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## CABINET

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber , Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 4 November 2015 from 7.00 - 7.25 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Bowles (Chairman), Mike Cosgrove, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Gerry Lewin (Vice-Chairman), Ken Pugh, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox and John Wright.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Kathryn Carr, Abdool Kara, Zoe Kent, Emma Larkins, Jo Millard, Kent Parker, Donna Price, Mark Radford and Phil Wilson.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillors Andy Booth, Roger Clark, Sue Gent and Mike Henderson.

**APOLOGY:** Councillors David Simmons

### 307 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 7 October 2015 (Minute Nos. 251 – 260) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 308 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### PART A MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION BY COUNCIL

### 309 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2016/17

The Cabinet considered the report of the Heads of Resident Services and Finance, and the Cabinet Member for Finance. The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report and highlighted the paragraph numbering error on page 4 where 2.18 should be numbered 3.2, and a capital letter to start at paragraph 4.1. He advised that as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, Council Tax Benefit had been replaced by a localised scheme, Council Tax Support, which came into effect in April 2013. During the last financial year the scheme had operated a reduction of 15% in Council Tax Support to working age claimants. He proposed that the Council Tax Support scheme for 2016/17 was kept the same as 2015/16 in order to continue to reduce the amount of Council Tax Support to working age claimants by 15%.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage supported the proposal but sought clarification on whether the 15% had increased the levels of Council Tax collection; what the risk was if the proposal was not supported; and what evidence there was that the current proposals had increased the levels of Council Tax collection?

The Revenues and Benefits Manager – Technical and Financial advised that when the charge was increased by 8.5% to 15%, the collection rate had also increased. She advised that claimants were now used to paying, and council tax staff encouraged claimants by setting up suitable arrangements to pay. She further advised that by the end of October 2015, levels of collection had increased by 4% from end of October 2014, and that if the charge was lowered, she did not think the amount would change significantly.

A Member referred to paragraph 3.1 on page 4 of the report and sought confirmation that the Council was on track to collect the similar percentage to 2014/15, and what internal incentives there were to seek a higher return?

The Revenues and Benefits Manager – Technical and Financial stated that staff were working hard to improve collection rates; they telephoned claimants that did not keep up with their arrangements, the figures were monitored weekly to see if they had increased or decreased and, apart from the initial weeks, the rate had increased week-on-week. She was confident of matching the 82% collection rate of the previous year, but was unable to predict up to March 2016 with certainty. The Revenues and Benefits Manager – Technical and Financial also advised that the current figure was 15-20% below what the final collection rate would be as many people paid at the end of the year, and benefits staff could be drafted in to assist with collection at this time if necessary.

The Chairman welcomed the questions and discussions on the subject and considered that the amount collected was more than expected. He confirmed that the recommendation in the report would be a recommendation to Full Council.

**RECOMMENDED:**

***(1) That the Council Tax Support scheme for 2016/17 be kept the same as 2015/16, so that Council Tax Support continues to be reduced by 15%.***

**PART B MINUTES FOR INFORMATION**

**310 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY REVIEW**

The Cabinet consider the report of the Head of Property Services and the Cabinet Member for Finance. The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report. He acknowledged that the Health and Safety Policy had not been attached, but copies of the Policy had been circulated immediately prior to the meeting. He advised that if Members had any questions relating to the report or the appendices after the meeting he would be happy to respond.

The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that the Health and Safety legislation could change almost on a monthly basis and the policy was being brought up-to-date. He proposed the recommendations in the report.

A Member sought clarification on the responsibility for Health and Safety for Members. The Health and Safety Officer advised that Page 5 of the Health and Safety Policy referred to the responsibility of Members, along with the diagram on page 12 and the General Policy Statement on page 2.

The Cabinet Member for Housing advised that his own copy of the Health and Safety Policy had recently been updated, and encouraged Members to keep their own copy of the Policy safe and easily accessible.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Health and Safety Policy be approved.***
- (2) That delegation be given to the Head of Property in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance to agree minor amendments to the Policy between full reviews.***

**311 LOCAL ENGAGEMENT FORUM UPDATE**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Economy and Community Services, and the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage. The Cabinet Member introduced the report and advised that the recent Swale Local Engagement Forums (LEFs) had been well attended and of particular interest was the Natural England presentation on the England Coast Pathway at the Sittingbourne and Faversham LEFs. There had been a question at the Sittingbourne LEF regarding overnight lorry parking, and a response would be reported back from Chief Inspector Tony Henley. The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage spoke of the firm action Shepway Council had recently taken in enforcing overnight lorry parking. The Chairman advised that he had already asked officers to investigate this issue.

The Cabinet Member for Housing suggested it would have been useful to have the Rural Forum responses. He was advised by the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage that if the Rural Forum made recommendations they would be heard and referred to possible changes to the way in which LEFs operated in the future.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the report be noted.***

**312 DISPOSAL OF LAND AT CERES COURT, MURSTON**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Property Services and the Cabinet Member for Finance. The Chairman drew attention to the confidential appendix and reminded Members that should they wish to discuss any part of the Appendix, the Cabinet would need to resolve to exclude the press and public from the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which sought to achieve improvements to open space provision within the proposed new development. He advised that the proposal would reduce the Council's maintenance liability; would achieve a Capital receipt; enable the provision of an additional eight social housing units; and would have a positive regeneration impact on the Murston area.

The Cabinet Member for Housing spoke positively on the project and welcomed the increase in additional affordable housing and open space provision. In response to a question the Chairman gave an update on the relocation of occupants.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage sought reassurance that the mix of shared ownership and affordable houses referred to as part of AmicusHorizon's proposals in paragraph 2.4 of the report would be built as stated when it reached the planning application stage. The Chairman advised that, although it was not a function of the Cabinet and could not be insisted on, the relevant officers would take note.

There was no discussion on the confidential appendix.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Council agrees in principle to transfer the freehold of the open spaces land at Ceres Court to AmicusHorizon on the terms agreed.***
- (2) That the Head of Legal be authorised to complete the necessary legal formalities and to advertise the proposed disposal of open space.***

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel