in accordance with the emerging Government position with regard to climate, nature and sustainability.

65 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES - SCHEME TO APPLY FROM 1 APRIL 2022 AND INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL (IRP)**RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet recommends to Full Council that:-

- (a) The current scheme of members' allowances be made as the scheme to apply from 1 April 2022;
- (b) The Independent Remuneration Panel as outlined at paragraph 5 of the report, be appointed for a four year period commencing 1 March 2022;
- (c) The Panel's terms of reference be agreed as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- (d) The current offer of 1.75% (which has already been implemented for staff this year) be applied to members' allowances for 2021/22, before the end of this financial year, should no agreement be reached with the National Joint Council (NJC).

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Full Council.

PORTFOLIO:

N/A.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST(S):

None. All Members of the Cabinet had been granted a dispensation to speak and vote on this item.

DISCUSSION:

The Leader introduced the report which set out recommendations to review the Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances, alongside associated issues.

66 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND HOUSING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME 2022/23

RESOLVED:

1. That the Cabinet be asked to approve the proposed planned maintenance and improvement works programme for 2022/23 – 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.
2. That the Cabinet be asked to recommend to the Council that:-
 - (a) the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed;
 - (b) from 03 April 2022, an increase in rents of 4.1% from the 2021/22 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed;
 - (c) from 03 April 2022, an increase in service charges of 3.1% from the 2021/22 weekly service charge level, be agreed;
 - (d) a Housing Capital Programme to 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 4 of the report, be agreed.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Yes. Report to Cabinet and Full Council.

PORTFOLIO:

Housing and Homelessness Services.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST(S):

None.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report and spoke of the ongoing challenges the Council faced as a Housing Authority, to continue to deliver excellent services to tenants, ensuring homes were maintained in good order, as well as creating new council homes and the greener and more sustainable housing agenda.

Despite these challenges, including against a backdrop of rising prices, the Cabinet was pleased to note that the tenant representatives had stated that the recommendations contained in the report were fair and the rent levels represented good value for money, with resources reasonably allocated.

Additional resource for greater engagement with tenants was welcomed.

In response to concerns about raising the level of rents at a time when energy costs, recovery from the pandemic and employment were local and national factors, Cabinet considered that a balanced approach needed to be taken. Without the vital investment in the Council's HRA budget, which was ring fenced, pressures would build on the standard and number of homes in the Council's stock. The alternative of increased waiting lists and greater demand on private sector housing could be more costly for many tenants.

Members encouraged any tenants who were suffering financial hardship to come forward to the Council, as there was a comprehensive suite of support measures that could be considered and offered where appropriate.

67 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND ANNUAL BUDGET 2022/23**RESOLVED:**

That Cabinet recommend to Council that:-

- (a) there is a General Fund Net Budget Requirement in 2022/23 of £20,674,420, as set out in appendices 5a - d to the report;
- (b) the budget is set in accordance with the fees and charges as agreed by the Portfolio Holders and published in the lead up to the final budget approval and adoption;

- (c) the New Forest District Council Band D Council Tax for 2022/23 shall be £188.36;
- (d) the General Fund Capital Programme for 2022/23 of £17.174m, as set out in Appendix 6 of the report be approved;
- (e) the Section 151 officer and Chief Executive, working in consultation with the Leader and appropriate Portfolio Holder (depending on the nature of the item), have delegated approval to allocate budget from the 'Corporate Plan Delivery' funds made available within this budget to Services to achieve the objectives as laid out within this report; and
- (f) the site licence fees and service charges at Stillwater Park be increased by 4.9% in line with RPI inflation.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

As set out in the report.

KEY DECISION:

Report to Cabinet and Full Council.

PORTFOLIO:

Finance, Investment and Corporate Services / All.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED/REJECTED:

As set out in the report.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST(S):

None. All Members of the Cabinet had been granted a dispensation to speak and vote on this item.

DISCUSSION:

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report and outlined the £20,674,420 General Fund Net Budget Requirement.

The Government settlement had now been confirmed and was broadly in line with the Council's plan.

The Cabinet welcomed the good financial position the Council was currently in and that this enabled the Council to invest in priorities for local residents. However, attention was drawn to paragraph 3.3 of the report which confirmed the forecast budget deficit of £1.895M at 2025/26. With sound financial management and the actions contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan, there was confidence that this gap could be closed.

The Executive Head of Financial and Corporate Services referred to section 9 of the report and reiterated his satisfaction with the process for the development of the budget and medium term financial plan, alongside assurance on the adequacy of reserves in accordance with the statutory role of the Section 151 Officer.

CHAIRMAN