

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2013 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. Bracken, Mrs. Clark, Mrs. Davison, Hogarth, Mrs. Hunter and Ramsay

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. Mrs. Bosley

Cllrs. Brookbank, Davison, Fittock, Gaywood and Searles were also present.

62. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 6th December 2012 be approved and signed as a correct record.

63. Declarations of interest

There were no further declarations of interest, other than those recorded on the Council's Register of Member Interest.

64. Questions from Members (maximum 15 minutes)

There were no questions.

65. Matters referred from Council

No matters were referred from Council.

66. 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.

67. Draft Budget 2013/14

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money introduced a report setting out progress made in preparing the 2013/14 budget and updating Members on key financial information recently received. The report showed that no further savings other than those set out in the four year plan were required to balance the budget for 2013/14; albeit the budget recognised some risks, including income. The overall emphasis was building on the strong framework provided by the 10-year budget, whilst taking into account any new financial burdens and challenges in the economy that would have an impact on budget assumptions.

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Members noted that equalities assessments had been completed for all of the Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs).

The Group Manager – Financial Services provided an update on the changes that had been made to the 10-year budget since the Cabinet meeting on 6th December 2012 which were outlined in Appendix A of the report. Four income items were showing adverse variations in the current year and whilst these variations were being contained by other savings there were serious concerns that if the income levels continued there would no longer be adequate compensating savings elsewhere.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money stressed that government indications surrounding council tax support funding being included in the District Council's overall grant settlement were speculative and that there was no guarantee of this.

The Chairman noted that the report outlined a number of “at risk” areas and reported that he had asked Officers to review the Big Community Fund. Currently money from the New Homes Bonus was used to support the Big Community Fund, however in future funds from the New Homes Bonus would be placed into the Budget Stabilisation Fund. The Chairman reminded Members that there was no guarantee that the New Homes Bonus would continue in future years and this appeared to be a prudent use of the funding to ensure that there was good budget stabilisation in the future. Members agreed that this appeared to be a sensible use of the New Homes Bonus and supported the proposals that had been put forward.

The Chairman also reported that a Minister within the Department for Community and Local Government (DCLG) had recently made a verbal statement regarding Council Tax Support and had announced that in 2013/14 there would be a further 8.5% decrease in funding. This would impact both Sevenoaks District Council and the Town and Parish Councils. Whilst there were no firm details of the proposals it was important that the Council had a healthy budget stabilisation fund in order to mitigate against the impact of any future proposals.

Members also noted that a significant amount of work would have to be undertaken on reviewing savings for the next year. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money had been asked by the Chairman to start work on identifying potential savings with a small group of Members.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money, the Group Manager – Financial Services and the Chief Executive Designate for the work they had undertaken on developing proposals for Members consideration.

Resolved: That Officers be asked to make the necessary amendments to the budget around use of the New Homes Bonus and provide a further update on 7th February 2013.

68. Calculation of Council Tax Base and other tax setting issues

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money introduced a report setting out details of the calculation of the District's tax base for council tax setting purposes. The figures were used to determine tax rates for each of the Council tax bands once the

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Council's budget requirement was known. The report also outlined the timetable for setting the 2013/14 council tax.

Members noted that the collection rate had been reduced to 99.3% and this rate reflected the difficulties anticipated by Officers in collecting council tax from people in receipt of Council Tax Support.

The Chairman highlighted that the costs of collection would also increase over the coming year and the Council could find itself in a position where it was spending more on collecting less. The Chairman also highlighted that the impact of changes in Council Tax Support would not be evenly spread across the District, as a result of this Town and Parish Councils would need to start to consider ways of protecting their residents in future years.

Resolved: that:

- (a) The report of the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Corporate Resources for the calculation of the Council's tax base for the year 2013/14 be approved;
- (b) pursuant to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Corporate Resources and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended) the amount calculated by the Sevenoaks District Council as its council tax base for the whole area for the year 2013/14 shall be 47,052.88;
- (c) pursuant to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Corporate Resources and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended) the amount calculated by the Sevenoaks District Council as the council tax base for 2013/14 for the calculation of local precepts shall be:

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Tax Base</u>
Ash-cum-Ridley	2,342.51
Brasted	729.63
Chevening	1,427.85
Chiddingstone	570.29
Cowden	398.28
Crockenhill	623.31
Dunton Green	806.71
Edenbridge	3,320.50
Eynsford	893.09
Farningham	594.73
Fawkham	269.51
Halstead	713.52
Hartley	2,436.35
Hever	584.92
Hextable	1,608.47
Horton Kirby & South Darent	1,239.75
Kemsing	1,773.07

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Knockholt	601.93
Leigh	778.76
Otford	1,647.13
Penshurst	798.88
Riverhead	1,200.57
Seal	1,146.50
Sevenoaks Town	8,890.62
Sevenoaks Weald	601.48
Shoreham	958.50
Sundridge	887.81
Swanley	5,103.66
Westerham	1,892.17
West Kingsdown	2,212.39

- (d) any expenses incurred by the Council in performing in part of its area a function performed elsewhere in its area by a parish or community council or the chairman of a parish meeting shall not be treated as special expenses for the purposes of section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

69. Senior Management Restructure

Members considered a report setting out a proposal for a restructure of the Council's senior management that would meet the commitment within the four year savings plan to deliver a reduction in senior management costs of £302,000.

The report outlined the criteria used to help shape the proposal, the proposed senior management structure, a summary of the consultation carried out with staff and the process that would be followed in appointing to new posts.

The Chief Executive Designate stressed that it was never easy to save money, particularly in an already lean authority such as Sevenoaks District Council. £60,000 savings had already been made following the departure of the Head of Finance and Human Resources and the Head of Development Services. The Director of Community and Planning Services had also offered to take voluntary redundancy and this would contribute toward the £302,000 savings that were required.

The proposed structure at Appendix A of the report had been developed to meet the anticipated future challenges and reflected a move towards a Chief Officer structure. The proposed Chief Officer roles were:

- Chief Officer Communities and Business
- Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services
- Chief Officer Housing
- Chief Officer Corporate Support
- Chief Officer Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)
- Chief Officer Planning
- Chief Officer Finance

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The posts of Chief Officer Finance and Chief Officer Planning would be subject to competitive assimilation including external competition.

The Chief Executive Designate reported that consultation had been undertaken with both Unison and affected staff and there had been no indication that the proposed structure was not supported. The Chief Executive Designate stated that the departure of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Community and Planning Services would leave a significant gap at a senior level particularly due to her contributions in transforming the Council.

The Chairman highlighted that significant changes to the senior management structure had already been made and were reflected in the report. One of the great successes of Sevenoaks District Council was its ability to develop its staff and prepare them for more senior roles. The Chairman stressed that this report was the first stage in the reorganisation process and further reviews of structures across the Council would be taking place. Sevenoaks District Council had found itself in the very fortunate position that the current Chief Executive had given early indication of his intention to retire which had meant that the Council had incurred no additional costs. The decision taken by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Community and Planning Services had also allowed the organisation to move forward.

In response to a question from a visiting Member, the Chairman reported that a review of Member-level governance structures would also be taking place in order to ensure that these structures complemented the Officer structures.

A Member suggested that one area of concern was the effect that the proposed changes and the resulting period of instability could have on the Planning Department however, she was working with the Chief Executive Designate to minimise this. The Member stressed the need to ensure that the current high standards were maintained. The Chief Executive reported that senior officers would be working hard over the next six months to prepare for the proposed changes and ensuring that the transition was as seamless as possible.

Resolved: That:

- (a) The report be endorsed;
- (b) It be noted that the costs associated with the restructure of senior management will be limited to, and met from, the earmarked Reorganisation Reserves as approved by Council in February 2012; and
- (c) It be noted that the cost of any service restructures resulting from the new senior management structure will be limited to, and met from, existing service budgets.

70. Whiteoak Leisure Centre Asset Maintenance Consideration of Options

The Head of Community Development introduced a report summarising four options for Swanley Whiteoak Leisure Centre and outlining the impact of each option. The Centre was built in the 1960s and it was now expected that major costs for repairs to the existing centre would be necessary over the next ten years. The existing asset

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maintenance budget would not be sufficient to address these needs. The report noted that the Centre was an important local facility and that it was necessary to consider options for its future.

Members noted the summary of the full Equalities Impact Assessment that had been undertaken.

Following detailed discussions Members agreed that, in light of the current economic climate, it was unlikely that Option One (do nothing) would be economically feasible in the future.

Options two (invest in the existing building) and three (replace the existing building on the same or a different site) were considered to be the most viable options and should be investigated further. Members agreed that it was important to consider how these options could be pursued without the Council incurring further debt.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Value for Money highlighted that the current building was not fit-for-purpose. In order to compare like-for-like costs for options two and three, costs associated with option two would also have to include the cost of making the existing building fit-for-purpose.

A visiting Member who was also a ward member concurred that options two and three appeared to be the most viable options and highlighted that the community need for a leisure centre had been proven. The Member stressed the need for local councillors to be consulted on any further proposed options. The Chairman agreed that it was essential that all local stakeholders were included in any consultation process.

Another visiting Member who was also a local ward member stressed the need for the new facilities to be flexible in meeting future needs and consumer demands. If the building were flexible it was possible that the commercial possibilities for the Centre could be extended.

Another visiting Member highlighted the importance of considering the financial implications of any decisions that were taken that would incur additional expenditure. The Member acknowledged that whilst the Council was currently incurring expenditure on on-going asset maintenance issues on a building that was not fit-for-purpose, it was also important to safeguard the local authority from additional future expenditure and suggested that option four (close the leisure centre) should not be dismissed if options two and three were found not to be financially viable.

It was agreed that Officers should be asked to investigate and explore all possibilities surrounding options two and three, consult with all stakeholders and report back to Members. It was envisaged that this process would take between three and six months. The Chairman requested that Officers narrow down the list of potential sites for a new leisure centre from the twelve that were currently listed as the investigation undertaken by Officers should give a clear understanding of the most viable sites.

Resolved: That Officers be asked to investigate and explore all possibilities surrounding Options Two (invest in the existing building) and Three (replace the existing building on the same or a different site), consulting with all stakeholders and report back to Members as soon as practicable.

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71. Consideration of Exempt Information

Members noted the information contained within Appendix C of Minute 70 without discussion and there was therefore no need for Members to go into closed session.

72. Whiteoak Leisure Centre Asset Maintenance Consideration of Options - Appendix C

Members noted the information contained in Appendix C under Minute 70.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.18 PM

CHAIRMAN