

## **BOROUGH OF TELFORD & WREKIN**

### **Minutes of the Meeting of the Borough of Telford & Wrekin held on Thursday 3 March 2016 at 6.30pm at The Place, Oakengates.**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillors J.C. Ashford, S.L. Barnes, S. Bentley, K.T. Blundell, M. Boylan, A.J. Burford, S.P. Burrell, L.D. Carter, E.A. Clare, G.H. Cook, S. Davies, N.A. Dugmore, A.J. Eade, A.R.H. England, N.A.M. England, R.C. Evans, I.T.W. Fletcher, V.A. Fletcher, J.A. Francis, C.A. Furnival, K.R. Guy, M.B. Hosken, J. Jones, R.T. Kiernan, A. Lawrence, J. Loveridge, N.C. Lowery, C.N. Mason, A.D. McClements, A.A. Meredith, J.C. Minor, C.P.R. Mollett, L.A. Murray (Mayor), T.J. Nelson R.A. Overton, J. Pinter, G.C.W. Reynolds, S.A.W. Reynolds, S.J. Reynolds, H. Rhodes, K.S. Sahota (Leader), J.M. Seymour, P.J. Scott, R.J. Sloan, C.F. Smith (Speaker), M.J. Smith, B.D. Tillotson, K.L. Tomlinson, W.L. Tomlinson, C.R. Turley, P.R. Watling and D.G. Wright

#### **72. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 21 January 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Mayor.

#### **73. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors E.J Carter and E.J. Greenaway,

#### **74. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **75. LEADER'S REPORT & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

##### **Leader's Report**

The Leader reported on various matters including the recent Budget consultation which had resulted in over 4,000 responses. He pointed out that the Council was in consultation with the public, partners and Parish councils and had listened to responses by making a number of adaptations to the original proposals. A number of Parish councils had taken over Library services in their areas, enabling those services to be kept open for the public. More than 60% of people responding to the consultation had supported the principle of increasing Council Tax by at least 3.2%, including the government agreed 2% increase for Adult Social Care. The proposed increase was still one of the lowest rises in the Midlands.

The Telford Land Deal report, which would be discussed later in the meeting, would provide 2,800 new homes, 8,500 new jobs and up to £44.5m investment into the local area. The Council would continue to work collaboratively with partners to attract businesses and visitors to the town.

## **76. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor reported on a number of engagements that he had attended since the last meeting of the Council. He thanked his fellow councillors for their support. His charitable fund stood at over £6k and his aim was to collect £12k by the end of the Civic year for his designated charities, Samaritans, MS Society and Wellington Cottage Care.

## **77. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No questions were received.

## **78. CABINET DECISIONS MADE SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

Members received the report on the Cabinet decisions made since the last meeting of the Council.

A number of questions were raised regarding item 2.1.1 on the report on matters determined by Cabinet, Pride in Your High Streets and Local Centres.

Councillor S Davies, Cabinet Member: Business, Neighbourhood & Customer Services welcomed support for the scheme, investment in the Borough's High Streets and District centres was vital for the town. He confirmed that applications had been subject to due diligence with an Independent panel being appointed to evaluate applications. Successful applications had been through a robust process and would be subject to further checks during the next evaluation phase. In answering specific queries about one of the companies with successful applications he said he would be happy to meet with councillors to discuss any concerns they may have about any applicants.

Responding to a question on road repairs in Newport, he noted that Newport was set to receive £122k for High Street improvements and that any pot hole issues should be reported by councillors in the normal way. He was disappointed that some councillors were not able to support investment in District centres. Referring to a question on the Lord Hill building, Councillor Davies explained that land adjacent the building had been sold for partly for housing development and for some car parking spaces. The proposed work would bring the building back in to use after it had remained empty and derelict for a number of years.

In response to a question on item 2.2.4, the report on Waters Upton Neighbourhood Planning Referendum, Councillor R A Overton, Cabinet Member: Housing, Public Health & Protection, agreed that if Parish councils wished to do so then they should go forward with a Neighbourhood Plan.

Councillor E A Clare, Cabinet Member: Leisure Services & Culture, responded to questions regarding item 2.2.3, the Telford & Wrekin Playing Pitch Strategy 2016. She noted that due to the unusually high level of rainfall during the year, together with high useage, some of the Council's playing pitches had suffered. But with time

and drier conditions these pitches would improve. She refuted the suggestion that unpaid volunteers were not able to maintain sports pitches to a high standard.

## **79. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET**

### **i) Telford Land Deal**

Councillor S Davies, Cabinet Member: Business, Neighbourhood & Customer Services presented the report of the Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment, which sought approval for a deal with the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) whereby the Council would take responsibility for marketing and selling all HCA's employment land in Telford for the next 10 years. HCA was an agency for the Department of Communities and Local Government. The government were committed to allow the Borough to share in the receipts from this land on the basis that by investing into preparing these sites for the market they would be sold at a higher market value than anticipated by HCA.

Over ten years the deal aimed to generate:

- 2,800 new home
- 8,500 new jobs
- 300,000 square foot new employment area
- Up to £44.5m investment into the local area for new infrastructure to support growth
- A potential £6m per annum in Council Tax and Business Rates by the end of the programme

Councillor C A Furnival joined the meeting at 7.17 pm after being delayed.

A number of members spoke strongly in support of this initiative, citing the longer term benefits for the Borough, whilst some members raised concerns over the level of risk associated with investment.

Following a debate it was:

### **RESOLVED –**

**a) That Council delegates authority to the Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment, in consultation with the Assistant Director: Finance & Human Resources and the Cabinet Members for Finance & Service Delivery and Business, Neighbourhood & Customer Services, to finalise the terms for the Land Deal;**

**b) That Council delegates authority to the Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment, in consultation with the Assistant Director: Finance & Human Resources and the Cabinet Member for Finance & Service Delivery, to enter into an agreement for the transfer of HCA liability sites to the Council's ownership where costs are within the changes to the capital**

**programme and revenue budget sought by this Report, this includes £18k towards revenue costs of managing liability sites**

**c) That Council enters into a Land Deal and all the implications of this including the approval of necessary changes to the capital programme and revenue budget to facilitate the Land Deal as outlined in the report**

**d) That Council delegates authority to the Assistant Director: Legal, Procurement & Commissioning to seal or sign any documents required to give effect to the recommendations contained in this report.**

## **80. SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLANNING 2016/17 – 2017/18**

The Overview and Revenue Budget report set out the unprecedented pressures facing the Council. DCLG's Departmental Expenditure Limit which funded Local Government would be cut by a further 53% in cash terms during the remaining four years of this Parliament. Local Government had already faced greater cuts than almost any other part of the public sector. In addition, the cuts so far had been allocated unevenly across different council areas; those areas with the greatest deprivation had tended to see the largest cuts with the Borough being hit hard. The Council had already delivered £80m of savings, meaning £1,100 less to spend on services for each household in the Borough. The latest grant settlement meant that the Council would have to make a further £30m savings over the next two years. The Council had always sought to protect front line services as far as possible but there were now no options other than to propose some extremely difficult cuts that would impact on communities. The Council was committed to meeting the needs of vulnerable people and was increasing the budget for Adult Services and Children's Safeguarding by £3.2m in the next year.

Councillor Carter told the meeting that the Council needed to find new ways of meeting the approaching challenges and could no longer be the answer to everything. There were a number of core principles underpinning the budget which included:

- Protecting the most vulnerable
- Driving growth by attracting and retain businesses
- Protecting front line services wherever possible
- Bringing in Income and having a commercial outlook
- Continued drive for efficiencies
- Working with partners to identify innovative solutions to protect services

The Council did not want to make the proposed changes and would actively work with partner organisations wherever possible in order to identify alternative solutions to minimise the impact of the cuts. But with a further 20% cut to the government Revenue Support Grant next year it was not possible for the Council to continue to provide all of the current services. An extensive public consultation had been undertaken with a clear majority expressing a preference for a Council Tax increase over and above the 2% Adult Social Care precept assumed by the government.

Following the consultation process Cabinet had confirmed its key budget strategy proposals for 2016/17 and later years as:

- A total council tax increase of 3.2%, including implementation of the new Adult Social Care precept of 2% on council tax - as assumed by the Government. This reflected the clear majority support of respondents to the consultation for an additional council tax increase in order to help reduce the cuts to front-line services, and minimise the impact of the loss of the Government's "Council Tax Freeze Grant". This increase was lower than most other local authorities with social services responsibilities in the West Midlands, and reflected awareness of the continuing pressure on household budgets;
- Minimising cuts to priority services for vulnerable adults and children as far as possible, against a backdrop of unprecedented cuts in government funding, through good financial management and implementing the new ring-fenced Adult Social Care precept. This would allow an investment of an additional £1.62m for children's safeguarding budget and an increase of £1.65m in the budget for adult services;
- Protecting and creating jobs through an investment of over £25m to improve and develop industrial, commercial or retail facilities, and spending just under £4m over two years to roll-out Superfast Broadband to parts of the Borough where there is no broadband infrastructure.
- Investing in neighbourhoods and communities – including maintaining and improving highway and transport infrastructure, a Community Pride Fund for 2017/18, continued funding up to the end of 2018/19 for tackling key environmental issues, and an investment of £50m in Nuplace – the Council's wholly-owned housing company.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of communities and addressing health inequalities – including funding to campaign for the protection of services at the Princess Royal Hospital.

Attached to the report were a number of appendices, including savings proposals, Impact Assessments of the savings proposals, the Pay Policy Statement 2016/17, analysis of base budget movements, and details of Reserves and Balances.

Following publication of the Cabinet's budget proposals in early January 2016, there had been extensive consultation via a wide range of media and settings to involve local people and groups. This included 14 road show events taking place at locations around the Borough, two formal public meetings and visits to a number of community groups. In total, 1,347 contacts were made during these events, and 788 comments/views gathered. Extensive information (including two Council produced videos) was available on the Council website, and 2,135 online survey forms were completed. The full findings/results from the consultation exercise were appended to the report.

Since the draft budget proposals were approved for consultation, the Government had issued the final settlement for 2016/17. The only change affecting Telford & Wrekin had been a reduction of £4k relating to New Homes Bonus. The Public Health grant had, as anticipated, reduced by £0.3m in 2016/17 and £0.32m in 2017/18. It was noted that the Government had allocated additional grant funding to

some; mainly Conservative-run, Councils, but Telford & Wrekin had received no additional money. Following consultation and proposals from Scrutiny some of the original proposals had been deleted from the savings proposals (eg: Creative Arts service, Town Park visitor centre opening hours, winter maintenance service), putting on hold savings proposals for the Ice Rink, Ski Slope and Transport Age UK to allow for reviews of these services and their delivery, and the reduction (or re-phasing) of some savings proposals – including for Newport Library and the environmental maintenance budget. It was also proposed to increase the budget for children’s safeguarding by a further £0.2m to reflect increasing demands on the service. The reduction in the value of the savings package as a result of these changes was £246k in 2016/17 and £378k in 2017/18 and ongoing. This would be funded from the proposed 1.2% increase in Council Tax over and above the new Adult Social Care precept.

An equality impact analysis of the overall impact of the budget was appended to the report, along with environmental and economic impact assessments.

The Council’s Chief Financial Officer was required to give a view on the robustness of the Council’s financial strategy, including the use of balances, and this was appended to the report. This had concluded that the Council was pursuing a sound financial strategy in the context of the most prolonged and challenging financial position it had ever faced due to the combined effect of Government grant cuts and increased service pressures.

The report on the Capital Programme presented the Council’s Capital Strategy for 2015/16 – 2018/19 and later years and a capital programme of £264.299m that included the proposed investments contained in the overall budget strategy. It also set out the Council’s Asset Management Plan and planned building maintenance programme, particularly focusing on 2016/17, and the three year Highways and Transport capital investment programme.

The report on the Treasury Management Strategy detailed the Treasury Strategy to be adopted for 2016/17. The Strategy was set within the parameters of the latest guidance and accounting standards. It was expected the Council would borrow up to £52.4m in 2016/17 based on the current capital programme plans, and would adopt a flexible approach to borrowing. The report also provided an update on the treasury management activities during 2015/16. The weighted average return on internal investments at the end of December 2015 was 0.43% compared to a benchmark return for the period of 0.30%. The report also included the Council’s Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement, which had been extended to include the Public Finance Initiative Agreement and changed to reflect the way in which MRP was being charged in respect of historic borrowing. This would produce net savings in the short and medium terms.

The report on Prudential Indicators sought approval of the prudential indicators for 2016/17 to 2018/19 required under the Prudential Code of Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

Having been moved by Councillor Carter, the budget proposals were seconded by the Leader of the Council, Councillor K S Sahota.

The Council's Chief Financial Officer had certified the alternative budget proposals as likely to balance and therefore as being robust.

Councillor A J Eade, Leader of the main opposition group, responded to the budget proposals and moved an amendment in the form of his group's alternative budget proposals which had been circulated as a separate appendix with the budget papers. His group agreed with a great deal of the budget proposals, there was little room for manoeuvre with existing budget constraints. However, he was critical of the approach taken by some members of the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee, who he believed had been adversarial and unhelpful when alternative proposals had been presented. His group supported the 2% ring fenced Council Tax increase but not any additional increase. He had concerns over the level of borrowing and the risks associated with this as well as there being no financial provision for additional secondary school places to cater for future demand. He believed that money could be levied from developers to provide funding for increasing secondary school places by 2020. Library closures were strongly opposed and he was glad to see that amendments had been made to the budget regarding Newport Library.

Councillor A Lawrence seconded the proposals which included freezing Council Tax, reducing debt levels by not proceeding with some commercial investments, reducing the number of new homes to be built in the Borough by just over 3,000, transferring £1m from one off funding set aside for Single Status, committing £0.5m to fund 78 new apprentices for one year and £0.75m to fund a project to generate additional commercial income over and above current proposals and using one-off resources of £3.429m to balance the budget. He was concerned about the proposals for borrowing and investing in what he believed to be speculative investments as income was not guaranteed, in preference, his group would create centres of excellence and generate income from selling services to other Councils and public sector bodies. He was critical of the proposal to increase Council Tax each year for the rest of the term of this Council.

Councillor W J Tomlinson, Leader of the Liberal Democrat/Independent group, sincerely hoped that when the impact of this level of government cuts became apparent over the coming years, that the current policy would be reversed. He told the meeting that the Solar Farm and Nu Place would generate around £450k income in the coming year and could not understand why the Conservative group wished to dispose of these assets. He believed that disposing of assets generating income would make it increasingly difficult to find savings. Although he believed its aims to be laudable, he was not supportive of £1m expenditure on the Pride fund as he believed that this Revenue funding would be better used to support the Adult Social Care budget. The Pride Fund should be financed from Capital funding rather than Revenue funding. His group supported the proposed 3.2% Council Tax increase. He noted that Shropshire Council, despite received additional funding following government lobbying, had already agreed to increase their Council Tax by 3.9% for the next three years, illustrating the difficult financial position most Councils were faced with.

Councillor Carter responded at the end of the debate on the amendment and a vote was then taken on the amendment (alternative budget proposals) The amendment was defeated and further debate took place on the substantive motion to approve budget recommendations in reports E1-E5. Members also considered the comments of the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee on the proposals which were appended to report E1.

A number of members spoke both for and against the proposed budget. Those in favour strongly opposed alternative budget proposals to dispose of projects that were generating income. These included the Solar Farm and Nu Place projects. In addition, cutting the number of houses being built would also reduce projected revenues. In particular, a number of speakers emphasised that the budget proposals were to protect services in the longer term. Members speaking against the budget proposals raised concerns over proposed borrowing and associated risks.

A vote was taken on the budget proposals in reports E1 and E4 and the proposals were carried.

In accordance with legal requirements and Council Procedure Rule 11.3 a recorded vote was taken to approve recommendations in reports E5 (Council Tax setting).

Voting was as follows:

*For (28)*

*Councillors: Burford, L Carter, Clare, Cook, Davies, A England, N England, Evans, Guy, Jones, Loveridge, Mason, McClements, Minor, Murray, Overton, Pinter, G Reynolds, SA Reynolds, SJ Reynolds, Rhodes, Sahota, Scott, Sloan, C Smith, M Smith, Turley and Watling.*

*Against (21)*

*Councillors: Ashford, Barnes, Bentley, Boylan, Burrell, Dugmore, Eade, I Fletcher, V Fletcher, Francis, Furnival, Hosken, Kiernan, Lawrence, Lowery, Meredith, Mollett, Nelson, Seymour, Tillotson and Wright*

*Abstentions (3)*

*Councillors: Blundell, K Tomlinson and W Tomlinson*

## **RESOLVED –**

### **(i) Overview and Revenue Budget**

- 1. To consider the feedback from consultation summarised in Appendix 17 and from Scrutiny in Appendix 15.**
- 2. To note the Impact Assessments contained in Appendices 3 and 4.**
- 3. To approve the base budget in Appendix 10.**

- 4. To approve a council tax increase of 3.2% for 2016/17 (including the new 2% Adult Social Care precept assumed by the Government) and a medium term strategy of increases at the same level for the three years from 2017/18 to 2019/20 to match the period of the CSR and 4 year settlement.**
- 5. To approve the savings package detailed in Appendix 2 and the revenue pressures detailed in Appendix 2C.**
- 6. To note the commitment to continue to work with partner organisations, including Town & Parish Councils and Voluntary Sector and Community Groups to seek to identify ways to mitigate the impact of some of the cuts to services that we can no longer afford to provide.**
- 7. In order to support these discussions to approve the use of funding from the invest to Save/Capacity Fund to provide transitional funding for a Partnership Support Programme and to grant delegated authority to the Director for Customer, Neighbourhood and Well-Being Services after consultation with either the Cabinet Member for Business, Neighbourhood & Customer Services or the Cabinet Member for Council Finance and Service Delivery to agree allocations of funding from the Invest to Save/Capacity Fund to facilitate support packages in line with the principles set out in Section 19 of this report.**
- 8. To approve the policy framework for Reserves and Balances outlined in Appendix 12.**
- 9. To approve the revenue implications of the medium term capital programme for the period 2015/16 - 2018/19 set out in the Capital Programme report also on this agenda.**
- 10. To note our Efficiency Strategy/ Plan contained in Appendix 18.**
- 11. To approve the Pay Policy for 2016/17 included as Appendix 5 which has already been approved by the Personnel Committee.**
- 12. That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director: Finance & Human Resources to action any virements required following the final allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant and other related Education Grants as long as they are within the budget and policy framework.**
- 13. That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director: Early Help & Support, in consultation with the Cabinet Member: Adult Social Care, to enter into appropriate Section 256 and Section 75 Agreements under the NHS Act 2006 (as amended).**
- 14. That the Assistant Director: Legal, Procurement & Commissioning be authorised to execute all necessary contract documentation including the affixing of the common seal of the council as appropriate to enable the council to enter into appropriate Section 256 and Section 75 Agreements under the NHS Act 2006.**

15. To note the CFO's robustness statement in Appendix 14.

(ii) **Capital Programme**

1. To approve the report and associated capital estimates for 2015/16 and 2016/17 – 2018/19, which incorporates the Capital Strategy, the Capital Programme (Annex I), the Planned Building Maintenance Programme (Annex II), and Asset Management Plan (Annex III) and the three year Highways and Transport capital investment programme (Annex IV).
2. To delegate authority to the Assistant Director: Development, Business & Employment to deliver the planned programme of works within the Asset Management Plan and to the Assistant Director: Neighbourhood & Customer Services the Highways and Transport capital investment programme in line with the approved budgets with any variations or changes to schemes in these programmes, that remain within overall approved budgets, after consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Members.

(iii) **Treasury Management**

1. To note the treasury management activities for the first half year;
2. To note the Treasury Management Policy Statement (Appendix A);
3. To approve the Treasury Strategy, including the Annual Investment Strategy for 2016/17 together with the associated treasury Prudential Indicators and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement, which will apply from 2015/16 onwards.

(iv) **Prudential Indicators**

1. To approve the prudential indicators proposed in this report as part of setting the budget for 2016/17.

(v) **Council Tax Formal Resolution**

1. Members are asked to approve the formal resolutions to determine the levels of Council Tax for 2016/17 as detailed in the report.

81. **MINUTES OF BOARDS & COMMITTEES**

Council noted the resolved and draft minutes of the following Boards and Committees:

Audit Committee	26 January 2016
Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee	6,13 & 19 January 2016
Licensing Committee	9 December 2015
Personnel Committee	7 January & 11 February 2016
Planning Committee	13 January & 3 February 2016

**82. QUESTIONS**

None Received

**83. NOTICES OF MOTION**

None received

The meeting ended at 9.14 pm.

**Mayor:** .....

**Date:** .....