

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 17 January 2019.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.
Councillors J M Palmer, J A Gray, R Fuller,
D M Tysoe and Mrs M L Beuttell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors T D Sanderson and Mrs S Smith.

48. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13th December 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

49. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

50. ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS FOR THE COUNCIL BUDGET 2019/20

The Cabinet gave consideration to a report by the Independent Group Leader (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining alternative proposals for the Council's budget 2019/20. The proposals related to the community chest, grounds maintenance, leisure and play facilities for young people, the establishment of a new budget for a Local Highway Improvements Scheme for Huntingdonshire and an increase in Council Tax of 3%.

In introducing the report, the Independent Group Leader, Councillor T D Sanderson, proposed an amendment to their proposal relating to the community chest budget and suggested that the figure of £100K be reduced to £30K. Regarding the proposal to increase Council Tax to 3%, it was confirmed that this would equate to a difference of £35K when compared to the proposed 2.6% increase recommended in the Draft 2019/20 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2023/24 (Minute No.18/51 post refers).

Much discussion ensued on each of the proposals. Executive Councillors outlined their concern that Town and Parish Councils would not welcome the management of all grounds maintenance responsibilities within their communities. In response to questions, the Independent Group Leader confirmed that the terms of the transfer would be subject to negotiations between the District Council and Town and Parish Councils which could potentially include the transfer of assets. Owing to the lack of detail at the meeting, the Independent Group Leader offered to provide a further report on proposals for grounds maintenance to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) at their meeting in February 2019.

Concerns were expressed over the suggestion to transfer budget from the Active Lifestyles Team to the community chest budget. Despite the proposed reduction to £30K, Executive Councillors highlighted the benefits to the community that the Active Lifestyles budget currently delivered and noted the success of the Team at generating additional income. Furthermore, comment was made that the current community chest budget was not fully utilised and that efforts needed to be made to raise awareness of the availability of these funds and the funding criteria amongst the local community.

Executive Councillors were unable to support the proposals around leisure and play facilities for young people, the introduction of a Local Highway Improvements Scheme for Huntingdonshire and an increase in Council Tax by 3%. In noting the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) and having thanked the Independent Group Leader for the proposals, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the proposed alternative budget and Council Tax proposals be received and noted; and
- (b) that a further report on proposals for grounds maintenance be submitted by the Independent Group Leader to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) at their meeting in February 2019.

51. DRAFT 2019/20 REVENUE BUDGET & MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2020/21 TO 2023/24); INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

By way of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Executive Councillors were presented with the details of the Draft Budget 2019/20 and the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2020/21 to 2023/24.

In noting the forecast outturn position for 2018/19, Members' attention was drawn to Tables 2 and 3 detailing service savings, income and growth and a summary of savings and additional income respectively. In discussing the position with Government Grants, it was reported that the New Homes Bonus would be phased out over the four year period with the first reduction planned in 2020/21. Whilst Business Rates had been modelled on a 2% growth rate, Members were mindful of the implications of the Fair Funding Review which would see a reduction in the level of income retained by the Council. These changes had been included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy taking effect from 2020/21.

The draft Capital Programme for the period 2019/20 to 2023/24 was noted together with the Minimum Revenue Position which had been calculated at £2.42m.

Referring to the proposed increase in Council Tax of 2.6%, the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources commented on the need to protect the District's most vulnerable community groups from sharp

increases in rates. Attention was also drawn to the £1.3m budget gap which had been estimated at the end of the Medium Term Financial Strategy period. In doing so, assurances were received that efforts had been made to deliver a robust and resilient budget.

The Cabinet expressed their appreciation to the Executive Councillor for Strategic Resources, Senior Officers and staff for their continued assured management of the Council's finances and production of a comprehensive budget. Having commended the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) for the scrutiny of the budget at their meeting on 8th January 2019, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- a) that the overall Draft Budget 2019/20 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2023/24 (as attached as Appendix 1 of the report now submitted) be approved;
- b) that the savings and growth proposals (as per paragraphs 4.1 to 4.6 and attached as Appendices 3 and 4 of the report now submitted) of the draft Budget 2019/20 be approved;
- c) that the draft Capital Programme 2019/20 to 2023/24 (as per paragraphs 9.1 to 9.2 of the report now submitted) be approved; and
- d) that the planned increase in Council Tax of 2.6% for 2019/20 and for the duration of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (as per paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3 and Table 6 of the report as submitted) be approved.

52. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information in relation to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

53. HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK - DETAILED BUSINESS CASE

The Cabinet gave consideration to an exempt report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) seeking approval of a capital investment proposal for Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

In noting the benefits the project would deliver and following a proposal made by the Executive Councillor for Partnerships and Well-Being to amend the recommendation contained within the report, it was

RESOLVED

that the investment proposal for Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, as contained within the submitted exempt report, subject to a satisfactory re-negotiation of a new long term arrangement on land ownership with Cambridgeshire County Council, be approved.

Chairman