

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Mid Sussex District Council Cabinet  
held on Tuesday, 5 September 2017  
from 4.00 p.m. to 4.44 p.m.**

**Present:** Councillors: Jonathan Ash-Edwards, Andrew MacNaughton, Gary Marsh, Garry Wall (Leader), Mandy Thomas-Atkin and Norman Webster.

**Also present:** Councillors: Ginny Heard, Rod Clarke and Pete Bradbury.

**Officers:** Kathryn Hall, Tom Clark, Judy Holmes, Peter Stuart, Simon Hughes, Lucinda Joyce

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Wall declared a pecuniary interest in item 8, 'Local Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme to Provide Revaluation Support to Mid Sussex Businesses', as he is a local business owner and his business may be affected. He confirmed that he would leave the room during the debate on Item 8. The Deputy Leader will chair the meeting for this item.

**2. APOLOGIES**

None.

**3. MINUTES**

Following a small amendment to a date on page 3, item 5, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

**4. URGENT BUSINESS**

None

**5. BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2017/18 – PROGRESS REPORT APRIL TO JULY 2017**

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report which is the second quarterly budget management report for the current financial year. He drew Members attention to over achievement of income in car parking, development management and building control fees. In addition, he noted a pressure on staffing costs which has a projected year end overspend of £108,000. He also noted a correction on paragraph 33 where the increase in 2018/19 should read £168,000 not £318,000. He summarised that although there was a small overspend currently projected, management action would ensure the position is balanced by year end, if not before.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the report and noted that areas where income has exceeded expectations covered pressure points that need to be looked at in the future. The Deputy Leader appreciated the progress made and noted the successful completion of the Bolnore Pavilion project which is looking good. However he also highlighted the significant pressures on temporary accommodation which needs to be monitored. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning acknowledged the overspend on temporary accommodation but confirmed that the Council is looking at new ways to tackle the situation. It is a complex piece of work.

The Leader took Members to the recommendations contained in the report which were agreed unanimously.

## **RESOLVED**

Cabinet resolved to recommend to Council for approval:

- (a) that £125,000 be transferred to a Martlets Relocation Specific Reserve as detailed in paragraph 21.
- (b) the variations to the Capital Programme contained in paragraph 32 in accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure rule B4.

To note:

- (c) the remainder of the report.

## **6. SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING – GUIDELINES FOR 2018/19**

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report, noting the pressures on temporary accommodation and revenue and benefits, combined with the increasing level of inflation in contracts and staffing. He noted that fees and charges remain generally static which means that they go down in real terms. Regarding council tax, he drew Members attention to paragraph 54-56 on page 25 of the report, recommending that no decision should be finalised on Council Tax levels until after the November 2017 budget.

He also drew Members attention to the noteworthy fact that the Council will have achieved financial independence by 2018/19, which is a significant achievement, and that in 2019/20 under current plans the Government actually becomes dependant on the Council.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the report and noted that in very financially challenging times it was the robustness of financial planning and the Members' active involvement in budget setting which contributed to the strong position that the Council is now in. He emphasised that the Council has done well to be able to offer an affordable level of Council Tax and going forward will need to look carefully at how this sits against fees that have been frozen, in order to look boldly to the future to achieving a level of service delivery that residents want.

Regarding the 20% increase in planning fees outlined in the recent Housing White Paper, given the level of growth the Council is planning he noted that the Council would be happy to sign up to this to enable the planning service to be more adequately funded.

The Deputy Leader concurred with the comments made and noted the significance of the financial independence in light of the number of years work that has gone in to making it possible. He was keen to reflect on the paper which identifies where to invest in services to ensure that we can serve the community and deliver and improve on what makes the District special. With regard to next year's financial planning and budget, it is important to go through the process with a wider eye on Council processes.

The Cabinet Member for Community noted that the financial independence reflects the hours of work invested by Officers. He was delighted to see the improvements that have been made since his election in 2007, (at the end of a financially difficult time for the Council), with the building up of reserves and reengineering the organisation to be prepared for the future. The issue of temporary accommodation and the role of the Council in supporting economic development in the future stood out as notable points to be aware of when considering Council Tax as these issues will be crucial to residents who are keen to work locally. He also noted the efficiency in which we respond to more complex disabled facilities grants which combined with reasonable Council Tax shows that the Council is achieving one of its aims to make the District a good place to live and work.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Services acknowledged the high calibre of staff who have worked to get to the position of financial independence. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning also acknowledged the successful position, noting that in areas such as New Homes Bonus the Council has chosen to do things differently, to great success. He also welcomed the proposed 20% increase in planning fees which would enable the Council to deliver a service that applicants and residents expect.

The Leader endorsed comments made by Members and asked that they consider what the Council wants to be going forward, aiming to be one that sets an example on leadership, cements its financial planning and builds resilience into the community to protect those vulnerable and those who want to invest. He drew Members to the recommendations contained in the report which we agreed unanimously.

## **RESOLVED**

Cabinet resolved to:

- (a) endorse the guidelines set out within this report and uses these principles in preparing the 2018/19 Corporate Plan and Budget;
- (b) affirm that the Council can be considered to be 'financially independent' for the financial year 2018/19
- (c) reserve its decision on Council Tax levels until after the November 2017 Budget.

## **7. PROPOSED LEASE OF LAND AT MAPLE DRIVE**

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report, highlighting that it was another example of the Council supporting the community.

The Leader supported the recommendations and the Deputy Leader felt that it was noteworthy not only for the Church but also for the groups that will use the facilities in Burgess Hill. Both the Cabinet Member for Community and the Cabinet Member for Service Delivery acknowledged the long journey to see this to fruition and the Cabinet Members were all happy to support it.

The Leader drew Members to the recommendations contained in the report which we agreed unanimously.

## **RESOLVED**

Cabinet resolved to:

- (a) Note the contents of this report; and
- (b) Authorise the grant of an agreement for a building lease for three years of the land at Maple Drive, Burgess Hill, to The Trustees of Sheddingdean Baptist Church, followed by, on practical completion of the building a lease for a period of 135 years on the terms outlined below, and on such other terms and conditions as the Solicitor and Head of Regulatory Services to the Council may recommend to protect the Council's position.

[The Leader left the meeting at 4.36pm and the Deputy Leader chaired the following item.]

## **8. LOCAL DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF SCHEME TO PROVIDE REVALUATION SUPPORT TO MID SUSSEX BUSINESSES.**

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report highlighting that it was a bespoke scheme drawn up for the Cabinet to approve. It sets out a four year discretionary rate relief scheme to help businesses who have been affected by the revaluation and has been targeted to help independent and small to medium businesses. There is a question over the three or four year length of the scheme as the Government has confirmed that funding can't be flexed so the fourth year has only £11,000 funding. He confirmed the Council will be asking the Government to consider rolling it into two years.

Consultation was carried out with West Sussex County Council and the Head of Corporate Resources read out the following response received:

"We welcome the scheme you have brought forward to support businesses detrimentally impacted by the revaluation of business rates, and the opportunity to comment on it. It is clearly your intent to apply all grant money received in full to help our local businesses and communities they support, which we welcome too.

We note that it is targeted at smaller and medium sized businesses and the ones facing the largest increase, which seems appropriate. The scheme sets out future support and indicates that the Council may apply its own funds to maintain the support in later years.

We note the scheme is relatively simple and also simpler to administer to keep the overheads down."

The Deputy Leader welcomed the acknowledgement by the Government that some transitional support will ease things and appreciated the sensible principles of this scheme. He has already met with some local business associations and the scheme has been well received.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Services was delighted to see that the relief was applied automatically without the need for a complex application process.

The Deputy Leader drew Members to the recommendations contained in the report which were agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED**

Cabinet resolved to:

1. adopt the Local Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme for revaluation support as set out in the report.

[The Leader returned to the room at 4.42pm.]

The meeting was closed at 4.44 p.m.

Chairman.