

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the held on
9 February 2012 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. Bosley, Mrs Bracken, Mrs. Clark, Mrs. Hunter and
Ramsay

Also Present: Cllrs. Bosley, Fittock and Mrs Purves.

Apologies for absence: Cllr. Mrs. Davison

66. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 12 JANUARY
2012

Referring to Minute 64, the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities clarified that she had not been questioning the legitimacy of the grounds for refusal but was arguing that grounds for refusal should be applied consistently and not selectively.

Resolved: That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 12 January 2012 be approved and signed as a correct record.

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Hunter declared a Personal Interest as the Council Appointee on the Board of the Citizens Advice Bureau (Sevenoaks and Swanley).

68. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

There were no questions from Members.

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

(a) Treasury Management Strategy – (*Performance and Governance – 10
January 2012*)

This was considered under Minute 72 below.

70. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities introduced the draft Housing Strategy Action Plan which had been produced to reflect

findings from consultation and latest intelligence, both of which provided an indication of future housing need and demand. If approved, delivery of the Housing Strategy Action Plan would be overseen by the Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) Strategic Housing Sub-group, which was represented by District Council Officers and a number of other partner organisations. Progress reports would be taken to the main LSP and Services Select Committee to update on strategic objectives. A full review and update of the Housing Action Strategy Plan would take place in 2014.

The Chairman highlighted that the changes that were being introduced to Housing Benefit and the introduction of Universal Tax Credit would have an impact on the Action Plan. The Housing Policy Manager reported that the changes would be kept under review and any amendments to the Action Plan would be presented to the LSP Strategic Housing Sub-group when necessary.

Action Point: The Chairman also requested that a report on any risks associated with the proposed welfare reform be presented to Cabinet as soon as further information on the changes was available.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities commented that the extensive use of acronyms made the document difficult to understand and encouraged more use of plain English in documents. The Head of Housing and Communications reported that the Action Plan was the working document of the LSP Strategic Housing Sub-group and was therefore more detailed as the primary audience was Officers. The Housing Policy Manager reported that it was best practice to provide this level of detail in the action plan and that a more accessible summary would be publically available on the Council's website.

A Member noted that the conclusion on page 15 of the report should read "The HSAP aims to make best use of limited financial and non-financial *resources* to deliver the housing strategy to best effect..."

Resolved that the Housing Strategy Action Plan be recommended to Full Council for approval.

71. IT STRATEGY

The Head of IT and Facilities Management introduced the IT Strategy and Action Plan 2012-2015 which set out the Council's strategic approach to the management, use and development of technology. Within the strategy, consideration was also given to the Council's strategic priorities, policies and other key strategies. The strategy also set out key assumptions being made to deliver the required outcomes. The IT Strategy and Action Plan would be delivered within the agreed 10 year budget and would support Departments across the Council in delivering their services.

The Chairman highlighted the context in which IT services were being delivered, specifically the reduction in the allocated ICT Budgets from 2012-2015.

The Cabinet noted that the IT Strategy and Action Plan 2012-2015 had been considered by the Services Select Committee on 31 January 2012 and no changes had been proposed.

Resolved that it be recommended to Council that the IT Strategy and Plan 2012-2015 be approved and adopted.

72. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2012/13

Prior to the introduction of the report, the Chairman reported that this would be the last Cabinet meeting attended by the Head of Finance and Human Resources, Tricia Marshall. Members thanked Ms Marshall for the support she had provided the Council and wished her well in her new role as Director of Resources at Canterbury City Council. The Chairman welcomed Adrian Rowbotham as the newly appointed Group Manager – Financial Services and Helen Martin as the newly appointed Finance Manager.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money introduced the Treasury Management Strategy 2012/13 setting out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments.

The Portfolio Holder reported that at its latest meeting the Finance Advisory Group had discussed the issue of credit ratings and they considered that, given the limited number of institutions to which the Council could lend, the minimum long term credit rating should be reduced to A instead of A-, which is included in the report. Cabinet supported this amendment to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

The Chairman of the Performance and Governance Committee reported the Committee had considered the Treasury Management Strategy at its last meeting. Members had expressed concern regarding the risk associated with reducing the Council's credit rating requirement. The Chairman of the Performance and Governance Committee reported that his personal view was that there was a greater risk in not having greater diversity in terms of investments.

The Head of Finance and Human Resources reported that Officers were cautiously investigating a number of options but that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find places to invest. Members noted that the Council continued to only invest in UK-based banks.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

73. CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND ASSET MAINTENANCE 2012/15

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money introduced a report setting out the proposed 2012/15 Capital Programme, with supporting

documentation in a standard format for individual scheme bids. Projected capital receipts were included, indicating the proposed financing of the Programme.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money highlighted that the proposed scheme for locating a Police office within the Argyle Road Offices had been included within the Capital Bids.

Resolved that:

(a) the Capital Programme 2012/15 and funding method set out in the report be approved; and

(b) the proposed Asset Maintenance budget of £372,000 be agreed for 2012/13.

74. REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2012/13

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money introduced a report setting out the proposed budget and required level of Council Tax for 2012/13. The proposed net expenditure budget was £13.443m (£13.771 in 2011/12). Subject to any further changes this would envisage no Council Tax increase in 2012/13, with the District's council tax remaining at £181.89 for a Band D property for the year.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for Value for Money, the Finance Advisory Group and Officers for the work they had undertaken in producing the 10 year budget which had provided financial stability for the Council. As a result of good financial management the Council had been able to freeze Council Tax at a time when other Local Authorities were seeking to increase their level of Council Tax.

Resolved that it be recommended to Full Council that:

(a) The Summary of Council Expenditure and Council Tax set out in Appendix C to the report be approved;

(b) The 10 year budget 2011/12 to 2021/22 set out in Appendix A, including the growth and savings proposals set out at Appendix B to the report, be approved and that where possible any variations during and between years be met from the Budget Stabilisation Fund.

(c) Any changes in the tax base and collection fund and other minor variations be transferred to/from the Budget Stabilisation Reserve.

75. ANNUAL REVIEW OF PARKING CHARGES FOR 2012/13 - RESULTS OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Portfolio Holder for the Cleaner and Greener Environment introduced a report outlining the outcome of the public consultation for the proposed increases to car park and on-street parking charges for 2012/13. On 3 November 2011, the Cabinet considered and approved proposals for increasing certain parking charges to contribute to the Council's overall budget target for 2012/13.

A petition containing 1,317 signatures calling upon the Council to abandon all plans to increase parking charges in Sevenoaks town centre in 2012 was submitted to Council at its meeting on 29 November 2011. It was resolved that the petition be referred to the Cabinet in order that it be considered at the same time as the outcome of the consultation process.

The consultation period for the car park proposals ended on 11 December 2011. In addition to the usual notices in local newspapers and the car parks, letters were sent to all season ticket holders and resident permit holders advising them of the proposals. In total nine responses were received to the consultation including a response from the Sevenoaks Town Council, Westerham Parish Council and Kent Police.

The consultation period for the on-street proposals ended on 11 December 2011. In addition to the usual notices in local newspapers and displayed on-street, letters were sent to all resident and non-resident permit holders advising them of the proposals. The petition submitted to Full Council on 29 November 2011 related to plans to increase parking charges in Sevenoaks town centre. Members noted that there were no proposals to increase on-street charges in the town centre. In total thirteen responses were received to the consultation including a response from Swanley Town Council and Kent Police.

The Portfolio Holder for the Cleaner and Greener Environment reported that minimal increases were being proposed with no change to evening charges and no Sunday charges. Increasing operating costs such as the business rates needed to be offset. Recent surveys had shown that the number of empty parking spaces in Sevenoaks town centre had been decreasing which suggested that more people were visiting the town centre.

Councillor Purves, addressing the Cabinet on behalf on the 1,317 petitioners stressed that wages had not been increasing and that many workers using the town centre car parks were on low wages and would struggle to pay the increased charges. Independent retailers had also voiced concern that higher parking charges would force people to visit out-of-town shopping centres rather than town centres.

The Chairman highlighted that many other nearby local authorities were considering parking charge increases greater than those for Sevenoaks. In relation to town centre workers the Council operated parking schemes just a short walk out of the town centre where parking was cheaper.

Resolved that the proposed car park and on-street parking charges approved by Cabinet on 3 November 2011 be implemented on or soon after 1 April 2012.

76. CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

The Portfolio Holder for Community Wellbeing introduced a report outlining progress on the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau during the current year. The report also sought approval for the Service Level Agreement for the next three financial years.

The Head of Community Development tabled two additional appendices outlining the Budgets for Sevenoaks and Swanley Citizens Advice Bureau and Edenbridge and Westerham Citizens Advice Bureau which had only recently become available.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the Citizens' Advice Bureau appreciated knowing the financial support they would receive over the next three years.

The Head of Community Development reported that the Citizen's Advice Bureaux were happy to sign the Service Level Agreement and had agreed the apportionment of the grant between themselves as required. The Chairman of Edenbridge & Westerham Citizens Advice Bureau had drawn attention to the significant proportion of funding they received from local trusts and thanked the Council for its support. The Bureau would be moving to the new Edenbridge community centre and running the front of house service for the County Council. This would reduce their overheads. Sevenoaks & Swanley had planned recently made significant savings, particularly through the new. In addition to a number of staff savings that had been made, the new manager for Sevenoaks and Swanley was a shared management post with Tonbridge and Malling. Changes were also planned to improve training arrangements whilst reducing costs and to the freeing up of adviser time for face to face work in bureaux through joint provision of telephone advice with Tonbridge and Malling.

The Portfolio Holder for the Cleaner and Greener Environment reported that the Citizens' Advice Bureau had made significant improvements in the seventeen years that she had been the Council's appointed representative on the Board.

Resolved that the draft Service Level Agreement for 2012/15 be agreed.

77. ADOPTION OF VISION FOR KENT

The Head of Community Development introduced the draft Vision for Kent. The three ambitions set out in the vision were (i) growing the economy, (ii) tackling disadvantage and (iii) putting the citizen in control. In addition, the document also set out three cross cutting themes (i) protecting and enhancing the environment, (ii) improving community safety, crime and anti-social behaviour, and (iii) improving health. The document recognised that District and Borough Council areas were the building blocks for service delivery in Kent and it also recognised the need to identify local priorities and deliver the ambitions in a way that met them.

It was proposed that performance assurance of the Vision for Kent should be light-touch and non-bureaucratic, using existing performance information. An Annual Report would also be developed.

The Portfolio Holder for the Cleaner and Greener Environment suggested that a glossary at the end of the document would aid public understanding. The Head of Community Development responded that, despite requests, Kent County Council had not produced a glossary.

The Chairman, who had been involved in developing the 'tackling disadvantage' ambition reported that this was the best piece of joint work with Kent County Council that he had been involved in.

Resolved that the draft Vision for Kent be endorsed.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.50 PM

CHAIRMAN

Implementation of Decisions

This notice was published on 13 February 2012. The decisions contained in minutes 70, 71, 72, 73 and 74 take effect immediately. The decisions contained in minutes 75, 76, 77 take effect on 21 February 2012.