

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday 15th February 2017

**Present: Councillor A Barnes (in the Chair)
Councillors Ashworth, Lamb, Marriott and Oakes**

**In Attendance: Mr S Sugarman, Chief Executive
Ms S Plum, Director for Communities
Mr P Seddon, Head of Finance and Property Services
Mrs C Law, HR Manager
Miss K Gee, Corporate Officer
Mrs C Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager
Ms J Griffin, Committee and Member Services Officer**

**Also Present: Councillors Cheetham, Eaton, Essex, Haworth, Roberts,
Serridge and Stansfield
1 press
4 members of the public**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

3.1 There were no urgent items.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

4.1 Councillors Ashworth, Lamb and Oakes declared an interest in Item E2 (minute 14) as they were involved in the Stubblelee Steering Group.

4.2 Councillors Marriott and Oakes declared an interest in Item D1 (minute 12) as they were Rossendale Transport board members.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

5.1 Mr Atherton asked a question regarding the consultation that the government was undertaking in relation to authorities selling land with planning permission, and asked whether the Council currently did this or whether we were barred from doing it. The Leader of the Council stated that the Council was not barred and it could already be done.

- 5.2 Councillor Essex asked whether his previous request for Cabinet members to take a 50% reduction in their special allowance had been considered, since there had been no Cabinet meeting in June 2016. The Leader of the Council informed that it was still under consideration. In June 2016 there had been a Council meeting held instead of a Cabinet meeting owing to the items of business. The work of the Cabinet members was extensive and not just limited to attending Cabinet meetings.
- 5.3 Mr Wood asked how much was outstanding on the loan used for purchasing the Valley Centre and how much was the land valued at. The Leader of the Council stated that the information was contained within the finance reports in relation to internal borrowing. The Head of Finance and Property Services noted that information was contained within the Treasury Management Report. £4.6 million was showing and the Council was still paying interest. The Leader of the Council asked the Head of Finance and Property Services to provide the relevant information following the meeting.

6. 2017/18 CORPORATE PRIORITIES, COUNCIL TAX AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

- 6.1 The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance introduced the report which set out the Revenue Budget and level of Council Tax for 2017/18, together with implications for the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 6.2 The Portfolio Holder noted that Overview and Scrutiny had recommended an increase in Council Tax of 1.99% as well as a 1% raise in fees and charges. He thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their cross party work in scrutinising the budget proposals and their unanimous agreement. Rossendale Transport's pension scheme would be amalgamated back into the Council's pension scheme, which would help the company's balance sheet. The Leader of the Council also noted that in November local authorities had agreed a four year deal with government but one month later the New Homes Bonus had been top sliced to inject money into the adult social care deficit which was very disappointing for local councils.
- 6.3 The Portfolio Holder moved the report and noted an additional recommendation and change to the Council's Constitution as follows:
- For 2017/18 Members' Allowances would not increase in line with inflation.
- 6.4 Other elected members present were invited to comment on the report:
- A request was made to change a figure on page 3 at 5.2 which detailed a reduction of £900k per annum, to £600k over 5 years.
 - There was a need to look for ways of providing excellent services in different ways.
 - This year there had been an overspend of nearly £1 million in relation to Empty Homes. The Leader of the Council confirmed that money had already been set aside to deal with this.
 - Opportunities had been lost in undertaking joint working with other authorities.

- 6.5 The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder confirmed that:
- There was more focus on growing the economy and building housing and this was a real challenge in Rossendale.
 - Council Tax collection rates were at 96.8% and business rates at 97.4%.

Resolved:

1. That the Cabinet recommend to Council a 2017/18 Council Tax rate for Band D.
2. That Cabinet recommends to Council the use of £199,000 (subject to the rate of Council Tax) from the Transitional Reserve and £700,000 from the Business Rates Retention reserve to support the 2017/18 annual budget.
3. That the Cabinet recommends to Council a net revenue budget for 2017/18 of £9,440,000
4. That Cabinet recommends to Council any changes to Fees and Charges as noted in Appendix 1
5. That Cabinet recommends to Council the transfer of the Rossendale Transport Limited pension surplus (c £220k) to Council.
6. That the Head of Finance and Property Services be instructed to prepare the technical resolutions necessary to give effect to these proposals.
7. That Cabinet recommends to Council to opt into the national appointing arrangements for external audit appointments being undertaken by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited.
8. That Cabinet recommends to Council no increase in line with inflation for 2017/18 Members' Allowances.

Reason for Decision

The Council must remain focused on identifying and delivering further efficiencies and income in order to ensure annual balanced budgets over the immediate and medium term. It must also ensure that all its budget resource allocations are directed to the core functions of the Council and that the use of its resources has clear links to the Council's Corporate Priorities.

Alternative Options Considered:

None.

7. CAPITAL RESOURCES AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/18 TO 2019/20

- 7.1 The Leader of the Council introduced the report and noted that there had been £8 million investment in the borough. She also noted that it would be useful if the table on page 7 could include dates when payments were expected to finish in relation to internal borrowing.
- 7.2 Other elected members present were invited to comment on the report:
- Scout Moor was significant to the Council, if it did not happen how would the gap be filled? The Leader of the Council informed that this was a real risk which would need to be looked at if it happened. There had been a delay by the Inspector owing to ill health and the outcome was now not expected until April. This was a significant project worth £20 million over the life of the scheme.

Resolved:

1. Members considered the potential resources for 2017/18 and the medium term.
2. Members considered the affordable capital programme for 2017/18, as set out in Appendix 1, and recommended the new capital expenditure projects totalling £885k to Full Council for approval.
3. Members agreed to delegate any minor amendments to the capital programme throughout the 2017/18 financial year to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance.

Reason for Decision

Resources are available to meet the currently proposed affordable capital programme for 2017/18 and up to 2019/20. The deficit between capital resources and requirements over the future years looks set to continue. With severe pressures on the Council's revenue resources throughout the Medium Term Financial Strategy it is more important than ever to avoid longer term external borrowing, which will have a negative impact of future revenue costs. Members delegate the consideration, prioritisation and approval of any future capital projects, should additional resources become available during 2017/18, to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance.

Alternative Options Considered:

None.

8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY & TREASURY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (UPDATES FOR 2017/18)

- 8.1 The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance introduced the report and noted that it was a standard report which was taken on an annual basis. The prepayment options referred to at 1.3 would help with the deficit. The Leader of the Council noted that this was being adopted by other Lancashire authorities.
- 8.2 The Head of Finance and Property Services noted that it was an investment in the pension fund rather than a high street bank. There was a caveat on this and the Council would be checking the legality of doing this first to ensure it stood up to scrutiny.
- 8.3 Other elected members present were invited to comment on the report:
 - It has to be on paper and done in the proper way. It is a lot of money, which is not our money, so it has to bring benefit to the Council. The Leader of the Council confirmed that the benefit was £100k and that it would only be pursued if the advice given to all finance leaders in Lancashire was acceptable.

Resolved:

1. Members recommend the approval of the revised Treasury Management Strategy Statement and the Treasury Management Policy and Practices to Full Council.
2. Members agree to delegate any further minor changes to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance.

3. Members agree to authorise the Head of Finance to take advantage of any prepayment options offered, as noted in paragraph 5.9, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance.

Reason for Decision

To recommend adoption of the updated Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Treasury Management Policy and Practices, which will ensure continued compliance with the Code, and continue to contain the Councils exposure to financial risk.

Alternative Options Considered

None

9. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS - JOINT WORKING POLICY

- 9.1 The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance introduced the report and policies which provided guidance for joint working projects.
- 9.2 The report had been through the overview and scrutiny process, and the policies would formalise the relationship between the Council and community groups to ensure good practice.
- 9.3 Cabinet members were invited to comment on the report:
 - There was an opportunity to improve facilities by encouraging community groups to get involved.
 - There was access to more funding through community groups.
 - At 8.4 it should say Stacksteads Countryside Park Group.
 - The new framework was welcomed.
 - It would be useful to know when projects had started.
 - Millions had been brought in to regenerate playgrounds by working with communities.
- 9.4 The Leader of the Council noted that it would be useful to see a log of projects in the pipeline on a regular basis.

Resolved:

Members considered and approved the introduction of the two policies.

Reason for Decision

Both capital and revenue grant schemes being run by community groups now play a vital part in the effective and efficient delivery of facilities and services to local residents, especially given the pressures on the Council's scarce resources. These two policies aim to encourage and support such projects whilst protecting the interests of the Council and the public which it serves.

Alternative Options Considered

None

10. HR POLICIES

- 10.1 The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance introduced the report which outlined the HR policies which had been updated and refreshed.
- 10.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been consulted on the policies and as a responsible employer it was good practice to ensure policies were up to date.
- 10.3 Other elected members present were invited to comment on the report:
- Thanks to the HR Manager for participation with Overview and Scrutiny and the work undertaken in updating the policies.
 - The adoption of taking whistleblowing information to Audit and Accounts was welcomed.
 - Regarding domestic abuse and safeguarding there was not as much co-operation between some agencies as there could be.
 - Safeguarding in nursing homes was essential and having a register of where establishments are in the valley. The Leader of the Council confirmed it was the role of the Care Quality Commission to ensure such establishments were properly run, and if there were any specific concerns to pass the information to the Director of Communities and the HR Manager.

Resolved:

1. Members agreed the following policies, which had been revised as part of the Council's policy review cycle in line with best practice.
 - a. Drug and Alcohol Policy
 - b. Training and Development Policy
 - c. Pay and Grading Policy
 - d. Whistleblowing Policy
 - e. Statement of Policy for Employer's Discretions
 - f. Absence Management Policy.
 - g. Disciplinary Policy
 - h. Grievance Policy.
 - i. Recruitment and Selection Policy and Managers Guidance
 - j. Domestic Violence Policy.
 - k. Safeguarding Adults Policy.
 - l. Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy
2. Members agreed that all future minor amendments be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision

There was a requirement to undertake a periodic review of Council policies to make necessary amendments to make them more robust and bring them in line with current legislation. This would protect the Council from any employment litigation or financial claims.

Alternative Options Considered

None

11. RESPONSE TO RESIDENT SURVEY – INFORMING THE COUNCIL’S CORPORATE STRATEGY

- 11.1 The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance introduced the report which informed of the responses to the Resident Survey.
- 11.2 The responses would help shape the Corporate Strategy and would help the Council prioritise resources.
- 11.3 Other elected members present were invited to comment on the report:-
- Dog fouling was still an issue. Could the Dog Warden post be brought back? The Leader of the Council confirmed that this was currently under review, but any specific instances such as name, time, and place that incidents happen, should be reported as they can be investigated.
 - Thanks to all those involved in the review, the information gives the Council a clear way forward.
 - The outstanding quality of the 43 schools was also an attraction for Rossendale.
 - It was clear that people were saying they wanted the Greenbelt and countryside protecting.

Resolved:

That Cabinet acknowledge the response to the residents’ survey which will lead to changes to the Council’s vision and priorities, enabling the Corporate Strategy to be developed.

Reason for Decision

The Council needs a new Corporate Strategy and the results of the Resident Survey have provided useful in setting ourselves new priorities and a vision to align with our residents, our resources and the aim of the Council over the next three years.

Alternative Options Considered

None

12. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2016/17

- 12.1 The Portfolio Holder for Resources & Performance outlined the report which updated members on the latest revenue forecast for 2016/17 as at the end of December 2016. Since the last report there had been an improvement in the forecast adverse variance of £258.1k.
- 12.2 Other elected members present were invited to comment on the report:
- Members had been assured that the transfer of properties to Calico would be completed by December but this deadline had passed. The Leader of the Council confirmed that the Council was working towards the end of the financial year.
 - What did the wording “final tranche of properties continuing in the scheme” on page 13 mean? The Head of Finance and Property Services confirmed it meant those properties eligible for HCA support, the Council would be returning a number of other properties back to the owners and also returning the grant. The

Leader of the Council suggested a meeting with the Head of Finance and Property Services if further clarification was required or to raise it at the Audit and Accounts Committee, which was the most appropriate meeting.

Resolved:

That the report was noted.

Reason for Decision

To ensure robust monitoring of the Council's finances.

Alternative Options Considered:

None.

13. WRITE-OFFS COUNCIL TAX, NON-DOMESTIC RATE, HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENT AND SUNDRY DEBTS

- 13.1 The Leader of the Council informed that this was a technical process and the Council would continue to pursue debts. The Portfolio Holder for Resources & Performance outlined the report and informed members that all efforts were made to recover debts and there was a legal obligation to do so.
- 13.2 The Head of Finance and Property Services noted that not all the business rates belonged to Rossendale, as these had been transferred to Rossendale under the new arrangements introduced on 2013/14.
- 13.3 Members were invited to comment on the report; no comments were made.

Resolved:

Members approve the write off of:

- £106,509.54 in respect of irrecoverable Non-Domestic Rate debt
- £25,060.78 in respect of irrecoverable Council Tax debt
- £25,889.63 in respect of irrecoverable Housing Benefit overpayment debt
- £13,812.64 in respect of Sundry Invoice debts

Reason for Decision

The write-offs are within the provisions available and recommendation to write off is made within the grounds of prudence before the financial year end.

Alternative Options Considered:

None.

14. STUBBYLEE PARK

- 14.1 The Portfolio Holder for Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which updated members on the development and delivery of the Stubbylee Park Masterplan and detailed each of the key areas for development in the park.
- 14.2 The Portfolio Holder informed that this was the accumulation of two year's work with the Friends of Stubbylee Park. Planning permission detailed at 5.7 had been

approved and the café was expected to open in May, there were also plans for a community cinema, workshops and the pump track was expected to be open by Easter. It was noted that the owl hospital was aspirational.

- 14.3 Other elected members present were invited to comment on the report:
- There was a request not to take the fencing away from around the pump track until it had been given a chance to clear and dry.
 - Could the demolished sheds be taken away as soon as possible as children had started playing on them? The Portfolio Holder agreed to feed this back.

Resolved:

That the report was noted.

Reason for Decision

The work to deliver the Stubbylee Park Masterplan continues to make progress and have a visible and positive impact on the support, activity and the quality of the open spaces within the park – completing the improvement works to the Dell and Duck Pond will see these features improved and be accessible once again and the new Pump Track will add a further attraction to the Park. The support of partners is key to continued improvement and developments and the new Partners Group and work of the Community Greenhouses Group, will be a huge asset.

Alternative Options Considered

None

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.40pm

_____ CHAIR _____ DATE