

**Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet
held on Monday, 16th September, 2019
from 4.00 pm - 4.54 pm**

Present: J Ash-Edwards (Chair)
J Llewellyn-Burke (Vice-Chair)

J Belsey
R de Mierre

S Hillier
A MacNaughton

N Webster

Absent: Councillors

Also Present: Councillors M Belsey, P Chapman and I Gibson

1. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA.

Councillor Hillier declared a personal interest with respect to Items 5 and 6 - Service and Financial Planning Guidelines for 2021/21 and Budget Management 2019/20 - Progress Report April to July 2019 as he is a Member of West Sussex County Council.

2. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

None as all Members were present.

3. TO CONFIRM MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2019.

The Minutes of Meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE LEADER AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

5. SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING – GUIDELINES FOR 2020/21

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report which sets out the service and financial context within which the authority will operate over the next two years and provides guidelines for developing the Corporate Plan and Budget for 2020/21. He noted that the outlook for local government funding is uncertain as the political situation is unsettled. He highlighted that the Fair Funding review is likely to be delayed to next year and the Council Tax increase is now likely to be a maximum of £5 or 2% (whichever is higher). He noted that recycling credits could reduce for all local authorities in the County due to West Sussex County Council's Budget cuts.

The Leader commented that the Council would be in a good position without the impact of reduced funding from the County Council. The Council is in a strong financial position, providing good quality services and value for money for the residents. He noted it was important to start work early on how the Council can protect services and reduce the impact of changing budgets at West Sussex County Council.

The Cabinet Member for Community commended the Council's policy to provide temporary accommodation within the District by purchasing properties. He welcomed the success to the project which has enabled families to stay within their local communities and support networks. He noted the difference between homelessness and rough sleeping, and was pleased to see that it was being highlighted.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning noted that it was good that the Council were in a position to improve services for homeless families, especially with a project as ambitious as the provision of temporary accommodation. He also noted that the Council needed the Development Plan Reserve to fund and maintain the District Plan, and further funding may be necessary in the future. With regards to issues with the Pension Fund the triennial review is underway, and he noted that if contributions are lowered it can quickly reduce the value of the pension fund.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Services confirmed her agreement of maintaining funding for the Development Plan Reserve. She asked if there were any implications on the 3% increase for Council Tax at the County Council.

The Head of Corporate Resources advised that the County Council can increase Council Tax by 2% and then an additional 2% precept can be added for Adult and Social Care provision.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth advised that the Council needed to invest in order to make savings.

The Leader took the Cabinet to recommendations which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

Cabinet recommended to:

- (i) endorse the guidelines set out within this report and use these principles in preparing the 2020/21 Corporate Plan and Budget;
- (ii) reserve its decision on Council Tax levels until after the Spending Review.

6. BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2019/20 – PROGRESS REPORT APRIL TO JULY 2019

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report for the first quarter of this financial year. He noted that savings had been made on insurance premiums and noted the proposals on page 25. He informed Cabinet that there had been a delay in the demolition of the Martlets Hall because of asbestos, work would commence again on 26 September with a new contractor and the anticipated timescale for the work is 8 weeks.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth welcomed the extra funding to help with the restructure of the Corporate Estates department. He asked whether the officers had confidence that tenants would maintain the leased properties to the required standard.

The Head of Corporate Resources noted that the recent restructure was to ensure that the Council has more skilled staff to manage the Council's growing portfolio of properties.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Services welcomed the allocation of increased funding for work on trees in the District.

The Leader confirmed that the report indicated a strong start to the financial year. He also welcomed the increased funding for tree maintenance and noted the receipt of supplementary rents. He highlighted the utilisation of Section 106 funds to improve playgrounds.

The Cabinet Member for Service Delivery and Environment supported the proposed improvements to playgrounds.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Service asked why the service charges on BACs payments had not been budgeted for.

The Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that the payment card industry had unexpectedly added fees.

The Deputy Leader noted the Council's good financial planning and welcomed the underspend which will be used to assist the Council through more challenging times. She commented that it was fortunate that the Council had been able to acquire more properties last year and this was due to efficient financial planning of the Council.

The Leader took the Cabinet to recommendations which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

Cabinet recommended to Council for approval:

- (i) that £280,925 grant income relating to Flexible Homelessness Support Grant be transferred to Specific Reserve as detailed in paragraph 21;
 - (ii) that £27,765 grant income relating to Preventing Homelessness Grant be transferred to Specific Reserve as detailed in paragraph 22;
 - (iii) that £457,000 of the revenue underspend be transferred to Specific Reserves as detailed in paragraph 23;
 - (iv) the variations to the Capital Programme contained in paragraph 33 in accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure rule B3.
- To note:
- (v) the remainder of the report.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2019/20.

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report and highlighted that 79% of the indicators were green. He confirmed that the report had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance and Performance on 4 September 2019.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning commented that the indicator for the emission of greenhouse gasses from council buildings was a new indicator. He confirmed that the Council had been reducing its carbon footprint for a number of years through increasing thermal efficiency and replacing oil fired boilers.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth welcomed the report and queried whether the report had included a revised target for parking charges and whether the Parking Strategy Working Group should consider longer term targets for the use of mobiles to pay for parking.

Judy Holmes, the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the target figure had not yet been revised and payment by mobiles had been received better than anticipated. The Council would continue to monitor with a view to amending the target. She noted that the Parking Strategy Working Group would consider such matters of providing a range of payment options as part of the review of the Parking Strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Community welcomed the increase in the number of Wellbeing case interventions. He confirmed a back log of cases and that the team were getting up to date.

The Cabinet Member for Service Delivery and Environment confirmed his agreement of the new indicators covering sustainability. He highlighted the red indicator on the electric vehicle charging points and thanked officers on their work to rectify the charging points at Cyprus Road car park and to increase the number of charging points available across the District. He noted that the Council had exceeded the target for recycling and with the introduction of further recycling projects and the potential food waste recycling the rate should increase.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Service noted the Council Tax Support Scheme and highlighted the successful workshop held by the Revenues and Benefits Team. She confirmed that another workshop would be run next year. The Cabinet Member congratulated the officers who ran the workshop.

The Deputy Leader confirmed her attendance at the Scrutiny Committee meeting for Leader, Finance and Performance which considered the first presentation of the new format of the report and noted it was more informative. She highlighted the new indicator for micro business grants and confirmed that public awareness of these grants had increased. The Deputy Leader commented that nothing had happened at The Orchards Shopping Centre that was not expected.

The Leader took the Cabinet to recommendations which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

Cabinet noted the Council's performance and progress with flagship activities in the first quarter of the year.

8. SALE OF LAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING AT BLACKWELL FARM ROAD, EAST GRINSTEAD.

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report which detailed the opportunity to increase the affordable housing supply in East Grinstead. He noted the proposal to sell the land for £400,000 and to assist the developer to bring forward housing provision on the site. He informed Cabinet that the representations received were primarily planning objections. All representations were within the report for Members to consider carefully. He confirmed that there was nothing in those objections that would prevent the Council from agreeing the sale of the land.

The Leader reminded Cabinet that here the Council is the landowner rather than the planning authority and advised Members to take careful note of the representations from Ward Members and stakeholders.

The Cabinet Member for Service Delivery and Environment advised he was concerned over the loss of open green spaces within a built-up area. He confirmed that he understood the objections and comments of the Ward Members and the residents. He highlighted that it was rare for a council to own a site that could provide 100% affordable housing once developed. He welcomed the right of termination of the contract if planning permission is not approved by June 2020. The Cabinet Member confirmed that 291 families waiting on the housing list requested East Grinstead as their first preference area for housing. He understood that there would be concerns over the ecological impact but hoped the development would be a scheme that could be replicated elsewhere in the District.

The Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that all planning permission costs would be funded by the purchaser of the land and that the purchase price of £400,000 had already been agreed.

The Cabinet Member for Community noted the report confirmed the transfer of land to the Council in 1947 for the purposes of housing. He confirmed the sale of the site is to a registered housing provider and that the land had been advertised for sale in the public domain giving others the opportunity to make expressions of interest. He noted it would be difficult to contest the loss of the land when the site is within walking distance to 140 hectares of green open space. He reminded Cabinet that all the houses would be affordable when compared to market rents.

The Deputy Leader supported the recommendations having taken careful account of the representations received.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning confirmed that central Government is encouraging local authorities to dispose of land for affordable housing.

The Leader noted that no affordable homes had been built in East Grinstead since 2016 and it is important to consider how the Council can provide affordable housing in the community.

The Leader took the Cabinet to recommendations which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

Cabinet resolved to:

- i) Approve the sale of land at Blackwell Farm Road / Holtye Road, East Grinstead to The Guinness Partnership for the sum £400,000 to provide 10 affordable homes.
- ii) Instructed the Council solicitor to agree the contract for sale on behalf of the Council in a timely manner and on such terms that are favourable to the Council.

9. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN.

None.

The meeting finished at 4.54 pm

Chairman