
CABINET

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 8 December 2021 from 7.00 pm - 7.55 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Russell Fairman, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Kerrie Houghting, Charlotte Hudson, Zoe Kent, Kellie MacKenzie, Jo Millard, Larissa Reed, Emma Wiggins and Phil Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE REMOTELY: Councillors Cameron Beart, Derek Carnell, Steve Davey, Alastair Gould, Denise Knights, Hannah Perkin, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Ghlin Whelan and Mike Whiting (in the Chamber).

485 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

486 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 October 2021 (Minute Nos. 403 – 412) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

487 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

Part A Minutes for Recommendation to Council

488 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND 2022/23 BUDGET

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set-out the draft interim 2022/23 revenue and capital budgets and the draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and explained that the Council was waiting to hear how much funding it would receive from central government. He stated the importance of setting a balanced budget and explained that the draft budget would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 26 January 2022, followed by Cabinet on 9 February 2022 before being set by Full Council at their meeting on 23 February 2022.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance said that local government had had to face the impact of long-term reduced funding and delays in clarifying the position of councils. He said that the Council had been previously dependent on the New Homes Bonus funding from the Government but it was unclear whether the Council would still receive this. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance spoke

of the costs of running an effective organisation which were set-out in Appendix II of the report. He outlined other significant costs to the Council: inflation which he warned may continue to rise; unavoidable increases in the cost of contracts; interest costs from the Sittingbourne Town Centre investment; and the cost of the Covid-19 pandemic. He advised that the Government had previously reimbursed the Council approximately £4million for the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic but that funding was not available for the 2022/23 period, and he spoke about the loss of income caused by the pandemic including the significant loss in car parking income.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance advised that in the summer of 2021 it was predicted that the Council would be facing a funding gap of £3.7million. He said that the Council's strategy for closing that gap was to make budget savings and to allocate from a reserve fund. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance drew attention to Appendix I of the report which showed that the funding gap had been reduced to £2.316million, if Members agreed to the savings outlined in Appendix II of the report. He did not consider that the savings proposed in the budget would significantly affect the level of service delivered by the Council.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance considered that the Council had acted prudently to ensure they could provide a balanced budget this year by creating a Budget Contingency Reserve to meet the funding that was needed. He drew attention to paragraph 2.4 of the report which showed that the Council had made funding available for improvements in the borough from one-off funding bids which he explained were not always eligible for everyday housekeeping spending, and he said that the improvements made to the public realm were something the Council should be proud of.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance drew attention to saving no. 43 (Parish Councils Footway Lighting), in Appendix II of the report and reported that following communication with several Parish Councils he wanted to reinstate funding for this. He moved the following amendment to the budget: That the Grant of £39,710 to assist Parish Councils with footway lighting be restored. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance concluded that in the current circumstances the Council was managing its budget soundly and prudently and would promote a balanced budget whilst also making resilient improvements to the borough.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning spoke about the financial difficulties that local and county councils were experiencing and considered that central Government needed to be made aware that the funding it gave to local councils was not sufficient. He welcomed an improved working relationship with Parish Councils.

In response to questions from a Member, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance said that they had considered a range of savings and the Parish footpath lighting was just one of those considered. He explained that the Council had not had the opportunity to liaise properly with parishes about the proposed budget

saving and considered that given the marginal impact the saving would have on the budget, he considered it was fair to Parish Councils, who were also struggling financially, to restore the grant. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance said that with regard to reserves he had advised that a special Contingency Reserve had been set-up and it was clear that the Government expected councils to use their reserves, and he hoped that the Government would recognise the role of District Councils particularly during the Covid-19 Pandemic and fund them appropriately.

Recommended:

- (1) That Council endorse the draft 2022/23 revenue and capital budgets as amended to include the grant of £39,710 to assist Parish Councils with footway lighting be restored.**
- (2) That Council endorse the Medium-Term Financial Plan.**

489 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2022/23

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set-out the proposed level of fees and charges to be levied for the next financial year 2022/23 and would take effect from 1 April 2022. He advised that the report would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 26 January 2022.

A Member drew attention to pages 42 and 43 of Appendix I of the report in respect of residents parking and asked that the Head of Service look into why the Council charged the same for a one hour permit as they did for an all-day permit.

Councillor Ben Martin drew attention to page 54 of Appendix I in respect of white bar markings and moved the following amendment: That the total charge of white bar markings be rounded-up to £155.00 for the installation of new white bar markings, and £130.00 for the re-painting of existing white bar markings. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

A Member drew attention to page 41 of the report and asked that Cockleshell Walk be included in the list of Sittingbourne car parks on page 40 of the report rather than as a separate item. This was agreed by Members.

Recommended:

- (1) That the proposed fees and charges 2022/23 as set out in the report as amended to include the total charge of white bar markings to be rounded-up to £155.00 for the installation of new white bar markings, and £130,000 for the re-painting of existing white bar markings be agreed.**
- (2) That in respect of Taxi Licensing delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing & Community Services in consultation with the Director of Resources and the Cabinet Member for Community to amend the fees and charges as a result of a review of the charges in 2021/22.**

490 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2022/23

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which considered the percentage reduction that should be set for the 2022/23 Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS). The CTS needed to be approved by Full Council by 31 January 2022.

Recommended:

- (1) That the Council Tax Support scheme for 2022/23 be kept the same as for 2021/22 and the Council Tax Support continues as a maximum award of 80%.**
- (2) That the Council investigate the implementation of a banded Council Tax Support scheme for 2023/24.**

Part B Minutes for Information

491 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2021

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set-out the revenue and capital projected outturn position for 2021/22 based on service activity up to the end of September 2021 and was collated from monitoring returns from budget managers.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance stated that the Council had prudently set-aside a contingency fund of £1.04million. There were significant financial pressure coming from: the loss of car park revenue this year; having to sustain the cost of major planning application sites; and increased housing costs. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing drew attention to page 151 on Appendix I of the report and the £286k required for compensation to bus companies from the Sittingbourne Town Centre project. He stated that had been agreed by the previous administration in 2017 and considered it unfair for the Council to pay the full cost of this. He called upon the Spirit of Sittingbourne to pay a reasonable share.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance reminded Members that the Council had received £198k compensation from the Government for losses in respect of fees and charges. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance drew attention to paragraph 3.8 of the report which outlined funding required from the Covid Recovery Fund for The Swallows Leisure Centre roof and loss of income from The Swallows Leisure Centre and Sheppey Leisure Centre. He advised that a top-up in funding for the Business Rates Economic Development Pool Reserve was required to meet the costs of the Master's House, Sheerness refurbishment, and said that this funding would also assist the Council with its case for Levelling-up as it would be classed as match-funding.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning drew attention to pages 152 and 153 of the report which he said demonstrated an "innovative and interventionist" approach by the Council to get things done. He spoke about some of the positive work that the Council had achieved including: investing £70,000 in churchyard repairs; providing a Planning Enforcement Notice Register; and additional tree officer resource.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance outlined further positive work of the Council including improvements to: Barton's Point, Minster Leas, Milton Creek, Sittingbourne and Oare Gunpowder Works, Faversham; public toilets; high street improvements; repairs to the clocktower, Sheerness; funding for Sheerness and Faversham pools; projects for deprived children; the Climate Emergency Business event; funding for Christmas events; Electric Vehicle Charging points; extra funding for play areas; trees and park benches; lighting for a rail footbridge; supporting the West Faversham Community Association; the Cycling and Walking Initiative; supporting Kemsley Community Centre; Fuel and Poverty Outreach work; the Skate Park; and the Artesian Well were just a few of the projects supported by the Council's Special Projects Fund and Improvement and Resilience Fund whilst still being able to balance the Council's budget.

Resolved:

- (1) That the projected revenue overspend of £359,000 be noted.***
- (2) That the additional funding from the Covid Recovery Fund towards two schemes as detailed in paragraph 3.8 of the report be approved.***
- (3) That delegated authority be given to the Leader and the Director of Resources to top-up the Improvement & Resilience Fund as required from the Business Rates Economic Development Pool Reserve in order to meet the costs of the development of the Master's House.***
- (4) That the changes to the capital funding as detailed in paragraph 3.13 of the report be approved.***
- (5) That the capital expenditure of £2,533,419 as detailed in paragraph 3.14 and Appendix I Table 8 of the report be noted.***
- (6) That the additional Government funding received by the Council in response to the coronavirus as detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the report be noted.***
- (7) That the capital variances and their funding as detailed in paragraph 3.15 and Appendix I Table 8 of the report be approved.***

492 SWALE CEMETERY REGULATIONS 2021

The Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report which sought approval of the proposed Cemetery Regulations 2021. He said that it had been 25 years since the regulations had been updated and the new version had been prepared with the support of the relevant industry body and relevant Cabinet Advisory Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Environment drew attention to paragraph 2.6 of the report which explained that the document would help to control anti-social behaviour in cemeteries and assist with the maintenance of memorials. He said that it was obviously a very sensitive area of work for residents but considered that it had been considered thoroughly and recommended that it be approved.

In response to a question from a Member, the Service Delivery Team Leader confirmed that dogs would need to be on leads and were not being banned from public cemeteries.

Resolved:

(1) That the Swale Cemetery Regulations 2021 be approved.

493 COMMISSIONING AND PROCUREMENT POLICY

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which outlined proposals to replace the existing Commissioning Framework and the Procurement Strategy with a combined Commissioning and Procurement Policy.

Resolved:

(1) That the new Commissioning & Procurement Policy be adopted.

494 SAFEGUARDING POLICY REFRESH 2021

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing introduced the report which summarised the amendments that were proposed to be made to the Safeguarding Policy and associated appendices and asked Members to agree the revisions made. She reminded Members of the recent Member briefing on Safeguarding in relation to children, and reported that she had requested a training session in relation to safeguarding adults and a date for this would be forwarded to Members.

Resolved:

(1) That the revised Safeguarding Policy and associated appendices be approved.

495 HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIVES FRAMEWORK

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing introduced the report which provided an update on the Active Lives Framework 2017 – 2022 (ALF) and set-out proposals for the draft Healthy & Active Lives Framework 2022 – 2027 (HALF) to enable a 8-week consultation. She explained that the Council were focusing more on healthy and active rather than pure sports to ensure inclusivity. She spoke about the health inequalities in Swale and considered a holistic approach was needed. The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing stated that obesity was a problem in Swale and in 60% of the Covid-19 deaths obesity was a factor. She said that the Council must do everything it could to get people healthier and more active.

In response to a query from a Member, the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing confirmed that case studies would be included in the final document.

Members made the following comments:

- Emphasis on health and active lives was very welcome;
- could active travel be included as walking should be encouraged as much as possible?;
- sport was so competitive that some people often felt excluded; and
- there were lots of walks within Swale and people should be encouraged to look at the Council's website for inspiration.

Resolved:

- (1) *That the draft Healthy and Active in Swale Framework 2022 – 2027 be approved to enable an 8-week consultation period.*

496 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2021

Resolved:

- (1) *That the recommendations in Minute Nos. 462, 463 and 464 be agreed.*

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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