

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Thursday, 7 February 2019

Present: Councillor David Jukes (Chairman)
Councillors McDermott (Vice-Chairman), Dr Basu, Moore, Reilly and Weatherly

Officers in Attendance: William Benson (Chief Executive), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Patricia Narebor (Head of Legal Partnership), John Antoniadis (Estates Manager), Sheila Coburn (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Gary Stevenson (Head of Housing, Health and Environment) and Mark O'Callaghan (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Backhouse and Mackonochie

APOLOGIES

CAB122/18 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor March.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

CAB123/18 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

CAB124/18 There were no Visiting Members who had registered as wishing to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 06 DECEMBER 2018

CAB125/18 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 06 December 2018 be approved as a correct record.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

CAB126/18 There were no questions from members of the Council.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

CAB127/18 There were no questions from members of the public.

CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN AS AT 30 JANUARY 2019

CAB128/18 Members considered the plan. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan as at 30 January 2019 be noted.

PROPERTY TRANSACTION REPORT: JULY - DECEMBER 2018

CAB129/18 Councillor Jukes and John Antoniadis, Estates Manager, introduced the report.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- The report set out excellent results and the small Estates team was to be congratulated.
- Councillor Chapelard had received written answers to his questions raised at Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board.
- The Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board supported the recommendations.

The decision was made taking the exemption information attached to the report as read.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To comply with the Constitution.

ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019/20

CAB130/18 Councillor Jukes and John Antoniadis, Estates Manager, introduced the report.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- The Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board supported the recommendation.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended that the Asset Management Plan 2019/20 be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

The Plan supports the Council's Corporate Priorities and the Five Year Plan.

COUNCIL TAX LONG TERM EMPTY PREMIUM

CAB131/18 Councillor Reilly and Sheila Coburn, Head of Revenues and Benefits Partnership, introduced the report.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- There was nationwide pressure on housing supply and local government finance.
- The introduction of the premium would provide a strong incentive to return empty properties into use.
- Whilst the key was to return properties into use, any properties which remained empty would, at least, generate income for the Council for other initiatives.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended:

1. That the revised Council Tax Long Term Empty Premium be implemented for the financial years beginning on 1 April 2019, 1 April 2020 and 1 April 2021; and
2. That the amendments to the Council Tax Empty Property Policy be noted to reflect the revised Council Tax Long Term Empty Premium.

REASON FOR DECISION:

The premium encourages owners to bring empty homes back into use.

BUSINESS RATES RETAIL RELIEF

CAB132/18 Councillor Reilly and Sheila Coburn, Head of Revenues and Benefits Partnership, introduced the report.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- The short term assistance to help businesses as they adjust to changing market conditions was welcome.
- The restrictive definition of 'retail' used by the Government and lack of any local discretion was disappointing.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended that the Policy for the award of Business Rates Retail Relief, as set out at Appendix B to the report, be agreed in line with the guidance provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

REASON FOR DECISION:

To implement the Government funded scheme to provide assistance to retail businesses.

BUDGET 2019/20 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

CAB133/18 Councillor Reilly and Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development, introduced the report.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- A balanced budget despite the difficult conditions was to be congratulated.
- Confirmation of the short term financial settlement from the Government was welcome but there needed to be a long term sustainable solution.
- At the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board the Liberal Democrat member voted against the recommendations without providing any reason or alternatives.
- As a result of reduced Government support and the continuing move to greater localisation, the Council had to be financially self-sufficient.
- Successful efforts to remove the inexplicable negative Revenue Support Grant were congratulated.
- The Council's strategy of investing in the economy to generate Business Rates was working and provided significant income.
- The Council's property portfolio was also being well managed to provide income.
- The Council was no longer funded by the Government and had to be run as a business. Greater independence would be welcome.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended:

1. That the changes to the base budget along with the assumptions and approach set out throughout the report be approved;
2. That the responses to the budget consultation set out at Appendix C to the report be approved;

3. That the rolling forward of the capital programme including additional gross funding of £2,643,340 for new schemes listed within the report be approved;
4. That the 2019/20 Pay Policy Statement, set out at Appendix D to the report, be approved; and
5. That an increase in the 'Basic Amount' of Council Tax of £5.19 for a Band D property be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To deliver a sustainable budget to deliver the Council's key objectives.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY 2019/20

CAB134/18 Councillor Reilly and Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development, introduced the report.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- The Council considered the successful identification and control of risk to be prime criteria by which the effectiveness of its treasury management activities would be measured.
- The Council was committed to achieving value for money.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended that the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2019/20, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

The security of the Council's cash and effective cash flow management is vital in order to support all the services provided by the Council. The interest received from the Council's investments is an important source of income in helping the Council set a balanced budget.

CAPITAL STRATEGY 2019/20

CAB135/18 Councillor Reilly and Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development, introduced the report.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- The report was intended to ensure all members understood the Council's financial objectives and risk appetite.
- Although the information had previously been available in various documents, the new consolidated document was useful.
- At the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board the recommendation had been supported unanimously despite inclusion of funding for the Calverley Square development. There appeared to be a lack of consistency from opposition members.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended that the Capital Strategy 2019/20, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To provide guidance on the Council's capital programme and the use of its capital resources as recommended by the revised Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy codes.

CALVERLEY GROUNDS STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019-2029

- CAB136/18 Gary Stevenson, Head of Housing, Health and Environment, introduced the report which included the following comments:
- Credit for the report was to Peter Every, Parks and Sports Team Leader, and his team who was not available at this meeting due to being at a Britain in Bloom conference following the Council's success last year.
 - Work was ongoing on an Equalities Impact Assessment to which any future works would have regard.
 - The report referred to consultation with the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum, however, this was clarified as meaning 'some members' of the Town Forum.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- The report was excellent.
- There had developed a lack of trust from certain interest groups which the new plan should help to alleviate.
- The Council was already investing in the Grounds and the plan would deliver further improvements.
- The setting of the park following completion of the Calverley Square development would be magnificent.
- The Communities Cabinet Advisory Board supported the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Strategic Management Plan for Calverley Grounds for the period 2019 – 2029, as set out at Appendix A to the report be approved; and
2. That a management and maintenance plan plus a conservation management plan be developed.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To enable Council members, officers and key stakeholders to make strategic decisions about the future of Calverley Grounds and to comply with conditions of the planning permission for the Calverley Square development.

URGENT BUSINESS

CAB137/18 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

CAB138/18 The next meeting would be held on Thursday 07 March 2019 at 10.30am in Committee Room A at the Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 11.05 am.

An audio recording of this meeting is available on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council website.