

Cabinet

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **28th November 2019**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Barrett, Bell, Buchanan, Clokie, Feacey, Pickering, Shorter.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Gideon, Michael, K Ovenden.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Anckorn, Burgess, Campkin, Forest, Hayward, Krause, Mulholland, N Ovenden, Sparks, C Suddards, L Suddards, Wright.

Chief Executive, Director of Law and Governance, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Planning and Development, Head of Environment and Land Management, Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing, Head of Finance and IT, Head of Housing, Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Environmental Operations Manager, Housing Operations Manager (Options and Private Sector), Environmental Protection and Licensing Team Leader, Senior Accountant (LF), Senior Accountant (MH), Governance and Data Protection Officer, Communications Officer, Member Services Manager (Operational).

210 Minutes

Resolved:

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

211 Corporate Performance Report (Quarter 2 2019/20)

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which summarised performance against the Council's suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Quarter 2 (1st July to 30th September) 2019/20. It also provided an overview of key developments in the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities over the same period.

Resolved

That the performance data for Quarter 2 2019/20, as contained at Appendix 1 to the report, be received and noted.

212 Financial Monitoring Report (Quarter 2 2019/20)

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the forecast outturn for 2019/20 based on information available at the end of September 2019. The Quarter 2 projections forecasted a reduction of £17,000 since Quarter 1 with the General Fund deficit now forecast to be £292,000 at year end. A full list of variances since Quarter 1 were shown at a service level. It was anticipated that through tighter financial control, the deficit could be reduced through the second part of the year. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was forecasting an overspend of £469,000 for the year with £92,000 being added since Quarter 1. This pressure was largely coming from increased feasibility work in progressing new building opportunities to expand the HRA Portfolio.

The Senior Accountant (LF), agreed to provide a Member with an exact income figure for the investment portfolio detailed in the first table at Appendix A to the report.

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 (including Exempt Appendix C to the report)**

Recommended:

That the fees for external printing as set out in Appendix B to the report be agreed.

213 The Medium Term Financial Plan 2020-25

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), a budget forecast including underlying assumptions, covering a five year period from 2020 to 2025 for the General Fund. The plan highlighted the emerging pressures from cuts in Government Funding that needed to be managed over the next four years. Management Team was currently working on plans to reduce the budget going forward. The Plan was based on the Council's current activities and resources for new priorities and projects would need to be fully planned and the impact of the budget understood, before approval.

The Portfolio Holder drew particular attention to the table on page 65 of the report showing the revenue forecast year-on-year to 2024/25 and also to potential

upcoming changes to business rates and New Homes Bonus which could affect the Council's financial position.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the forecast be noted and the underlying assumptions accepted.**
 - (ii) the Inflation Management Strategy be endorsed.**
 - (iii) it be noted that 2020/21 funding will be based on current funding, with spending reviews, fair funding and Business Rate changes now to be implemented from 2021/22.**
 - (iv) authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Economy, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT, to agree the Council's continued participation in the Kent Business Rates pool.**

214 Draft Budget 2020/21

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the draft budget 2020/21 for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. He also directed Members' attention to the tabled papers which included some changes to the original report. The draft budget was in line with the MTFP presented earlier at this meeting and would form the basis of the budget scrutiny and budget consultation processes. Overall there was a balanced budget for 2020/21, although there were a number of risks with this projection that were explored within the report. The report also included the HRA draft budget which incorporated the assumptions in the 30 year business plan presented to the Cabinet in October.

The Portfolio Holder drew particular attention to paragraph 13 of the report which explained that the draft budget included a £5.00 (or 3.1%) increase in Council Tax. This would maintain Ashford's position as the lowest taxing Authority in Kent.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the draft budget for 2020/21 be approved.**
 - (ii) the draft Housing Revenue Account budget for 2020/21, as contained at Section 2 of the report, be approved.**
 - (iii) the report will be used as the basis for budget consultation with the public, the business community, Parish Councils and staff.**
 - (iv) 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.**

215 Council Tax Base 2020/21

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Council was required to approve the tax base used to calculate the level of Council Tax for 2020/21. It was calculated with regard to the number of domestic properties (including a forecast of new properties), which were then converted to Band D equivalents. The tax base had been calculated at 47,300 Band D properties, an increase of 800 (or 1.72%) on the current year. He also directed Members' attention to the tabled papers which included amended Appendices A and C to the report.

Resolved:

- That (i) the 2020/21 'Net' Tax base of 47,300 Band D equivalent properties be agreed.**
- (ii) the distribution across parished areas of the proposed grant to Parish Councils be agreed, to help compensate for the negative impact caused by the Council Tax Support Scheme on Parish Councils' Tax bases (see Appendix D to the report totalling £40,900).**
- (iii) the possibility of further Cabinet and Council decisions being required before the end of January, should any material change in the Tax Base be required as a consequence of any further relevant funding announcements from Government, be noted.**

216 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – Implementation and Current Position

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that the Homelessness Reduction Act had been implemented on the 3rd April 2018 to place a greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. Whilst the introduction of the Act had resulted in an 11% increase in homelessness approaches to the Council, the numbers of households accepted as homeless had significantly reduced from 160 cases in 2017/18 to 71 cases in 2018/19. In addition the number of preventions had risen in the first year of implementation from 148 in 2017/18 to 293 in 2018/19. The report provided an overview of the current position relating to homelessness in the Borough, as well as some data on the number of clients who had accessed the Council's service. The report also reviewed the Council's experiences in relation to the new Act so far and set out an Action Plan for tackling homelessness.

The Portfolio Holder and Housing Operations Manager drew attention to the costs of temporary accommodation and the methodology for counting the number of rough sleepers and said that both of these were key issues for the Service and on which they needed to remain vigilant.

The Deputy Leader asked for more information on changes from KCC that were referenced in the report so that he could make further enquiries in his role as a KCC Member. The Head of Housing advised that as part of a re-tendering in October

2018, KCC had made significant changes to contracts for adult, children and ex-offenders in supported accommodation. In the longer term, there was a strong likelihood that this would impact county wide, with more single vulnerable people who might not meet the statutory threshold for services approaching Ashford and less accommodation/provision available for them. In addition, KCC had altered the criteria for those able to access floating support services. Only households that were identified as being at threat of homelessness were now eligible for the service. In effect, there would be no early intervention from this service until matters might be approaching a crisis point. It was therefore likely that this would exacerbate the problems of homelessness and rough sleeping. She advised that colleagues across Kent were working together, and with Social Services and Public Health, to try and find solutions to these problems. A Member said that in her role with the Street Pastors she had been extremely alarmed at the young age of some of the rough sleepers in the town centre. She asked about Belgic Court and how that appeared to have been empty for a number of months, whilst it could have helped with this situation. The Head of Housing advised that Belgic Court had been one of the casualties of the KCC re-tendering. Fortunately ABC had worked hard with KCC and Golding Homes to find a solution for Belgic Court and would be providing accommodation for young parents, removing up to eight households from temporary accommodation.

A Member asked about the Council's current relationship with Porchlight. The Head of Housing advised that the Council continued to work closely with Porchlight, and a number of other partner agencies, on homelessness and rough sleeping issues. The Council had previously provided Porchlight with funding each year for a part time outreach worker solely for Ashford. This had been the case for a number of years, but with the increased rough sleeper activity emerging over the past two years, it was felt that a full time post was now merited and it had been agreed to bring that post in-house and to take more direct control and ownership of outreach work and statutory Homelessness Reduction Act assessments.

In response to a question about the number of families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, the Portfolio Holder was pleased to confirm that this was currently zero.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the progress made since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 be noted.**
 - (ii) the Action Plan set out in the report to tackle homelessness and reduce numbers in temporary accommodation be agreed.**
 - (iii) the report be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review.**

217 Street Trading Policy (Revision)

The Deputy Portfolio Holder introduced the report which proposed a revision to the existing Street Trading Policy to clarify the Council's position regarding trading on private land.

Recommended:

That the proposed amendment to the Street Trading Policy be approved.

218 Statement of Licensing Policy 2019-2024

The Deputy Portfolio Holder introduced the report which presented the results of the statutory consultation for the draft Statement of Licensing Policy 2019-2024, originally presented to the Cabinet on the 11th July 2019. It confirmed that no amendments to the original draft had been proposed following the consultation.

Recommended:

That the results of the consultation be noted and the Statement of Licensing Policy 2019-2024 be adopted.

219 Community Connection

The Deputy Portfolio Holder introduced the report which updated the Cabinet on the success of the community buses (Community Connection) in Rolvenden and Woodchurch and provided options for future delivery and funding arrangements.

Resolved:

That (i) the continuation of the scheme be approved.

(ii) funding arrangements for the next two financial years be supported.

220 Adoption of the Rolvenden Neighbourhood Plan

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which explained that the Rolvenden Neighbourhood Plan was submitted for examination in May 2019 and the Council had received the Examiner's report in September 2019. The Examiner's report recommended that the Rolvenden Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum, subject to a number of modifications. On the 7th November 2019, the amended and final version of the Neighbourhood Plan was the subject of a local referendum in the Parish and 89.5% voted in favour of the plan. Following the successful referendum it was now the Local Planning Authority's responsibility to formally 'make' (i.e. adopt) the Plan, which would confer full Development Plan status for decision making purposes. Formally 'making' the Neighbourhood Plan must be agreed by Full Council, so this report recommended that the Cabinet endorse the Neighbourhood Plan and asked Full Council to 'make' it.

Recommended:

That the Rolvenden Neighbourhood Plan be ‘made’ in accordance with Section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

221 Ashford Borough Council Cemetery Provision – Challenges and Solutions

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report which advised that a recent review of cemetery provision had identified the projected capacity of the Borough’s cemeteries over the coming years. Based on current demand the Borough had adequate availability of grave space within its cemeteries for the short/medium term future. The Borough was however expected to see a rapidly increasing population, particularly in the over-65s demographic with an increasing death rate of +45% between 2017 and 2041, putting increasing demand on provision of grave spaces. The report provided details of the challenges being faced, along with potential solutions

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) interment fees be scaled up for non-residents of the Borough in accordance with the information in Paragraph 45 of the report, to protect burial ground for the Borough’s residents.**
 - (ii) delegations be given to the Head of Environment and Land Management, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder, to apply discretion where applications are made for interments from families of previous residents of the Borough.**

222 Compliance and Enforcement Board – Notes of 7th October 2019

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on the 7th October 2019 be received and noted.

223 Ashford Strategic Delivery Board – Notes of 25th October 2019

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board held on the 25th October 2019 be received and noted.

224 Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group – Notes of 4th and 18th October 2019

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meetings of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group held on the 4th and 18th October 2019 be received and noted.

225 IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee – Notes of 1st November 2019

The Portfolio Holder for Human Resources and Customer Services advised that as a result of the adoption of Modern.Gov, Members' printing costs had reduced from circa £20k in 2016/17 to a forecasted £6k in 2019/20. The costs of administering fly-tipping reports had also reduced drastically since the creation of the on-line reporting tool.

Resolved:

That the Notes of the Meeting of the IT and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee held on the 1st November 2019 be received and noted.

226 Economic Regeneration and Investment Board – Terms of Reference

Resolved:

That (i) the Terms of Reference of the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board (ERIB), as appended to the report, be agreed.

(ii) the appointment of Councillor Neil Bell as the sixth Member of the ERIB be noted.

227 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.

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Member Services
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