

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER
19TH DECEMBER 2017 (6 PM)**

Present:

Councillors: M J Hart (Chairman), N J Desmond, I Hardiman, C Rogers, J D Smith and R J Vale.

Observers:

Councillors: S Miah and J A Shaw.

CAB.60 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.61 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.62 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 14th November 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.63 Call Ins

No decisions had been called in since the last Cabinet meeting.

CAB.64 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.65 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-21

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources which provided Cabinet with financial information in order to make proposals for the Budget Strategy for the period 2018-21.

The Cabinet Member for Resources led Members through the report. He commented this was a balanced budget for the Council's future spending and set out a clear and strategic way of moving forward. He advised that the Council's financial context remained challenging with net expenditure on services set to fall a further 5% to just under £11.7 million by 2021. He added that despite further reductions in income streams such a Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and New Homes Bonus (NHB), the budget provided clarity and

direction to the Council. He emphasised that the Council had an excellent track record on delivering savings and was confident that this would continue, adding that the majority of savings for 2017/18 and 2019/20 had already been identified and achieved.

The Cabinet Member for Resources continued that key areas had been identified which would enable commercial activity to continue to grow and front line services be protected. He stated that income from fees and charges would continue to contribute to the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Some fees and charges would be frozen whilst others devolved to service managers to apply commercial judgment, whilst others would increase by 5%. He confirmed that car parking charges would be linked to inflation and increased by CPI plus 2% from October 2018 and capped at 5%. He commented that Council Tax had been frozen for 5 of the last 7 years. However the current financial context meant that any further freezing would not be appropriate. Therefore an increase of 1.94 % was proposed for each of the next 3 years, which would generate an income of £133,000 for frontline services. He emphasised that this was a fair and sensible approach for Council Tax payers across the District and was well below the rate of inflation.

The Cabinet Member for Resources added that the administration would continue with the mantra of invest to save in order to be as efficient and modern as possible. £1.75 million would be invested into the ICT infrastructure in order to ensure that the Council upgraded security, data storage and new technologies to ensure efficient and effective working. As with previous years, investment would continue for the Community Leadership Fund to enable Councillors to spend on community projects within their ward.

The Cabinet Member for Resources concluded that the budget was strategic in its outlook and would continue to invest in the Council's future. Income generation and efficiency were key priorities and would leave the Council with reserves of approximately £1.6 million at the end of the third year. He thanked the Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team for their continued professionalism and advice.

The Leader of the Council advised that the public would be consulted on the Strategy and commented that the budget was robust and sustainable. He noted the substantial reduction in RSG since 2010 and that managing finances in Local Government was increasingly more difficult. The Council would not shy away from the challenge and the administration would continue to do all that it could to continue to provide front line services to residents and communities.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Protection commented that she was pleased to see that funding for the Community Safety Partnership would continue, which would enable the team to keep the residents of Wyre Forest safe.

Decision:

1. The fees and charges as set out in Appendix 4 - Part 1 of the report to Cabinet be noted.

The Cabinet endorse and recommend to the Cabinet Financial Strategy Advisory Panel for scrutiny:

2. The Council's updated Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - 2.2.1 Cabinet Proposals – taking into account the impact on the Council's Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2018-21 (paragraph 7.3 of the report to Cabinet) including;
 - a. Approval of a further tranche of £1.757m capital investment required for the refreshed ICT Strategy to be added to the capital programme as set out in Appendix 3 of the report to Cabinet;
 - b. Approval of the Community Leadership Fund for 2018-19 of £33,000;
 - c. Approval of a further Localism Fund allocation of £50,000 in 2018-19.
 - d. Approval of funding to allow the current level of Community Safety staffing to be maintained for 2018-19 while a review of all options is undertaken taking into account the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) position regarding future funding strategies.
 - e. Approval of a further tranche of Wyre Forest Forward Efficiency Savings of £50k in 2018-19, £175k in 2019-20 and £400k in 2020-21.
 - f. Approval of an additional income generation targets of £50k in 2018-19, £75k in 2019-20 and £100k in 2020-21.
 - g. Approval of capital funding of £38k for the replacement of the Spennells Valley Boardwalk funded from the unused Leisure Centre contingency.
 - 2.2.2 The level of net expenditure and resultant Council Tax for 2018-21 as per paragraphs 7.1 and 7.4 of the report to Cabinet;
 - 2.2.3 The proposal to increase Council Tax charge for dwellings empty for more than 2 years from 100% to 150% with effect from 1st April 2018 as per paragraph 5.13 of the report to Cabinet ;

- 2.2.4 The fees and charges in line with this strategy and the impact on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2018-21, as shown in Part 3 of Appendix 4 (paragraphs 4.12 and 7.1 of the report to Cabinet also refer);**
- 2.2.5 The Base Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewals Schedule as set out in Appendix 6, Appendices A and B of the report to Cabinet;**
- 2.2.6 The variations to the Capital Programme and Vehicle, Equipment and Systems Renewal Schedule in accordance with the Council's Budget Process.**
- 2.3 The fees and charges as set out in Appendix 4 – Part 2 of the report to Cabinet be approved.**
- 2.4 The refreshed ICT Strategy as summarised in Appendix 3 of the report to Cabinet be approved;**
- 2.5 Decisions in relation to the allocation of "State of the Area" (SotA) funding be delegated to the Director of EPP in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration and the appropriate Member Champion (paragraph 4.5 of the report to Cabinet refers).**

CAB.66 Report on the Homelessness Contract and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place which considered the implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act on the Housing Register, Housing Advice and Homelessness Contract with the Community Housing Group and sought to agree arrangements for delivering the service from April 2018.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing led Members through the report and explained that the Council's current housing advice and homelessness service was provided by the Community Housing Group through a contract which was in place until March 2019, at a cost of £340,000 per year. He advised that the contract focused primarily on the delivery of services to statutory homeless cases. In order to support the required changes in service delivery, the Government had identified transitional new burdens funding for all local authorities, which for Wyre Forest was a total of £91,000 over three years commencing in 2017/18. After this period the reduction in statutory homeless cases and consequential cost savings would mean further new burdens funding was no longer required.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing explained that new legislation increased the opportunity for applicants to request a review of every

decision the Council makes, which could impact on Council Officers dealing with additional requests for reviews. He added that the new legislation posed potential risk to the Council if it was not successfully implemented, which could be mitigated if the service were brought back in house. He concluded by stating that fundamental changes required by the service lead officers to agree that the best way of delivering housing and homelessness advice was to do so directly rather than relying on a third party.

The Leader of the Council commented that homelessness reduction was topical at a national level and it was vital that the Council fulfils its statutory duty around this important area.

Decision:

- 1.1 Delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place and Corporate Director: Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Housing, Health & Wellbeing and Resources, to agree the financial arrangements and consequences of the proposed transfer; and if they are satisfied that the consequences can be accommodated within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy that:**
 - 1.1.1 The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place be authorised to give formal notice to The Group of the Council's intention for the housing advice and homelessness elements of the contract to be brought back in house.**
 - 1.1.2 Delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place in consultation with the Corporate Director: Resources and Solicitor to the Council to proceed with the transfer of staff from The Group to the Council under TUPE.**
- 1.2 The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place in consultation with the Solicitor to the Council be authorised to agree any consequential amendments to the current contract to ensure the continued delivery of the Housing Register element of the current contract until March 2019 with The Group.**
- 1.3 Delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Wellbeing to make any consequential amendments to the Council's Allocation Policy that may be necessary as a result of the introduction of the Act to ensure the Council's Policy is compliant.**
- 1.4 The Homelessness Reduction Act Action Plan be agreed.**

CAB.67 Exclusion of Press and Public

Decision: "Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration

of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "exempt information" as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

CAB.68 Asset Disposal in Kidderminster.

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place on an asset exchange in Kidderminster.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Redevelopment led Members in depth through the confidential report to Cabinet

Members discussed the report and were in full agreement that, if the proposed exchange took place, it would have a positive impact on the area.

Decision:

In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 7th December 2017:

The proposed asset transfer as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.6 of the confidential report to Cabinet be agreed.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 6.41PM.