

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2016 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Christopher T Wells (Chairman); Councillors L Fairbrass, Brimm, Crow-Brown, Stummer-Schmertzing and Townend

In Attendance: Councillors: Bayford, Game, I Gregory, K Gregory, Savage, Matterface, Ashbee, Campbell, Constantine, J Fairbrass, Partington, Rusiecki, D Saunders, M Saunders and Tomlinson

374. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received at the meeting.

375. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

376. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor L. Fairbrass proposed, Councillor Brimm seconded and Cabinet agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 20 October 2016.

377. COMBINED SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Cabinet re-affirmed its commitment to ensuring the safeguarding of the districts most vulnerable residents by adopting safeguarding policy that reflected the broader responsibilities that included safeguarding against domestic abuse, exploitation, radicalisation, forced marriage, trafficking and modern slavery.

Cabinet further acknowledged the contributions made by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel who considered the proposed policy at their October meeting and came up with some suggestions that Cabinet had taken on board. A further suggestion that grooming of victims of abuse ought to be included in the summary list of signs of abuse was agreed by Cabinet.

The following Members spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1:

Councillor Bayford;
Councillor Game;
Councillor Campbell.

Councillor L. Fairbrass proposed, Councillor Brimm seconded and Cabinet agreed the adoption of the Safeguarding Policy.

378. FULFILLING THANET'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Cabinet proposed the adoption of the economic growth strategy as part of the Council's commitment to supporting inward investment, job creation and increasing prosperity for residents through economic growth. Wide ranging consultation with key stakeholders had been undertaken by Council and received support for the proposed initiatives. The Overview & Scrutiny Panel recommended the draft strategy to Cabinet and also proposed some amendments which Cabinet had taken note of.

The following Members spoke under Council Procedure 20.1:

Councillor Bayford;
Councillor Savage;
Councillor Campbell.

Councillor Stummer-Schmertzling proposed, Councillor Crow-Brown seconded Cabinet agreed to adopt the Economic Growth Strategy.

379. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT NO 2 2016-17

Members considered the budget monitoring position in respect of the 2016-17 General Fund budget and the Housing Revenue Account, both capital and revenue. The meeting was advised that the overall General Fund revenue position was to break even, although there were some pressures, which needed to be managed.

Councillor I. Gregory spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1.

Councillor Townend proposed, Councillor Stummer-Schmertzling seconded and Members agreed the following that Cabinet:

1. Notes the forecast position for 2016-17 for the General Fund;
2. Notes the current Housing Revenue Account position;
3. Notes the shortfall in capital receipts of £799k and agree that in order to achieve a balanced budget it will be necessary for officers to undertake a review of the existing programme and either remove projects or re-profile the programme or adjust funding;
4. Notes the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes and agree the budget changes detailed as per Annex 1 and Annex 3 (to the Cabinet report) for the General Fund capital and HRA;
5. Notes the disposal of the SOS trailer for £5,500 plus VAT.

380. BUDGET STRATEGY 2017/18

Cabinet debated the draft budget strategy for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital budgets for the financial year 2017-18. They also considered the financial assumptions for the medium term and fees & charges policy.

Members agreed that it was worth noting that the financial context when considering the 2017-18 budget was extremely challenging. Therefore the proposed budget strategy anticipated reductions in external funding, although the council would not have an indication of government funding until December 2016.

Despite this challenging financial environment, it was Cabinet's intention to direct the limited resources at the Council's disposal, towards delivering corporate priorities.

Councillor I. Gregory spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1.

Councillor Townend proposed, Councillor Brimm seconded and Cabinet approved the Budget Strategy and noted the draft General Fund and HRA capital programmes.

381. FEES AND CHARGES 2017/18

Cabinet discussed proposed fees and charges to be recommended to Council for 2017/18. Members were aware that these proposals were being considered in a difficult environment and agreed that any proposed increases would be proportionate to the scale of the overall budget challenges and competing service requirements.

Members were asked to note the following amendments; that on page 155 of the agenda pack, the charge for commercial events “build and de-rig” should be 75%, not 50% as printed.

The following Members spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1:

Councillor I. Gregory;
Councillor K. Gregory;
Councillor Campbell;

Councillor Townend proposed, Councillor Crow-Brown seconded and Cabinet agreed to recommend the Fees and Charges listed in Annex 1 (to the report) to Council for final approval.

382. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2017-18

The meeting was informed of the need to adopt a new Council Tax Support Scheme for the district to replace the one that had been in place since 2013. The funding gap for the scheme had continued to grow due to funding cuts by government. Members agreed that the proposals being put forward were not a very difficult choice.

The recommendations that were put forward had been extensively researched and consulted upon, and were arrived at after careful examination of the evidence. Whilst trying to make the scheme less costly, it was worth noting that the scheme would still be subsidised. Cabinet also proposed in addition, a hardship scheme to assist those most adversely affected by the suggested changes.

The following Members spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1:

Councillor Constantine;
Councillor Campbell;
Councillor Game.

Councillor Townend proposed, Councillor Brimm seconded and Cabinet agreed to forward the following recommendations to Full Council that:

1. The existing scheme is modified to reduce the level of expenditure within the scheme by £875k (of which Thanet’s reduction would be £119k) and maintain alignment with the Housing Benefit rules whilst protecting the principles of the original scheme relating to protecting the most vulnerable where possible.
2. The current minimum contribution towards their Council Tax made by recipients of Council Tax Support is increased from 5.5% to 10.0%;
3. The maximum savings that a customer can have and still claim Council Tax Support is reduced from £16,000 to £6,000;
4. A minimum income is used within the calculation for Self Employed Customers after 12 months of self-employment;

5. The maximum level of Council Tax support is restricted to the equivalent of a Band D property charge;
6. Only the first two children in a family will be included in the calculation for children born after April 2017 (some exceptions will apply for adoptions and multiple births);
7. The Family Premium is not included in the calculation of Council Tax Support for all new working age customers;
8. The period for which a late claim can be backdated is reduced to one month;
9. The period for which a customer can be absent from Great Britain and still claim Council Tax Support is reduced to 4 weeks (with some exclusions for certain occupations);
10. The element of the work-related component of Employment and Support Allowance is not included in the Council Tax Support Calculation;
11. TDC works towards an exceptional hardship scheme that will be introduced from April 2017 in order to provide a safety net for customers experiencing extreme difficulty paying their Council Tax;

And Members further agreed:

12. To note the equalities impact as detailed in Annex 1 to the Cabinet report.

383. POLICY TO COVER THE USE OF ELECTRONIC TABLETS BY COUNCILLORS

The meeting was advised of the need to adopt a policy to cover the use of electronic tablets by Councillors. The policy specified expectations regarding the return of tablets when Councillors cease office, the use of Email and the process regarding replacement of broken or stolen tablets. It was important to note that this policy complemented the suite of ICT policies, currently in operation in the Council.

Members were reminded that the Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015 allowed the Council to issue electronic copies of meeting summonses, subject to written consent from each Councillor. This therefore means that once agreed by Cabinet and in order to facilitate this transition, Councillors would be asked to agree to receive meeting summonses electronically as part of this Policy. Such an agreement would mark a significant step towards a paperless environment for Councillors.

Councillor K. Gregory and Councillor Game spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1.

Councillor Crow-Brown proposed, Councillor Stummer-Schmertzling seconded and Cabinet approved the Councillor Electronic Tablet Usage Policy.

384. ASSET DISPOSALS

Cabinet considered a follow up report to the one that was brought before Members on 27 September 2016. They received feedback comments from the public consultation that Cabinet had commissioned. Of particular interest from the public comments was the issue regarding the agricultural land which many believe formed valuable 'green wedges' between settlements. The public response indicated high value that residents attribute to the concept of maintaining these green wedges.

Cabinet had been encouraged at the prospects of some sites possibly being transferred to Town Councils or community groups through the community asset transfer process.

This would ensure that the public uses could continue and be expanded for the benefit of the public at no cost to the council.

The following Members spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1:

Councillor Matterface;
Councillor Bayford;
Councillor Game;
Councillor Partington.

Councillor Townend proposed, Councillor Stummer-Schmertzling seconded and Members agreed:

1. The disposal of the assets listed in Annex 1 (to the report), with sale proceeds being used to fund the asset management plan and capital programme;
2. The removal of the assets listed in Annex 2 (to the report) from the disposals list for 2016/17.

Meeting concluded: 8.25 pm