

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **14th February 2019**.

Present:

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman);
Cllr. Bell (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Bennett, Bradford, Clokie, Galpin, Pickering, Shorter, White.

Apologies:

Cllr. Ovenden.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Burgess, Dehnel, Hicks, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Link, Miss Martin, Michael, Smith, Suddards.

Chief Executive, Director of Law and Governance, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Legal and Democracy, Head of Planning and Development, Head of Finance, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Head of Culture, Head of Environment and Land Management, Development and Regeneration Manager, Economic Development Manager, Senior Accountant (LF), Senior Accountant (MH), Accounts Officer, Communications Officer, National Management Trainee, Member Services Manager (Operational).

316 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Miss Martin	Made a Voluntary Announcement as her Mother would qualify as a potential Honorary Alderman.	323

317 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 10th January 2019 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

318 Leader's Announcements

The Leader reported that Agenda Item 11 – Ashford College Campus – had been withdrawn from tonight's Agenda. He advised that following the recent news, that only came out the previous day, about changes to the management of the West Kent and Ashford College, and having not received any further detail or an official position from the College at this stage, it was felt prudent to withdraw the Cabinet report on the Ashford College Campus. This matter would be brought back to Cabinet when the information was available to ensure that the Council could make an informed decision.

The Leader also advised that the National Infrastructure Commission, in conjunction with the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), had arranged a visit to Ashford to take place on 19th March 2019. They wanted to view Junction 10A, the A28 and Ashford College amongst other developments, as well as staying for lunch and having a look around Ashford. This was welcomed as an extremely good opportunity to provide some positive publicity for the investment in Ashford.

319 Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The Task Group had scrutinised the Council's draft 2019/20 budget and had regarded it as sound and deliverable. The Portfolio Holder said that this year's had been one of the most thorough and structured budget scrutiny processes he had been involved in and thanked the Chairman of the Task Group and the Members for their hard work. He advised that he fully supported the recommendations and was pleased that the Task Group had regarded the draft budget as sound and deliverable.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) it be noted that the O&S Committee regards the Council's draft 2019/20 budget as sound and deliverable.**
 - (ii) it be noted that the O&S Committee regards the Council's reserves position as suitable to cover identified contingencies and risks.**
 - (iii) it be noted that the parking income budget for Elwick Place is based on generally sound assumptions but remains ambitious.**
 - (iv) it be noted that the lorry clamping scheme extension is supported but represents a potential risk to the budget if fees are not set at a level which allows for operational costs to be covered.**
 - (v) it be noted that there may be a risk to the budget associated with the Town Centre Place Making work if the NNDR pooling target is not achieved or if the aspirations of the Town Centre Place Making Board exceed available funding.**
 - (vi) consideration be given to increasing the pest control budget in recognition of the expansion of Waterbrook truck stop.**

- (vii) **it be noted that improvements to the signage for the Community Toilet Scheme may necessitate expenditure beyond the Page 7 Agenda Item 6 allocated budget.**
- (viii) **the remaining capital outlay for Elwick Place be considered as part of the 2019/20 Capital Programme.**
- (ix) **it be requested that draft Capital and Treasury Management Strategies are included for consideration by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in future years.**
- (x) **it be noted that there may be a risk around delivery of key projects in the event of Section 106 funds not being available.**
- (xi) **the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group be instructed to consider ways to expand allotment provision in the Borough.**
- (xii) **it be noted that there may be a risk to the Council's rental income if International House leases expiring in 2019/20 are not renewed.**

Recommended:

That the Council agree that GDPR training be compulsory for all Members following the 2019 local elections.

320 Budget 2019/20

The report presented the final Draft 2019/20 Budget which would be recommended to the Full Council for approval. The Budget supported the fourth year of the Council's Corporate Plan, including the Big 8 projects and a number of other approved commercial and regeneration projects. The report also covered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which included a 1% reduction in rents, the fourth and final year of the four year reduction programme, the Capital programme and the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT introduced the report and directed Members' attention to the tabled paper which included a minor amendment to the table on page 125 of the report, and the detailed comments of those who had responded to the budget consultation. He thanked those residents who had taken the time to engage with the budget setting process and for asking meaningful questions. He advised that the budget proposed a £5.00 (3.17%) rise in the Borough's annual Council Tax requirement which would still leave Ashford as the lowest of any Kent District and amongst the lowest quartile in the country. He thanked all involved in putting the budget together through Officer hard work, formal scrutiny and consultation, and for all those Officers and Members who continued to promote and deliver the Council's entrepreneurial approach. This was continuing to generate a significant income stream which had allowed the Council to become self-sufficient, more than negating the loss of Government Grant without placing the burden on Council Tax payers.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing commented on the HRA which, despite setting an ambitious programme for the coming year, had been viewed as sound.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the Budget context and MTFP position be noted.**
 - (ii) the Chief Financial Officer be delegated powers to establish local discounts in Business Rates in accordance with Government policy.**
 - (iii) the summary of reserves as set out at Table 6 of the report (Appendix C refers) be noted.**
 - (iv) the Equality Impact Assessment as set out in Appendix E to the report be noted.**
 - (v) the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2019/20 be approved.**
 - (vi) the estimated average rent decrease of 1% be approved in accordance with Government guidelines and that the rent setting for the future continues to follow movements in the “limit rent” set by the Government.**
 - (vii) the advice from the Chief Financial Officer concerning the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of reserves be noted.**

Recommended:

- That**
- (i) the Revenue Budget 2019/20 including the net Budget requirement of £15,725,930 (excluding Parish Precepts) be approved.**
 - (ii) the level of Discretionary Fees to be levied from 1st April 2019 (as set out in Appendix D to the report) be approved.**
 - (iii) Band D Council Tax be set at £162.50.**
 - (iv) the Capital Plan for 2018/19 to 2021/22 (as set out in Appendix G to the report) be approved.**
 - (v) the MRP policy as set out in Appendix I to the report, the Treasury Management Strategy Statement at Appendix J to the report, and the Investment Strategy at Appendix K to the report, be approved.**
 - (vii) the Risk Based Verification Policy as outlined in Appendix L to the report be approved.**
 - (viii) the new Council empty homes premium for 2019/20 be adopted (appendix M to the report refers).**

321 Financial Monitoring – 2018/19 Quarter 3

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the forecast outturn for 2018/19 as at the end of Quarter 3 (31st December 2018). The report covered the performance and forecasts of the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account, with commentary supporting key variances in the body of the report. He also directed Members to the tabled paper which included some amended wording to strengthen recommendation (iii).

Cabinet Members said they strongly welcomed the approval of revenue funding to support service provision at Sk8side for a further two years. They were undertaking crucial work with the Borough's young people and the level of engagement they had achieved was fantastic. There was also strong support for the release of Section 106 funding to the Tenterden Schools Trust for the provision of a 3G pitch at Homewood School and the amended recommendation.

The Deputy Leader made reference to the pressure of additional planning costs which could no longer be contained within reserves and explained that this was because the Council had committed to robustly defending the rural areas against a number of predatory and inappropriate planning applications. They had been successfully fought, but these did come at a cost.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the forecast outturn position for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account be noted.**
 - (ii) the Capital Monitoring and Treasury Management position be noted.**
 - (iii) the release of Section 106 contributions of £235,081 to Tenterden Schools Trust for the provision of a 3G artificial turf pitch at Homewood School be approved, subject to the signing of a Section 106 Funding Agreement and a Community Use Agreement between the Schools Trust and the Council.**
 - (iv) revenue funding of £30,000 a year for two years be approved to support service provision at Sk8side.**

322 Corporate Performance Report – 2018/19 Quarter 3

The report summarised performance against the Council's suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Quarter 3 (1st October to 31st December 2018). Certain Performance Indicators from the previous Council framework had been retained and allowed for historic data comparison, however a number of new Performance Indicators had been agreed upon for which data was only available for the year to date. A summary of all KPIs was appended to the report. The Portfolio Holder introduced the report and thanked the Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer for his continued hard work in embedding the new monitoring arrangements.

Resolved:

That the performance data be received and noted.

323 Honorary Alderman Scheme

The Leader introduced the report which proposed the establishment of an Honorary Alderman Scheme to recognise dedicated and committed service by past elected Members of the Council. The report set out proposals for how the scheme would be established in Ashford and requested that the Cabinet make appropriate recommendations to Full Council.

A Member asked if the length of service to become eligible should be 16 years (or four terms) as at some other Local Authorities, rather than the proposed 12 years (three terms). The Leader said he did not believe there was a standard across other Local Authorities and the eligibility criteria did vary somewhat. This issue had been considered at some length and it had been agreed that 12 years or three terms of service did demonstrate significant commitment to the community.

Recommended:

- That**
- (i) an Honorary Alderman Scheme for the Borough of Ashford be established for those former Councillors who had served for 12 years or more as an Elected Member of Ashford Borough Council.**
 - (ii) the rights and privileges to be afforded to Honorary Aldermen be agreed as set out in Paragraph 7 of the report.**
 - (iii) Past Mayors be given the title of “Mayor Emeritus” upon ceasing to be a Member of the Council to acknowledge their contribution to the work of the Council and the community.**
 - (iv) the existing Members Long Term Certificates Scheme continue to be awarded to those Members who have served one or two terms of office.**
 - (v) the Nomination Award Criteria for Honorary Aldermen be approved as outlined in Paragraph 5 of the report.**
 - (vi) the Head of Legal and Democracy, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Member Champion for the Military Covenant and Ceremonial Liaison, be given delegated authority to agree the ceremonial and other matters associated with the award.**

324 Ashford College Campus: Extension of the Time Period of the Loan for the Phase 1A Development

ITEM WITHDRAWN

325 Solar Farm Project

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which proposed a solar farm on land in Council ownership as the optimal use for a 50 acre site located in Shadoxhurst. He advised that the proposal would deliver a significant income generating project for the Council, would allow grazing and farming to continue on the land, had a low environmental impact and promoted sustainable production of sustainable green electricity. The proposal was clearly predicated on Local Planning Authority approval of a detailed planning application for this site, which would include the usual community consultation.

Members were heartened that the location and topography of this particular site meant that this proposal could be implemented with no visual impact on neighbouring properties, gardens and roads and would be well screened on all sides. It presented a good opportunity for the type of development proposed.

Recommended:

- That (i) **subject to planning approval and public consultation, it be agreed that a solar farm is the optimal use for the site, which would provide a significant income stream to the Council, and in doing so further diversify that Council's Corporate Property Portfolio.**
- (ii) **approval be given to spend £5.94m as outlined in the report and a delegation be given to the Director of Finance and Economy, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT, to agree the optimal funding solution.**
- (iii) **authority be delegated to the Head of Legal and Democracy and the Head of Corporate Property and Projects to agree and enter in to all documentation required to give effect to the above recommendations.**

326 Trading and Enterprise Board Minutes – 11th February 2019

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Trading and Enterprise Board held on the 11th February 2019 be received and noted with the exception of the recommendations in Minute No. 313.

Recommended:

That the recommendations in Minute No. 313 be approved and adopted.

327 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Notes – 19th December 2019

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 19th December be received and noted.

328 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.