

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet

Wednesday 11th February, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

Present:

Councillor S Turner (Deputy Leader - in the Chair)
Councillors K Ahmed, H Bills, D Branwood, T Crumpton, J Foster,
R Harris, G Partridge and D Sparks.

Opposition Group Members nominated to attend meetings of the Cabinet:-

Councillors P Harley, R James, L Jones, I Kettle and P Miller, (Conservative Group); Councillors P Bradley and P Brothwood (UKIP Group)

Officers:

S Norman (Chief Executive), J Millar (Strategic Director (Environment, Economy and Housing)), P Tart (Strategic Director (Resources and Transformation)), P Sharratt (Interim Director of Children's Services), D Harkins (Chief Officer (Health and Wellbeing)), I Newman (Chief Officer (Finance and Legal Services)), R Sims (Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private Sector) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager).

Observers:

Councillors N Barlow, J Martin and N Neale.

Also in Attendance:-

S Joberns (Representing the External Auditors, Grant Thornton in relation to Minute No. 55 below)

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Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors S Etheridge, P Lowe, D Vickers and M Wood.

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Changes in representation of Opposition Group Members

Councillors P Bradley, L Jones and I Kettle were serving in place of Councillors S Etheridge, M Wood and D Vickers for this meeting of the Cabinet.

53 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

54 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4th December, 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

55 **Annual Audit Letter 2013/14**

A joint report of the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer (Finance and Legal Services) was submitted on the External Auditor's Annual Audit Letter for 2013/14.

Resolved

That the External Auditor's Annual Audit Letter for 2013/14 together with the views of the Auditor, be noted.

56 **Deployment of Resources: Housing Revenue Account and Public Sector Housing Capital**

A joint report of the Strategic Director (Environment, Economy and Housing) and the Chief Officer (Finance and Legal Services) was submitted on the proposals for the deployment of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and associated matters for 2015/16.

Resolved

- (1) That rents for Housing Revenue Account dwellings be maintained at current levels from 6th April 2015, as outlined in paragraph 3 of the reported submitted.
- (2) That an increase of 1.2% in service charges, as outlined in paragraphs 5 and 7 of the report submitted, be approved.
- (3) That an increase of 1.2% in heating and lighting charges for sheltered housing from an average weekly charge of £14.43 to an average weekly charge of £14.60, as outlined in paragraph 6 of the report submitted, be approved.

- (4) That an increase from £2.20 to £2.30 for laundry tokens, as outlined in paragraph 8 of the report submitted, be approved.
- (5) That the current charge for pitch licences at Oak Lane be maintained, as outlined in paragraph 9 of the report submitted.
- (6) That an increase of 1.2% in water charges at Oak Lane to £6.25 per week, as outlined in paragraph 9 of the report submitted, be approved.
- (7) That the leaseholder's administration fee and the charge for the leasehold information pack be maintained at current levels, as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the report submitted.
- (8) That an increase of 1.2% (10p per month) for private Telecare clients, as outlined in paragraph 12 of the report submitted, be approved.
- (9) That the Council be recommended:-
 - (a) To approve the revised Housing Revenue Account budget for 2014/15 and the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2015/16, as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.
 - (b) To approve the public sector housing revised capital budget for 2014/15 and the capital budget for 2015/16 to 2019/20 attached as Appendix 2 to the report.
 - (c) To authorise the Strategic Director (Environment, Economy and Housing) and the Strategic Director (Resources and Transformation) to bid for and enter into funding arrangements for additional resources to supplement investment in the public sector housing stock, as outlined in paragraphs 23 and 24 of the report submitted, and that expenditure funded from such resources be added to the Capital Programme.
 - (d) To authorise the Strategic Director (Environment, Economy and Housing), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety, to manage and allocate resources to the Capital Programme, as outlined in paragraph 25 of the report submitted.
 - (e) To confirm that all capital receipts arising from the sale of Housing Revenue Account assets, other than those specifically committed to support private sector housing, should continue to be used for the improvement of council homes.

- (f) To authorise the Strategic Director (Environment, Economy and Housing) to procure and enter into contracts for the delivery of the capital programme, as outlined in paragraph 26 of the report submitted.
 - (g) To receive the Housing Revenue Account medium term financial strategy and thirty year business plan, attached as Appendix 4 to the report submitted.
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57 **Capital Programme Monitoring**

A joint report of the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer (Finance and Legal Services) was submitted on the progress of the Capital Programme and a number of proposed amendments. The report also set out the proposed 'Prudential Indicators' as required to be determined by the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and the Local Government Act 2003 and to sought approval of the proposed Council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy for 2015/16.

During the discussion and questions on this report, it was agreed that written responses would be provided to Councillor P Harley concerning funding allocations for highway maintenance and to Councillor I Kettle concerning the number and location of bore holes referred to in relation to the Energy Efficiency item in the report.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture responded to a question concerning the cost of the new paths at Homer Hill Park. She also noted comments made by Councillor P Miller regarding safety concerns associated with the item on Wordsley Park Garage.

Resolved

- (1) That the result of the Post Completion Review of relevant capital projects, as outlined in Appendix C of the report submitted, be noted.
- (2) That the Council be recommended:-
 - (a) To note the current progress with the 2014/15 Capital Programme, as set out in Appendix A to the report, and that budgets be amended to reflect the reported variances.
 - (b) To note the grant funding for a toucan crossing in Colley Gate, Halesowen and that the project be included in the Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 7 of the report submitted.

- (c) To approve the Wordsley Park Garage project and include it in the Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 8 of the report submitted.
- (d) To approve the CCTV project at Blowers Green and Lister Road depots and include it in the Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 9 of the report submitted.
- (e) That the Highways Maintenance Block allocations 2015/16 – 2017/18 be included in the Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 10 of the report submitted.
- (f) To note the funding to install a new kitchen at Netherton Church of England Primary School and that the project be included in the Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 11 of the report submitted.
- (g) To approve the initial Energy Efficiency projects and their inclusion in the Capital Programme and that the Strategic Director (Resources and Transformation) be authorised to include further projects subject to establishing value for money and the availability of funding, as set out in paragraph 12 of the report submitted.
- (h) To note the urgent amendments to the Capital Programme, as set out paragraphs 13 and 14 of the report submitted.
- (i) To agree the Prudential Indicators as required to be determined by the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and the Local Government Act 2003, as set out in Appendix D of the report submitted.
- (j) To approve the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy as set out in paragraph 19 of the report submitted.

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Question under Council Procedure Rule 11.8

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8 a question was asked by Councillor P Brothwood and responded to as follows:-

Question

Following the recent press coverage about Brierley Hill Civic centre being handed over to a voluntary group, can the Council confirm how much income the Council will expect to lose over the next five years as a result of this handover? In addition has a full cost analysis been conducted and if so can the public see the results?

Response

The first point to make is that Brierley Hill Civic Hall has not been 'handed over' to a voluntary group. The Council has entered into a partnership arrangement with Dudley Council for Voluntary Services (DCVS) who will for a trial period of 18 months act as interim managers of the site with the main target being to increase both usage and income at the site.

This arrangement is in keeping with the Council's 'Asset Transfer Policy' and the Council's wider ambition to be a 'Community Council', and the 'trial' nature of this arrangement will be used to inform other asset transfer projects that may come along in the future.

The nature of the agreement with DCVS is that no income will be lost to the Council given that DCVS will act as the Council's 'proxy managers' for the venue and the budget remains the Council's, the same as would be the case if the Council continued to directly manage the venue itself, even to the extent of the existing staff remaining as Council employees.

The 18 month trial is seen as a possible pre-cursor to a more formal asset transfer opportunity in the future but that will be dependent on how successful DCVS are in terms of developing usage and income streams at the hall.

Given that this is an interim trial and the timescale is relatively short ie. 18 months, it was considered that there was no need for a full cost analysis to be produced, in lieu of the fact that the venue's budget remains intact during this period.

Some initial feasibility work was previously undertaken utilising consultants jointly engaged by the Council and DCVS, to assess the merits of a possible Asset Transfer of the venue. One of the main recommendations emanating from that study being that a trial project of the type proposed should be undertaken to test the theory and inform future decisions.

Issues Arising from Scrutiny Committees

The Cabinet was informed of the decision of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board at its meeting on 10th December, 2014 concerning the ongoing parking and transport issues concerning Russells Hall Hospital and surrounding areas.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board had recommended the Cabinet support proposals being developed by the Dudley Group of Hospitals Trust to develop additional staff car parking facilities on land adjacent to Russells Hall Hospital to benefit all users of the hospital and the wider community.

The Cabinet noted the recommendation for onward reference to the relevant Cabinet Members. Whilst the terms of the resolution were accepted in principle, it was noted that any future proposals would be the subject of appropriate environmental impact assessments and all necessary planning application procedures.

The meeting ended at 6.25 p.m.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL