

Cabinet
26 JANUARY 2023

Present: Councillors: Tony Hogben (Leader), Toni Bradnum, Liz Kitchen, Lynn Lambert, Christian Mitchell, Roger Noel, Josh Potts and Tricia Youtan

Also Present: Tony Bevis, Ruth Fletcher, Sam Raby and Claire Vickers

EX/58 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 24 November were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

EX/59 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

EX/60 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Liz Kitchen, Cabinet Member for Community Matters, announced that a new Mental Health drop-in centre supported by the Council should be ready to open this spring. She thanked officers for their work on this project.

Councillor Lynn Lambert, Cabinet Member for Planning & Development, announced that the LABC (Local Authority Building Control) excellence awards finals were taking place in London tomorrow. She wished the three short listed nominees, one of which was a Council officer, the best of luck.

Councillor Tricia Youtan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Public Protection, had visited three houses in Billingshurst, which had been built to a high standard for Horsham District Homes, the Council's affordable housing company. They comprised two 3-bedroom semi-detached houses and one 4-bedroom detached house adapted for use by the mobility impaired. They had been built to high standards and were about to be occupied.

Councillor Toni Bradnum, Cabinet Member for Recycling & Waste, announced that leaflets regarding the new coffee pod free collection service, Podback, was about to be launched and all households were being leafleted with details of this new service.

Councillor Roger Noel, Cabinet Member for Leisure & Culture, announced that it was proposed that Parish and Neighbourhood Councils would be able to apply for grants of up to £200 to support local events for the Coronation weekend in May. This was similar to the arrangements made for the Jubilee celebrations last year. The Council would also waive fees for road closures for street parties.

EX/61 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No questions had been received.

EX/62 **2023/24 BUDGET AND THE MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2026/27**

Councillor Tony Hogben, Cabinet Member for Finance & Parking, introduced the proposed Budget for 2023/24. He summarised key features, which included recognition of the impact of the cost of living crisis:

- an increase in Council Tax well below the current rate of inflation (approximately £4.85 per year for a Band E property);
- £1m to support those on Council Tax support and other benefits, and to support the voluntary sector;
- £15m environmental infrastructure reserve to tackle environmental improvements and decarbonisation; and
- £8.5m capital programme.

He put these in the context of the challenges and uncertainty facing the Council's medium-term financial forecasting, which predicted a budget deficit within the next 18 months.

Councillor Hogben confirmed that the Council's minimum reserve level was being kept at £6m; this was higher than other local authorities in West Sussex. He supported this prudent approach, which brought greater resilience for future years. Councillor Hogben also advised that the proposed introduction of discounted parking season tickets at the BT Exchange carpark should increase season ticket revenue and make better use of spaces in a currently under-used commuter carpark.

The recommendation within the report referred to an incorrect date, and it was confirmed that the budget would be considered by Council on 22 February 2023. Cabinet gave their unanimous support.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- (i) That the level of Council Tax for 2023/24 increases from £162.09 by £4.85 (2.99%) to £166.94 at Band D.
- (ii) That the net revenue budget set out in Appendix A for 2023/24 of £13.513m is approved.
- (iii) That Special Expenses of £336,920 set out in Appendix C and a Band D charge of £27.53 are agreed in respect of the unparished area for 2023/24.

- (iv) That the capital programme for 2023/24 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 2024/25 to 2026/27 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 2023/24 to 2026/27 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 to I(iii) are approved.
- (x) That the New Homes Bonus earmarked reserve is renamed to an Environment and Infrastructure earmarked reserve
- (xi) That the £2.9m Funding Guarantee grant received in 2023/24 is earmarked for £1m to help support residents in need through the cost of living, £1.6m food waste collection implementation, £0.3m for a new path around Horsham Park in the capital programme and £50,000 is used in 2023/24 to fund the painting of the street furniture in Horsham town centre in time for the Coronation on 6 May 2023.

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/63 **2023/24 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND HOUSING BENEFIT MODIFIED SCHEME**

Councillor Tony Hogben, Cabinet Member for Finance & Parking, advised that Horsham's current CTR scheme provided financial support for those on low incomes to help them afford their Council Tax payments. It supported approximately 2,400 pensioners and 3,160 working-age families. There was a requirement for the scheme to be reviewed annually, and the Cabinet Member proposed that it remain unchanged for 2023/24. It was also proposed that the Housing Benefit Modified Scheme continue without change.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- (i) That there are no changes in the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2023/24, other than the updates prescribed by Government to reflect changes in the wider benefits system.
- (ii) That there are no changes to the modified schemes under Housing Benefit subsidy whereby the Council locally and voluntarily disregards war disablement pensions or war widow pensions in the housing benefit calculation.

REASON

The Council Tax Reduction and locally modified schemes are annual schemes requiring an annual review and approval, even when no changes to the scheme are being proposed. Review work on the scheme showed the schemes remains affordable for Horsham District Council and provides a good level of support to our less well-off residents.

EX/64 **BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY CHARITABLE RELIEF 2023/24**

Horsham District Council provided discretionary rate relief to charities and not-for-profit organisations under s47 of Local Government Finance Act 1988. There was a requirement for the scheme to be reviewed annually and Councillor Tony Hogben, Cabinet Member for Finance & Parking, proposed that the current scheme remain unchanged and continue to extend the charitable relief to up to 100% for eligible organisations.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

That the Discretionary Rate Relief scheme for 2023/24 as detailed in the appendix to the report be approved.

REASON

Discretionary rate relief is an annual scheme and therefore requires an annual review and approval

EX/65 **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no matters currently outstanding for consideration. Councillor Tony Bevis, Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, stated that questions about the budget and financial strategy had been asked of the Cabinet Member at the Committee meeting on 23 January. He confirmed that Committee members were broadly supportive of the proposals.

EX/66 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan was noted.

EX/67 **LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND 2022-23 AND 2023-24**

Councillor Tony Hogben, Cabinet Member for Finance & Parking, advised that the Government had announced a £500m scheme in late December for local authorities providing accommodation for those fleeing conflict in Ukraine and Afghanistan. It was proposed that HDC accept funding of over £2.6m and add approximately £3.2m of its own to provide 16 homes by the deadline of 30 November 2023. The proposal was considered as a matter of general exception because a decision was required by the end of the month to secure the external funding.

The Cabinet Member advised that the homes would be for use by families fleeing conflict from Ukraine and Afghanistan, but it was anticipated that in time these families can return home and the accommodation would support wider local authority housing and homelessness responsibilities.

Councillor Tricia Youtan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Public Protection, made a statement in full support of this proposal. Members of the Liberal Democrat Group attending the meeting also confirmed their support.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- (i) To proceed with (i) the application for, and, (ii) receipt of the grant allocation for the Council to provide or facilitate the provision of 14 standard properties and 2 larger homes (“the Housing).
- (ii) To approve capital spend of up to £5.866m in the 2023/24 capital programme; the amount to be added being based on whether the Council decide to or is not able to proceed with the full amount and / or passporting to a Registered Provider/s.
- (iii) To delegate to the Director of Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Parking and Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Protection, the decision to provide the Housing through whichever means, or work with Registered Provider/s to provide the Housing and in both instances, to enable the use of the grant funding to be maximised.

REASON

- (i) To use the grant to help purchase / provide more affordable homes for the district.
- (ii) Full Council must approve the capital budget.
- (iii) Further work is needed at this stage to establish whether the Council can source sufficient properties at the right price.

The meeting closed at 6.05 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN