

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 September 2011 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. P Fleming (Chairman)

Cllr. Mrs P Bosley, Cllr. Mrs C Clark, Cllr Mrs J Davison and
Cllr. B Ramsey

Apologies for absence: Cllr. Mrs A Hunter

Cllr. M Fittock and Cllr. Mrs F Parkin were also present

24. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 21 JULY 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21 July 2011 be approved and signed as a correct record.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

26. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

There were no questions from Members.

27. MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE AND/OR SELECT COMMITTEES (PARAGRAPH 5.20 OF PART 4 (EXECUTIVE) OF THE CONSTITUTION)

There were no references from the Performance and Governance Committee or from Select Committees.

28. WEST KENT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2011-16

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities introduced a report which recommended that the Council should be asked to adopt the West Kent Homelessness Strategy as Council Policy. The report explained that although authorities which had achieved "excellent" status had been relieved of the duty to produce a Homelessness Strategy, which had been introduced by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Department for Communities and Local Government still recommended that authorities should have one. The draft Strategy had been developed in consultation with a wide range of service users and partners across various sectors and updated the Joint Homelessness Strategy 2007, although the new draft Strategy was significantly different from the 2007 document. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities explained that Equalities issues had been fully considered during the development of the Strategy. Key themes that had emerged from consultation included a desire for more commonality in

how the three West Kent local authorities (Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) worked. This included a need for more shared services, more innovation and sharing of knowledge, information and good practice, and opportunities to streamline services, processes and information. The draft Strategy provided the national, regional and local policy context, methods of consultation and key findings along with the five key strategic objectives and conclusions. Members were informed that the Strategy had already been adopted as policy by Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's which was the reason that the Strategy had been brought directly to Cabinet.

The Leader of the Council sought clarification on the likely impact of the change to limit payments for people under 35 (up from 25) to the shared room rate, how many people would be affected by the change and whether there were sufficient Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMO) to cope with the demand for housing. The Head of Housing and Communications explained that this data was not available yet but that the Council would be looking at HMOs to help to meet demand along with other initiatives. The Leader of the Council also asked what the anticipated impact of direct payments was likely to be and how many people currently defaulted on rent payments. The Head of Housing and Communications explained that currently around 3% of tenants in social housing were in arrears but that it was anticipated that this could rise to 6% or more. The Leader questioned the impact of the new levels of benefit payment and how these would enable people to secure housing given the vibrant private housing rental sector in Sevenoaks and how many single people were likely to be in housing need. The Leader raised concerns about providing sufficient affordable housing and the Head of Housing and Communications explained that the Council had several initiatives to maximise the private sector provision and would be working in partnership with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells District Council and Maidstone Borough Council and the Homes and Communities Agency to maximise funding to provide affordable housing as well. This would include measures to bring empty properties back into occupation.

The Cabinet congratulated the Head of Housing and Communications and her team for an outstanding piece of work to tackle homelessness across West Kent.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Improvement informed the Cabinet that the Council would be sharing a consultant with Maidstone Borough Council to develop a brief on provision for gypsy and travellers.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that the West Kent Homelessness Strategy be adopted as District Council policy.

29. PROPOSED CHANGES TO STAFF TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Cabinet considered a report which set out proposals to achieve the savings included in the 10 Year Budget arising from changes to staff terms and conditions. The changes would be introduced on a phased basis to

mitigate the impact on productivity and to ensure that residents continued to receive high quality, value for money services whilst delivering the level of savings required over the life of the 10 Year Budget. The proposals had been subject to extensive consultation with staff who had broadly understood the need for savings to be made and were supportive of the proposal as the “least worst option”. However a number of concerns had been raised about the impact of the proposals on staff pay, motivation and morale. The report outlined the consultation timetable and briefings which had begun in April 2011 with a view to the changes being introduced in April 2012. The proposed changes came in addition to earlier savings identified which had included the removal of market supplements, no national pay awards from 2010/11 to 2012/12 and the removal of a leased car option. It was noted that in addition to briefings the staff most directly affected by the proposals had received one-to-one meetings.

The proposed changes to staff terms and conditions were outlined in Appendix A to the report and attention was drawn to the comments received from staff in response to the consultation process which ended on 6 September, which were summarised in Appendix B to the report along with the management response to those comments. The Head of Finance and Human Resources informed Members that two further comments had been received after the agenda had gone to print which related to how the changes would affect career progression and incremental progression through the salary scales in April 2012.

The Cabinet noted that the proposals had been developed by staff with the savings target in mind and had been subject to widespread consultation with officers at different levels across the Council. Members particularly welcomed the opportunity to read the detailed comments from staff and the general support for the proposed changes. It was felt that it would be important to ensure that there was clarity about the impact of the changes and how they would impact upon career and salary progression. Members noted that the proposals would deliver the savings required in full over the 10 year period of the budget but provided some protection for affected staff up-front whilst giving greater flexibility in terms of the delivery of the 10 Year Budget.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that:

- (1) The changes to staff terms and conditions set out in the report and in Appendix B be implemented from 1 April 2012; and
- (2) The 10-year budget be amended as shown in Appendix C to the report to take account of the phased introduction of these changes.

Implementation of Decisions

This notice was published on 19 September 2011. All decisions take effect immediately.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.18 pm

Chairman