

Cabinet
28 JANUARY 2021

Present: Councillors: Ray Dawe (Leader), Jonathan Chowen (Deputy Leader), Philip Circus, Paul Clarke, Claire Vickers and Tricia Youtan

Also Present: Councillors: Tony Bevis, Karen Burgess, Peter Burgess, Ruth Fletcher, Frances Haigh, Nigel Jupp, Lynn Lambert, John Milne and Roger Noel

EX/53 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 26 November were approved as a correct record.

EX/54 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

EX/55 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste & Recycling thanked the Leader of West Sussex County Council for confirming that for the foreseeable future all of the waste and recycling centres in the district would remain open including Billingshurst, which had been threatened with closure. It was also confirmed that WSCC would not be re-introducing charges for hard-core and soil. The Cabinet Member advised that legislation surrounding the current lockdown specifically exempted such sites from closure.

The Cabinet Member of Environment, Waste & Recycling announced that a carbon reduction 'task force' was being set up, which would include external stakeholders who will work with the Council to help achieve its carbon reduction targets.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure & Culture thanked residents and organisations who had responded to the consultations on Rookwood. Whilst some residents still had concerns, there had been many positive comments on the key issues of opening the area to all by extending Warnham Nature Reserve and other ecologically responsible measures. The proposal also included 250 affordable homes as part of an eco-friendly settlement in a sustainable location.

EX/56 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No questions had been received.

EX/57 **THE 2021/22 BUDGET AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY
TO 2024/25**

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Assets reported details of the proposed 2021/22 revenue and capital budgets and revised MTFs, following the government's draft financial settlement. The net budget requirement for 2021/22 was £1.8m higher than in 2020/21 because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular its impact on parking and leisure services.

The Council was able to set an overall balanced budget due to unexpectedly generous government funding announced on 17 December. The Council had also taken prompt action and reduced expenditure by £1.4m through staff savings. The Cabinet Member confirmed a £7m capital programme, as set out in the report.

With regards to the proposed increase in council tax, the Cabinet Member advised that despite this increase, HDC would continue to have the lowest council tax of any district or borough in West Sussex.

The MTFs for 2022-25 was based on the latest information, although the outlook remained uncertain for a number of reasons, which were summarised by the Cabinet Member.

With regards to the longer-term indicative and potential capital commitments outlined in Appendix J, the Cabinet Member and the Leader emphasised that these were included as an overview of potential commitments and options for the future, and were not part of a capital programme.

The Director of Corporate Resources explained the importance of maintaining reserves above the minimum level of £6m, as agreed by Council. This approach gave flexibility and headroom to deal with any unforeseen issues that might arise in the future, which was particularly important because of the unprecedented uncertainty brought by the pandemic.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- i) That the level of Council Tax for 2021/22 increases from £152.52 by £5 (3.28%) to £157.52 at Band D.
- (ii) That the net revenue budget set out in Appendix A for 2021/22 of £13.039m is approved.
- (iii) That Special Expenses of £309,920 set out in Appendix C and a Band D charge of £26.01 are agreed in respect of the unparished area for 2021/22.

- (iv) That the capital programme for 2021/22 set out in Appendix D be approved and that the indicative capital budgets in the programme for future years be noted.
- (v) That the projected future budgets on the revenue account in 2022/23 to 2024/25 are noted and the Medium Term Financial Strategy continues to be reviewed and refined to ensure that decisions are taken to set balanced budgets in these three years.
- (vi) That the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement set out in Appendix E is approved.
- (vii) That the Capital Strategy, Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and prudential indicators and limits for 2020/21 to 2023/24 set out in Appendix F are approved.
- (viii) To note the statement on the robustness of the level of reserves in Appendix H.
- (ix) That the increases to fees and charges set out in Appendix I are approved.
- (x) Delegate to the Director of Community Services in consultation with the relevant Cabinet lead temporary changes to fees and charges in the form of offers and incentives during the year.

REASON

To meet the Council's statutory requirement to approve the budget and the prudential indicators before the start of a new financial year.

EX/58 **2021/22 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION (CTR) SCHEME AND 2020/21 DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME**

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Assets gave an overview of Horsham's current CTR scheme, which provided financial support for those on low incomes. The current scheme reduced the amount of council tax paid by working age customers in financial difficulties. The Cabinet Member advised that the Council's scheme was one of the most generous in the country. Given the challenges caused by the pandemic, particularly for residents working in retail and hospitality, it was proposed that the scheme remained unchanged for 2021/22.

The report also recommended how the remaining discretionary funds from the Government's 'Council Tax Covid-19 Hardship Fund', should be distributed. The Cabinet Member advised that approximately £220,000 remained unspent and proposed that this should be allocated to customers who were still in arrears for the current financial year.

RESOLVED

- i) To **recommend to Council** that the inclusion of a 'no-change' CTR scheme for 2021/22 be agreed.
- ii) To adopt the proposal for the dispersal of the remaining discretionary funds outlined in paragraph 3.6 of the report.

REASON

- i) CTR schemes are annual schemes and therefore require an annual review and approval, even when no changes to the scheme are being proposed.
- ii) Approval of the allocation of the discretionary funding is needed to ensure all remaining money is distributed.

EX/59 **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no matters currently outstanding for consideration.

EX/60 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan was noted.

With regard to the Local Plan regulation 19 decision, the Cabinet Member for Planning & Development explained that there had been an unavoidable delay, outside the Council's control; the Council was awaiting information from statutory consultees that was required before the report could be finalised. She advised that a delay of a few weeks, which was what was anticipated, would not have an adverse impact on the Local Plan review.

The Director of Place advised that the Public Realm strategy would be added to the Forward Plan shortly. Now that the recent consultation had been completed and the results processed, a timetable could be finalised.

EX/61 **TO CONSIDER MATTERS OF SPECIAL URGENCY**

There were no matters of special urgency to be considered.

To consider a report containing exempt or confidential information

RESOLVED

That, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government

Act 1972, by virtue of paragraph 3 regarding information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person, including the authority holding that information, and in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

EX/62 **EXTENSIONS TO UNITS AT OAKHURST BUSINESS PARK**

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Assets introduced the report, which sought approval for the extension of two units at Oakhurst Business Park, Southwater, which were let by the Council. It was noted that if approved by Cabinet, the extensions would require ecological surveys and planning permission.

Because of its relatively complex nature, it was proposed that the details of the transaction be delegated to the Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member.

RESOLVED

To delegate to the Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Assets the approval of the detail of the transaction provided that the capital requirement does not exceed the approved parameters.

REASON

The recommendation will allow the final decision to be confirmed when the floor areas and final rents have been agreed, provided that they are within the approved parameters.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN