

CABINET

Decision Notices and Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 7th January, 2016 at 5.00 p.m. at Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY, 13th JANUARY, 2016

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: MONDAY, 18TH JANUARY, 2016)

PRESENT: Councillors K.S. Sahota (Leader and Chair), L.D. Carter, E.A. Clare, S. Davies, A.R.H. England, A.D. McClements, R.A. Overton, G.C.W. Reynolds and P.R. Watling

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors A.J. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) and Councillor W.L. Tomlinson (Liberal Democrat/Independent Group Leader)

LAURA JOHNSTON AND PAUL TAYLOR

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Leader reported that this would be last Cabinet meeting to be attended by Laura Johnston, Director of Children's Services, and Paul Taylor, Director of Health, Wellbeing & Care, who would be leaving the Council this month. He thanked them for all their work and the contribution they had made to the delivery of important services to the people of Telford & Wrekin.

CB-60 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CB-61 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

CB-62 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CB-63 2015/16 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Key Decision identified as **2015/16 Financial Management** in the Notice of Key Decisions published on 11 November 2015.

Part Recommendation to Full Council in relation to decision (b) below not subject to Call-in

Councillor L D Carter, Cabinet Member: Council Finance & Service Delivery, presented the report of the Assistant Director: Finance, Audit & Information Governance, which provided Members with the latest financial monitoring information for 2015/16.

The net projected outturn position for 2015/16 for all service budgets showed a considerable improvement of £5.4m on the position reported to Cabinet on 10 December 2015. The main reason for this change was a benefit of £5.3m which related to the rescheduling of debt, and which followed detailed technical work and discussions with the Council's external auditors. After taking this revenue benefit from debt rescheduling, the Council would be within budget by £4.015m at year end. This sound financial management meant that £4.212m of contingencies held centrally would not be required in the current year. Therefore one-off resources of £8.227m were projected to be available at year end to support the delivery of future service and financial planning strategies, and would enable one-off costs associated with the delivery of on-going savings to be funded.

There were a number of variations from the approved budget, including the cost of Children in Care placements (overspend of £1.8m) and the cost of Adult Care and Support services (projected overspend of £1.6m). There were benefits from Public Health projected savings of £0.77m imposed by Government and £0.8m from the implementation of single status which would not be required in 2015/16. All projected variances over £0.100m were detailed in the report.

The capital programme totalled £92m, which included all approvals since the budget was set. Spend was currently standing at 98% of the budget allocation. The report detailed some slippage, together with some proposed changes to the funding of the capital programme.

The collection levels for Council Tax, Business Rates and Sales Ledger were all ahead of target, and this was a very positive situation.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that it be noted that 2015/16 revenue spending is currently projected to be within budget at year end, and that work continue to sustain this position;**
- (b) that the position in relation to capital spend be noted, and TO RECOMMEND to COUNCIL that the slippage detailed in Appendix 3 of the report and changes to capital funding outlined in paragraph 6.3 of the report be approved;**
- (c) that the collection rates for NNDR, council tax and sales ledger be noted.**

Key Decision identified as **Service & Financial Planning Strategy 2016/17 – 2017/18** in the Notice of Key Decisions published on 11 November 2015.

Council decision – not subject to Call-in

Councillor L.D. Carter, Cabinet Member: Council Finance & Service Delivery, presented the report of the Managing Director and the Chief Financial Officer, which set out the proposed service and financial planning strategy for the period 2016/17 to 2017/18 with specific budget proposals for 2016/17, and the proposed engagement and consultation activities with the community. He thanked the Chief Financial Officer, his team and officers from across the Council for all their hard work in managing the finances and preparing the draft budget.

The Cabinet Member set out the background and context to the budget round, particularly in relation to the unprecedented cuts in Government grant funding since 2010, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent spending announcements in his Autumn Statement which had indicated a further cut of 53% in local government funding over the next few years. Over £80m of savings would have been delivered by April 2016 - equivalent to nearly £1,100 for every household in the Borough. The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement had cut the Council's Revenue Support Grant by 20.81% in the next year alone, and the position was made worse by the loss of around 8% of grant funding due to the Government's use of grant "damping" and out-of-date population data for the Borough. In the light of this financial background, it was now inevitable that there would be significant consequences on the services that were delivered. The Administration would continue as far as possible to protect the most essential services for vulnerable children and adults, including the implementation of the Government's new social care precept on Council Tax that would increase the budget for adult services by £1.6m next year. It was also committed to investing in Telford's future and in promoting jobs and growth for the Borough. Attracting new businesses also benefitted the Council through increased income from business rates. The Council would continue to seek to generate income from adopting a commercial approach, building on innovative "invest to save" projects such as the Solar Farm which was now generating more than expected income for the Council.

However, despite all this the Council could no longer afford to continue to do everything that it currently did. The report contained details of over 200 savings proposals, but the main focus of public consultation would be on 32 services where the cuts had the most significant impact on the public. The proposals included:

- Closing council-run libraries at Dawley, Donnington, Hadley, Madeley, Newport and Stirchley and ending the mobile library service
- No council-run youth clubs
- No council-run community centres
- No council-run markets
- Less Council run children's centres

However, the Council would be working with Parish & Town Councils, community organisations and voluntary groups to explore how a number of these services could continue from April 2017, run in a new way by different organisations and not by the Council. The most significant cuts had been held back until 2017 to allow time to explore possible alternatives and consult with service users.

It was proposed to consult residents on three possible council tax options. The first was to “freeze” council tax and implement the 2% “precept” the Government had assumed Telford & Wrekin would put into its Council Tax to raise extra funds ring fenced for adult social care services. Residents would also be asked if Council Tax should be raised by an additional 1.2% or 1.9% (over and above the 2% Government assumed adult services precept) to help lessen cuts to key services. This was because councils would no longer receive a grant from Government if they froze Council Tax.

In terms of the base budget position, the Council was facing a projected funding gap of £10.462m for 2016/17, which after the application of savings proposals, additional cost pressures and the 2% social care precept gave a projected net surplus of £0.486m.

Attached to the report were a number of appendices, including savings proposals, Impact Assessments of the savings proposals, the Capital Investment Programme, details of Reserves and Balances and details of education related Section 106 Agreements. A programme of community engagement and consultation on the budget proposals would be undertaken over the next few weeks. This would seek views particularly on the specific savings proposals and council tax options, as well as highlighting simple ways that residents could help the Council to save more money. Details of the communication and engagement plan were appended to the report. Final proposals would be considered by the Cabinet on 25 February 2016 for recommendation to full Council on 3 March 2016.

Councillor A.J. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) advised that his Group was preparing alternative budget proposals. He agreed that it was a very tough grant settlement, but that the savings already made in the last five years showed what could be achieved. He welcomed the protection of services for the most vulnerable, but was concerned at the proposals to close libraries. There was also concern at the rise in debt and prudential borrowing, and that the focus should be more on investing in core services. He stated that his Group would be happy to work with the Administration in seeking a fairer funding settlement from Government and getting the best deal on the retention of business rates. Councillor W.L. Tomlinson ((Lib Dem/Independent Group Leader) highlighted the unfairness of Government grant funding, and also offered support for any lobbying of Government. He welcomed the initiatives to find alternative sources of income, and it was recognised that the Council would have to be more innovative to find additional savings. The Council was being forced into this position by Government, and the proposed closure of libraries was concerning. He asked for enough time to be given to find any alternative providers for running the libraries.

A number of Cabinet Members spoke of the difficulties that the Council now faced in setting a budget, and that the hard service choices were being forced on the Council by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was stressed that the Council would do all it could to work with partners on finding ways to mitigate some of these cuts, and that facilities would not be closed if a cost-effective alternative way of running them was available. Parish and Town Councils were urged to get involved, and it was hoped that there would be a positive response from the local community. Members also welcomed the offers of support from the Opposition Group Leaders in relation to lobbying Government, and that it was important that the local MPs were also supporting a fairer funding deal for the Borough.

RESOLVED –

- (a) **that the service and financial planning strategy as set out in the report be approved for consultation with the community between 8 January and 7 February 2016;**
- (b) **To RECOMMEND to COUNCIL that the transfer of £3m from the projected 2015/16 underspend, which largely arises from debt rescheduling - as set out in Section 12 and Appendix 13 of the report, to the Invest to Save/Capacity Fund, and the transfer of £3m to the Severance Fund, be approved.**

CB-65 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2016/17

Key Decision identified as **Council Tax Support Scheme 2016/17** in the Notice of Key Decisions published on 9 December 2015.

Recommendations to Council – not subject to Call-in

Councillor L.D. Carter, Cabinet Member: Council Finance & Service Delivery, presented the report of the Assistant Director: Customer Services, which set out the proposed policies for 2016/17 in relation to Council Tax Support and the Council Tax Hardship Fund.

The Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme was introduced in April 2013 to award council tax discounts to customers who were on low incomes, based on a series of principles and eligibility criteria. A review of the 2015/16 scheme had taken place, and it was recommended that some changes be made to the scheme that would result in some savings to the overall annual cost, as well as reflecting some technical and legislative amendments that were necessitated each year by Government. The main proposed changes to the Policy were the introduction of an upper limit cap on income from state benefits, the introduction of an estimated minimum weekly income for working age self-employed people who had been trading more than 12 months, and the removal of the 'Family Premium' from the assessment of Council Tax

Support. These changes would only affect a small number of claimants, but would reduce costs by £0.241m.

A full public consultation on the proposed changes to the Scheme had been undertaken, which included writing directly to 500 customers who would be most affected by the proposals. Copies of the consultation document and summary of responses were appended to the report. 584 responses were received, and there was overwhelming support for the recommended options/changes. The cross-party joint Customer, Community & Partnership and Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committees had also considered the proposed changes and were fully in support of the recommendations – a copy of their response was also appended to the report.

The Hardship Fund had been invaluable over the last two years in providing additional support to the most financially vulnerable customers, and it was proposed to fund the Scheme for a further 12 months at a cost of £30,000. The policy for awarding Council Tax hardship would remain unchanged. It was proposed to engage with specific customers affected by the changes to the Support Scheme to make them aware of the Hardship Fund.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

- (a) that the Council Tax Support Scheme Policy for 2016/17, as shown at Appendix A of the report, be approved;**
- (b) that the Council Tax Hardship Policy and fund of £30,000 continues in 2016/17.**

CB-66 TRANSPORT GROWTH STRATEGY

Non-Key Decision.

Councillor A.D. McClements, Cabinet Member: Communities, Regeneration & Transport, presented the report of the Assistant Director of Neighbourhood & Customer Services, which set out the transport infrastructure and investment that was required to accommodate future housing, business and population growth within the Borough. The full Strategy (Appendix A to the report) had been available for Members to view on the Council website.

The Strategy considered the impact and potential improvements in relation to public transport, cycling and walking, rail and car. Work had been undertaken using the Telford & Wrekin Strategic Transport Model to understand the impact of future growth on the network. Stakeholder impact on transport issues arising out of the recent consultation on the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan had also been taken into account. The Strategy identified potential improvements to the network to meet future transport needs, as well as providing the evidence base for the transport element of the Local Plan. A number of tables in the report detailed:

- short term schemes to be delivered by 2020 for which funding had been partially secured through the LEP, DfT and developer contributions;

- Other highway improvements that may be required by 2020, but which were subject to funding coming forward;
- Longer term infrastructure schemes to deliver strategic priorities up to 2031.

The report also set out the potential funding streams for this investment, much of which would be subject to successful bids for grant funding via Central Government and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. The Strategy also set out how the Council would continue to secure developer contributions for a wide range of transport improvements as development sites came forward. This could be affected by restrictions on the pooling of Section 106 contributions from developers. The Council had a good track record of securing investment in the local transport network, and Officers were to be congratulated on this success.

Councillor W.L. Tomlinson (Liberal Democrat/Independent Group Leader) stated that it was vital that the transport infrastructure was in place to support the growth of the Borough. The Cabinet Member added that she would be organising a Members' Information Seminar to explain the detail in the Strategy further, and she would be meeting with local Ward Members to discuss individual schemes that were being proposed within their Ward.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that the Transport Growth Strategy, as shown at Appendix A of the report, be approved;**
- (b) that the ongoing need to secure developer contributions and Central Government funding to deliver the Strategy, as well as the current restrictions on S106 contributions, be noted.**

CB-67 TELFORD & WREKIN LOCAL PLAN

Key Decision identified as **Telford & Wrekin Local Plan** in the Notice of Key Decisions published on 11 November 2015.

Recommendations to Council - not subject to Call-in

Councillor R.A. Overton, Cabinet Member: Housing, Public Health & Protection, presented the report of the Assistant Director: Planning Specialist, which confirmed that the Council was now ready to publish a version of the Local Plan that it intended to submit to the Secretary of State for an independent examination. The latest 'Publication' version of the Local Plan was appended to the report in the form of documents that could be viewed by Members on the Council website.

Public consultation on the previous version of the Plan had resulted in 385 representations from residents, parish & town councils, local organisations and businesses. As a result of the comments and advice received, Officers had made a number of revisions to the Local Plan – although these did not alter the overall thrust of the Plan and, in particular, the Borough's housing

requirement of 15,555 new homes by 2031. The main changes were summarised in the report, and included new boundaries of three proposed 'strategic landscapes', designating Lawley and Ironbridge as District Centres, reduction in the minimum amount of employment land to be delivered over the lifetime of the Plan, greater emphasis of the Town Centre as a sub-regional centre, rewriting of policies affecting the provision of rural housing, and allocated Housing Sites at The Beeches and The Nedge had been reduced in area.

The Council had also prepared an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which provided the estimated infrastructure needs associated with the levels of growth anticipated in the Local Plan. No projects identified in the IDP had been identified as critical to the delivery of the Plan.

If approved by Full Council, the latest version of the Local Plan would be formally published for a period of 6 weeks to allow for further representations to be made. Subject to any further revisions, it could then be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination by a Planning Inspector.

Councillor A.J. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) believed that the requirement for over 15,000 new houses was still too high, and there was no clear understanding of where this figure came from. There was a danger that the supply of houses would out-strip the creation of new jobs, and the current Plan was not sustainable. There was concern at the inclusion of Housing Allocation Site H1 at Muxton – there was no need to build houses in this location on green-field, open countryside. The Cabinet Member stated that the overall housing requirement had been reduced from the figure in the earlier draft Plan, and that a large number of those dwellings had already been built or received planning permission. It was the Government who were applying the pressure for more houses to be built. It was believed that the Local Plan was robust and addressed the needs of the Borough up to 2031.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND to COUNCIL

- (a) that the Publication Version of the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan and the Policies Map be approved for publication and submission to the Secretary of State for independent examination in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town & Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012;**
- (b) that authority be delegated to the Assistant Director: Planning Specialist (or any Officer authorised by this post-holder) to exercise all the Council's powers (besides those which are non-executive powers) relating to the processing of the Local Plan through to adoption, including all the powers under the 2012 Regulations and the 2004 Act relating to the preparation and submission of documents and information to the Secretary of State, the independent examination and further publication up to adoption;**

- (c) that authority be delegated to the Assistant Director: Planning Specialist (or any Officer authorised by this post-holder), during the period between publication/submission and the end of the independent examination, to recommend to the planning inspector conducting the independent examination any changes to the Publication Version of the Local Plan or the Policies Map which the Assistant Director (or authorised Officer) considers appropriate in response to representations which may be received or changes in circumstances which may occur during this period.

MICHAEL BARKER

At the end of the above item, the Cabinet Member: Housing, Public Health & Public Protection reported that this would be the last Cabinet meeting attended by Michael Barker, Assistant Director: Planning Specialist, before his retirement. He thanked Michael for all his work on the Local Plan, and other Members paid tribute to his long standing contribution to the Authority.

The meeting ended at 6.07 pm.

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Jonathan Eatough
Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & People Services
Date: 13 January 2016

Signed:

Date: