

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **8th December 2016**.

Present:

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman);

Cllr. Bell (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Bennett, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Clokie, Galpin, Knowles, Shorter.

Apology:

Cllr. Hicks.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Burgess, Heyes, A Howard, Link, Ovenden, Pickering, Smith, Wedgbury.

Chief Executive, Head of Finance, Head of Housing, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Accountancy Manager, Human Resources Manager, Assistant Planned Maintenance Manager, Senior Accountant, Communications Officer, Senior Member Services Officer.

220 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 10th November 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

221 Leader's Announcements

The Leader said he knew there would be other opportunities to give festive messages over the coming weeks, however as 2016 drew to a close he had been reflecting on the number of new developments that had been approved and for which all could now see the construction work being undertaken. These were all set to significantly improve the Borough of Ashford.

He said that 2017 would see even more construction works which would bring back to life predominantly derelict brownfield sites to even further enhance the Borough of Ashford. In September they would welcome nearly a thousand young students to the new and impressive Ashford College. This alone should inject a new vibrancy into the town centre.

The Leader said he would like to acknowledge the commitment of the Council's Officers who had, over the last year in particular, worked so hard to bring these major economic developments to the varying stages of actual delivery. In addition to wishing the Officers and Members a Merry Christmas and a happy, peaceful and prosperous New Year, he also wished the same to the Borough's residents, businesses and all involved with the aspirations and development of Ashford Borough Council.

222 Review of Housing Staff Structure

The report built on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan submitted to the Cabinet in November 2015. This had identified that the 1% reduction in social rents announced in the July 2015 Budget would result in an anticipated loss of income of £10m for the four years from April 2016. Members had agreed to implement a significant cost reduction programme, including salary savings, in order to recover the HRA's financial position. Subsequently a comprehensive review of the HRA Service had been conducted and the report set out the recommendations and impacts for staff arising from the review. These included improved working practices, an organisational restructure and a net reduction in headcount from April 2017 (and in the 2017/18 budget) of 9.12 FTE posts.

The Portfolio Holder said that he commended the report and thanked all those involved in its compilation. Other Members echoed that sentiment and said that although the subject matter was obviously difficult and sensitive, it had been dealt with well and been generally well received by the affected staff. Praise should also be given to members of the representative body Unison who had worked extremely well and pragmatically with the Council on such a difficult issue, as well as the staff in Housing itself for their professionalism and pragmatic approach.

Resolved:

- That (i) the findings of the review of Housing be endorsed.**
- (ii) the new staff structure at Appendix 3 to the report be approved.**

Recommended:

That the redundancy costs and pension costs set out at Appendix 4 to the report be approved and that the pension monies are released in the event that those staff at risk cannot be redeployed, or if there are pension implications or redundancy costs in relation to voluntary redundancy applications that they may be granted.

223 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2016-2046

The report provided an annual update to Members on the financial projections associated with the HRA Business Plan.

The Portfolio Holder drew attention to paragraphs 9 and 10 of the report which updated on the reviewed priorities for the HRA Business Plan and the projects, including sheltered and affordable schemes, which had been incorporated in to it.

The Chairman said that this was an important report and it again drew attention to the good work the Council was doing on focusing on care and facilities for the elderly and vulnerable. Ashford was certainly an exemplar Authority in this regard and he knew that the Ashford model was well regarded by senior figures within the Health Service.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the updated HRA Business Plan and financial projections be agreed.**
 - (ii) the updated HRA priorities, set out at paragraph 9 of the report, be agreed.**
 - (iii) it be noted that Overview and Scrutiny are required to review the HRA Business Plan financial projections as part of the budget scrutiny process.**

224 Draft Budget 2017/18

The report presented the draft budget for 2017/18 for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account which included the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and approval to accept the four year funding settlement.

The Portfolio Holder explained that the draft budget continued to drive the Council towards its aim of being self-sufficient by 2018/19 and continued to allow the Administration to fulfil its election manifesto pledge of having the lowest Council Tax in Kent. He commended the draft budget and said that it would form the basis of the budget scrutiny and budget consultation processes and already presented an almost balanced budget, with just a £31k variance deficit, which he considered would be comfortably recovered during the year.

A Member said that whilst Ashford would still be in a position to offer the lowest Council Tax in Kent this year, the differential between Ashford and other Authorities was closing. With the MTFP seemingly proposing increased rises in Council Tax year on year, and other Authorities potentially freezing their element of the Council Tax, he was concerned that in the near future Ashford would no longer have the lowest Council Tax in Kent. The Chairman responded that the MTFP had to make a forecast for future years, but his personal mandate and that of this Administration was reduced increases in Council Tax year on year and to firmly remain the lowest Council Tax in Kent. There was no budging on this position and if necessary, the Council would make cuts in certain areas to achieve this. The MTFP was a five year forecasted plan but it would be reviewed and adjusted year on year. The Portfolio Holder reiterated that the Council was in a strong financial position and with its developments and investments coming on board they were certainly ahead of their neighbours in terms of their ambitions to be grant free and self-sufficient. The

Council was set up to secure significant income streams and earn its money, rather than looking for handouts or excessively taxing its residents.

Recommended:

- That
- (i) the budget context be noted.
 - (ii) the draft budget for 2017/18 be approved.
 - (iii) the draft Housing Revenue Account budget for 2017/18 be approved.
 - (iv) the report be used as the basis for budget consultation with the public, the business community, Parish Councils and staff.
 - (v) the draft budget as set out in the report should now be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Budget Task Group for formal scrutiny.

225 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Recommended Scheme Post Public Consultation

The report advised that following Cabinet agreement in May to draft a Council Tax Support Scheme and undertake a twelve week period of public consultation, final recommendations were now brought forward for a scheme to operate from 1st April 2017.

The Portfolio Holder advised that this issue had been the subject of lengthy discussion and debate via the Council Tax and Welfare Reform Task Group with many options analysed. The proposals had been largely supported during the consultation and, slightly surprisingly, had been supported by a significant number of individuals who would be affected by the increase to the contribution rate for working age claimants. He also drew attention to the fact that the recommended scheme did introduce a 'safety net' for those who were genuinely affected by exceptional hardship through no fault of their own. The Chairman said that this point further exemplified that this Council would be understanding and reasonable whenever it could for those who found themselves in vulnerable situations and would also fully consider the results of any consultation it undertook and use those to frame the relevant debates and recommendations.

Resolved:

That the outcome of the public consultation process be noted.

Recommended:

- That
- (i) the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme be amended as outlined in the report.

- (ii) delegated authority be issued to the Head of Finance, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and the Leader, to make any adjustments to the final scheme by 31st January 2017.**

226 Council Tax Base 2017/18

The report advised that the Council was required to approve the Tax Base which would be used to calculate the level of Council Tax for 2017/18. It was calculated with regard to the number of domestic properties (including a forecast of new properties) which were then converted into Band D equivalents. The Tax Base had been calculated at 44,671.7 Band D properties and was an increase of 922 (or 2.11%) on the current year.

Recommended:

- That
- (i) the 2017/18 'Net' tax base of 44,671.7 Band D equivalent properties as set out in the table below be agreed.**
 - (ii) the distribution across Parished areas of the proposed grant to Parish Councils to help compensate for the negative impact caused by the Council Tax Support Scheme on Parish Councils' tax bases (Appendix D to the report refers) totalling £40,900 be agreed.**
 - (iii) the possibility of further Cabinet and Council decisions being required before the end of January 2017 should any material change in the tax base be required as a consequence of any further relevant funding announcements from Government be noted.**

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**TAX BASE 2017/18
LOCAL TAX BASE (WHOLE/PART AREAS)**

LOCAL TAX BASE 2016/2017	WHOLE AREA	BAND D EQUIVALENT	NEW OCCUPATIONS	1.0% PROVISION	Less discounts Council Tax Support	LOCAL TAX BASE 2017/18
		47,891.60	680.00	(440.40)	(4,381.20)	43,750.00
	<u>PARISH</u>					
579.80	Aldington & Bonnington	606.44	34.89	(4.49)	(42.39)	594.45
321.80	Appledore	381.78	0.89	(2.56)	(41.46)	338.65
701.50	Bethersden	767.14	4.67	(5.31)	(64.01)	702.48
1,086.90	Biddenden	1,178.50	2.78	(8.28)	(77.26)	1,095.73
147.90	Bilsington	156.94	0.00	(1.10)	(10.22)	145.62
1,043.90	Boughton Aluph & Eastwell	1,132.22	0.89	(8.07)	(57.61)	1,067.44
590.10	Brabourne	621.53	1.89	(4.51)	(21.85)	597.06
152.20	Brook	156.97	0.89	(1.17)	(1.67)	155.02
405.40	Challock	445.06	23.56	(3.42)	(12.29)	452.89
1,258.30	Charing	1,397.92	45.22	(9.87)	(127.10)	1,306.17
740.50	Chilham	813.11	9.44	(5.64)	(70.70)	746.22
92.50	Crundale (PM)	94.78	0.00	(0.70)	(0.91)	93.16
502.70	Egerton	525.81	0.89	(3.79)	(21.71)	501.20
176.40	Godmersham	177.56	0.00	(1.30)	(3.63)	172.62
2,420.20	Great Chart w/ Singleton	2,636.83	1.89	(18.25)	(205.82)	2,414.65
114.70	Hastingleigh	119.25	0.00	(0.86)	(4.21)	114.17
715.50	High Halden	771.19	4.67	(5.41)	(54.36)	716.09
287.10	Hothfield	334.69	0.00	(2.00)	(68.68)	264.02
106.10	Kenardington	116.53	0.89	(0.81)	(9.26)	107.35
4,334.50	Kingsnorth	4,575.81	109.56	(33.51)	(217.09)	4,434.76
123.70	Little Chart	131.81	0.89	(0.97)	(2.96)	128.76
637.1	Mersham and Sevington	752.61	25.44	(5.60)	(31.97)	740.49
103.8	Molash	117.14	0.89	(0.82)	(9.14)	108.07
103.2	Newenden	106.44	0.89	(0.77)	(4.60)	101.97
559.9	Orlestone	639.36	8.44	(4.51)	(46.04)	597.25
468.8	Pluckley	510.28	3.78	(3.59)	(34.77)	475.69
679.1	Rolvenden	728.89	14.11	(5.15)	(56.85)	681.00
317.7	Ruckinge	345.28	4.67	(2.53)	(11.97)	335.44
497.5	Shadoxhurst	543.25	38.67	(4.10)	(34.68)	543.13
620.5	Smarden	659.06	24.56	(4.84)	(38.22)	640.56
357	Smeeth	389.72	0.89	(2.72)	(27.83)	360.06
782.5	Stanhope	1,032.72	5.67	(5.87)	(255.77)	776.75
200.6	Stone	221.11	0.00	(1.52)	(17.83)	201.76
3438.5	Tenterden (TC)	3,774.56	58.44	(26.70)	(272.36)	3,533.93
176.7	Warehorne	180.47	0.00	(1.32)	(4.29)	174.86
319.5	Westwell	340.83	2.78	(2.45)	(16.58)	324.58
525.3	Wittersham	584.83	0.00	(4.00)	(51.44)	529.40
829.7	Woodchurch	896.00	4.67	(6.31)	(59.61)	834.75
1045.3	Wye with Hinxhill	1,116.78	10.33	(7.74)	(94.67)	1,024.70
16,185.60	Unparished Area	18,637.71	209.89	(124.38)	(2,184.44)	16,538.78
43,750.00		48,718.91	658.00	(336.98)	(4,368.26)	44,671.67

227 Trading and Enterprise Board – 7th November 2016

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Trading and Enterprise Board held on the 7th November 2016 be received, noted and approved with the exception of Minute No. 186.

Recommended:

That Minute No. 186 be approved.

228 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – 6th October 2016

Resolved:

That the notes of the meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 6th October 2016 be received and noted.

229 Economic Regeneration and Investment Board – 27th July, 26th October and 23rd November 2016

Resolved:

That the notes of the meetings of the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board held on the 27th July, 26th October and 23rd November 2016 be received and noted.

230 Schedule of Key Decisions To Be Taken

Resolved:

That the latest Schedule of Key Decisions as set out within the report be received and noted.

231 Season's Greetings

Councillor Galpin, Cabinet Member for Town Centres Focus and Business Dynamics, advised that he was having a hip operation this coming weekend and would now be out of contact until after Christmas. He said he wanted to echo the earlier sentiments of the Leader by wishing Members and Officers a Merry Christmas and thanking everyone for their support in the work of his Portfolio this year.

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MINS:

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
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