
CABINET

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 12 February 2020 from 7.00pm - 7.47pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Vice-Chairman), Monique Bonney, Angela Harrison, Ben J Martin, Richard Palmer, Roger Truelove (Chairman) and Tim Valentine.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Tracey Beattie, Jayne Bolas, David Clifford, Susan Hughes, Zoe Kent, Kellie MacKenzie, Sarah Porter, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

DEPUTY CABINET MEMBERS: Councillors Derek Carnell, Julian Saunders, Sarah Stephen and Ghlin Whelan.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Tim Gibson and David Simmons.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Hannah Perkin and Eddie Thomas.

511 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

512 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 December 2019 (Minute Nos. 398 – 406) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

Minute No. 403 (CCTV Control Move and System Upgrade Contract Award) first paragraph to read “Cabinet Member for **Community**” not Regeneration.

513 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

514 STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

The Leader made the following statement from-the-Chair:

“Over the last week this Council has been the target of several invective comments, especially from the MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey.

This follows from the administration’s publication of our position as the local planning authority on the KCC’s bid for HIF funding for junction improvement on the A249 corridor.

We have been called obsessive about the environment, called on to resign and described as incompetent. Though not very helpful or especially cerebral, such comments are part of the stuff of politics and mildly amusing.

However on Friday last the KMTV broadcast an interview with Mr Henderson in which he said emphatically that Swale Council "lied" in our official press statement.

That was to call all Cabinet Members and Deputy Members liars, in an official statement put out by Swale Council as a corporate body.

This is emphatically unacceptable.

Politics is robust and rightly so but differences of view, difference of interpretation, and differences over provenance are not lies.

I will not have members of this Council and indeed the Council itself attacked in this way, not when I know our statement, even if disagreeable to some, had been agonised over conscientiously for 2 months.

I have written an open letter to Gordon, letting him know that his comments on KMTV are unacceptable and have asked for an apology."

Part A Recommendations to Council

515 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND 2020/21 BUDGET

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set-out the Medium Term Financial Plan and 2020/21 Budget. The Cabinet Member stated that the report fulfilled the Council's obligation to have regard to the CIPFA Financial Management Code, as set-out on page 5 of the report.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance drew attention to the recommendations in the report, and commented as follows:

Recommendation (1) (To approve the 2020/21 Revenue Budget proposals). The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance considered it was a balanced revenue budget which did not take any money from the general reserves. He referred Members to paragraph 3.3 of the report, which outlined how officers had been able to secure a surplus of £15,000 which would be transferred to the General Fund. The Cabinet Member stressed the importance of ensuring budgets were balanced particularly given the uncertainty of future government funding. The Cabinet Member explained that the New Homes Bonus was likely to be replaced by a housing incentivisation grant which of course would be dependent on further housing, and referred to paragraph 2.5 of the report, which showed that the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board (LMIDB) had increased their precept by 3.6%, which had put an additional £14k cost pressure on the Council. He considered the LMIDB costs should be included as part of the council tax precept and not come directly from the local authority budget.

Recommendation (2) (To approve the proposed Council Tax Band D increase for 2020/21 to £179.37) – The Cabinet Member reported that an increase of £4.95 a

year was proposed. He stated that this was in-line with the Medium Term Financial Plan agreed in February 2019. The Cabinet Member explained that it was important to consider that increases to council tax overall would be high due to pressures Kent County Council (KCC) had providing services.

Recommendation (4) (To approve the Capital Strategy) – The Cabinet Member reminded Members that the Council could not borrow money from its base budget, and that until the Spirit of Sittingbourne, the Council did not have a capital programme. He considered that the levels of borrowing by the Council were deliverable, unlike other authorities whose commercial investments had not gone well. The Cabinet Member referred to paragraph 2.13 of the report which set-out their principles on what the Capital Strategy should reflect: investing in affordable and social housing taking account of social value; using the ability to borrow at low rates of interest; and manageable long-term borrowing. He stated essentially this meant being prudent, whilst achieving a good social outcome.

Recommendation (7) (To consider the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee). The Cabinet Member referred to paragraph 1.3 of the report which set-out the recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22 January 2020. He stated that it was intended to support the recommendation, and details of how this could be funded would be presented to the next Full Council meeting on 26 February 2020.

The Cabinet Member proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock.

The Cabinet Member for Health referred to Appendix VI on page 32 of the report, and reported that with regard to replacing the public toilets at Barton's Point, the shower block also needed to be replaced so the budget of £100,000 may need to be increased. The Chief Financial Officer agreed to look into the matter for the Cabinet Member.

The Leader and Cabinet Member said it was a good budget and thanked finance officers and strategic management team for their work.

A Member asked how many years it had been since the Council had not used its reserves to achieve a balanced budget? The Chief Financial Officer agreed to find out for Members.

Recommendations:

- (1) That the 2020/21 Revenue Budget proposals be approved.**
- (2) That the proposed Council Tax Band D increase for 2020/21 to £179.37 be approved.**
- (3) That the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.**
- (4) That the Capital Strategy be approved.**
- (5) That the Capital Programme proposals be approved.**
- (6) That the additional amount of Council Tax for Parish Precepts be noted.**
- (7) That the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee be supported.**
- (8) That the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set-out in Appendix VIII be approved.**

516 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2020/21

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set-out and sought approval of the proposed Treasury Management Strategy, the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators for 2020/21 and the Treasury Management Policy. The Cabinet Member reported that the report fulfilled the Council's legal obligation to have regard to the CIPFA Code and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government guidance.

The Cabinet Member stated that the Council's borrowing was based on short-term loans and internal resources which he considered to be prudent. He explained the importance of making it clear what projects the Council was borrowing for, and referred to paragraph 2.5 of the report which set-out approved sources of long-term and short-term borrowing. He observed that cash investments were currently best put into money markets, not commercial or retail, and that the Council did not currently invest in equities, but if it were too in the future it would need to consider its ethical standards.

The Cabinet Member proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

Recommendations:

- (1) That the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators be approved.***
- (2) That the Treasury Management Policy in Appendix II be approved.***

517 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2020/21

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which noted the outcome of the public consultation, having considered the potential impact of the proposed changes on working age claimants, taking into account the protected characteristics of disability, age and sex, under the Equalities Act 2010, and recommended changes to the current Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme.

The Cabinet Member referred to Table 3 on page 62 of the report, and noted the support from the public for Option 1 which lowered the threshold down to 20% and the other options which would also alleviate the pressure on poorer households.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager stated that collection of council tax had been particular hard this year, and the rise in council tax would make it even harder. She welcomed the proposed changes to the CTS scheme which should make things easier for people.

The Cabinet Member stated that KCC needed to fund services and were not receiving enough funding from Central Government. He proposed the recommendations.

Recommendations:

- (1) That the outcome of the public consultation having taken consideration of the potential impact of the proposed changes on working age claimants***

with the protected characteristics of disability, age and sex under the Equalities Act 2010 be noted.

(2) That options 1-6 as changes to the current scheme, as set-out in detail in table 3, paragraph 3.6 of the report, be approved.

Part B Minutes for Information

518 STAYING PUT CONTRACTOR FRAMEWORK PROCUREMENT

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report which summarised the procurement process and its results and sought approval of the recommended contractors for the current Staying Put framework which expired on 30 September 2020. The Cabinet Member outlined the important work of the Staying-Put team, and explained that there were currently only 7 contractors listed on the current Staying Put framework. It was proposed that the 18 contractors that had met the minimum requirements should be added to the framework. The Cabinet Member moved the recommendation in the report.

In response to queries from Members, the Staying Put Manager stated that the majority of the contractors came from the Swale area, and there was a good spread of contractors around the Borough with a new one for each of the main towns i.e. Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness. She explained that with regard to background checks, as well as the relevant health and safety and insurance checks, contractors were also asked to supply samples of work. This needed to be of a high standard and was inspected and scored accordingly by the Staying-Put Technical Officers who also spoke to their clients.

Members praised the work of the Staying-Put team and welcomed the report.

Resolved:

(1) That the Council enters into a new contractor framework for Staying Put starting April 2020 for an initial period of 2 years.

519 FUEL AND WATER POVERTY OUTREACH WORKER - AWARD OF TENDER

The Cabinet Member the Environment introduced the report which summarised the procurement process and results for an outreach service for fuel and water poverty, and sought approval of the recommended contractor for a two year and one month period. The Cabinet Member explained that it was a similar idea to the 'green doctors' service, except that this was a Borough-wide service. The Cabinet Member stated that up-to 28% of households in Swale were in water poverty one of the highest levels in Kent. He explained that the outreach worker would be able to offer advice and simple measures to help people reduce their energy and water usage and costs.

The Cabinet Member stated that the successful tenderer was Children and Families, a local organisation based on the Isle of Sheppey who also managed local food banks and the Fair Share Kent Warehouse, so had good local contacts. There was a possibility that the project could be extended for a further year. The Cabinet Member proposed the recommendation.

A Member welcomed the proposal and the appointment of Children and Families whose excellent work she was aware of. She asked if regular progress updates could be provided. The Member also spoke about the discount schemes that some water companies offered and raised concern about how this was achieved.

A Member asked whether pressure could be put on the relevant services to ensure more rural properties were put on mains drainage, as the rising costs of emptying cesspits was an issue for some.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Environment for his work on the proposal and stated that the Council should be proud of the scheme.

Resolved:

(1) That the appointment of Children and Families as the Fuel and Water Poverty Outreach Service provider from 2 March 2020 for an initial period of two years and one month with a possible extension of one year be approved.

520 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ENFORCEMENT POLICY 2020

The Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report which provided updates and revisions to the existing enforcement policies for the Mid-Kent Environmental Health Service 2015. The revision incorporated new legislation relevant to environmental health and changes, as a result of taking enforcement action, to clarify the context of actions the Council could take.

The Cabinet Member proposed the recommendation.

Resolved:

(1) That the adoption of the draft Environmental Health Enforcement Policy 2020 be approved.

521 CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: AREA COMMITTEES

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning which outlined the findings of the Policy Development and Review Committee (PDRC) and public consultation on whether area committees should be introduced. He considered the area committees were vital and stressed the importance of ensuring that they were a success. He hoped that they would consider more strategic issues rather than just ward issues, and thanked the PDRC for their work.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning proposed the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Angela Harrison moved the following amendment: That recommendation (3) be amended to read that the Special Responsibility Allowances of the chairmen of the new committees come from the budget surplus, and that Members allowances for 2020/21 not be frozen. This was seconded by Councillor Ben J Martin.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning referred to paragraph 4.2 of the report which outlined an alternative option regarding funding for the SRAs.

Some Members considered that allowances should not be frozen and be decided by the Independent Members' Allowances Panel and not by Members. He referred to paragraph 3.13 and asked for confirmation that the £4,000 of special project funding would not affect the £2,400 Member Community Grant? The Chairman explained that they would be separate grants.

Discussion ensued and the Monitoring Officer advised that, if Members were in favour of the proposed amendment, it might be easier to agree recommendations (1) and (2) but refuse recommendation (3) as the budget already existed for the allowances. Members agreed this course of action.

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendations from the Policy Development and Review Committee be noted.

(2) That the proposals for moving forward with area committees as laid out in the report be agreed.

522 SOUTH THAMES GATEWAY BUILDING CONTROL BUSINESS PLAN 2020 TO 2023

The Director of Regeneration introduced the report which asked Members to consider and make any comments on the draft South Thames Gateway (STG) Building Control Partnership Business Plan 2020 to 2023. The Chairman proposed the recommendation.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business and Delivery Plans for 2020 to 2023 be agreed.

523 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD MEETING HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2020

Cabinet considered the recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 13 January 2020.

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendations in Minute Nos. 437, 438 and 439 be agreed.

524 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LOCAL PLAN PANEL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2020

There were no recommendations.

525 EXEMPT APPENDICES - SOUTH THAMES GATEWAY BUILDING CONTROL BUSINESS PLAN 2020 - 2023

There was no discussion on this item, therefore the resolution to exclude the press and public was not passed.

Chairman

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