

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2013 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)

Cllrs. Hogarth, Ms. Lowe and Ramsay

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Bosley

Cllrs. Mrs. Davison, Dickins, Mrs. Hunter, Scholey and Searles were also present.

19. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 July be approved and signed as a correct record.

20. Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

21. Questions from Members (maximum 15 minutes)

There were no questions from Members.

22. Matters referred from Council

There were no matters referred from Council.

23. Matters referred from the Audit Committee and Scrutiny Committee (Paragraph 5.20 of Part 4 (Executive) of the Constitution)

There were no references from the Audit Committee or Scrutiny Committee.

24. Recommendations from the Cabinet Advisory Committees

- (a) Grants to Voluntary Organisations – Amendments to Guidelines (*Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee – 18 June 2013*)

This was considered at Minute 25.

- (b) Annual Treasury Management Report 2012/13 (*Finance and Resources Advisory Committee – 29 August 2013*)

This was considered at Minute 26.

- (c) Procurement Strategy Update (*Finance and Resources Advisory Committee – 29 August 2013*)

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This was considered at Minute 28.

25. Grants to Voluntary Organisations - Amendments to the Guidelines

The Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development introduced a report recommending minor changes to the Council's Community Grant Scheme guidelines in order to streamline the application process, place greater emphasis on volunteering and ensure that that the scheme did not subsidise statutory services provided by the voluntary sector for other authorities under commissioning or other contract arrangements.

The Council's Community Grant Scheme helped voluntary organisations who provided services for residents of the District and contributed to relevant priorities set out in the Community Plan. The total budget available for distribution in 2013/14 was £153,331, including £98,540 for the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CABx). Funding for the CABx was subject to a three year Service Level Agreement from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2015. The grant budget was agreed as part of the annual budget setting process.

The changes being recommended to the guidelines were:

- The scheme's priorities to now include an increased emphasis on supporting volunteers and volunteering;
- One application form for all applications, to be completed electronically. Previously there were two application forms, one for funding up to £500 and one for funding over £500, up to £5,000.
- Compulsory performance indicators were suggested for all applications:
 - For applications up to £500:
 - (a) Number of residents benefiting from the grant;
 - (b) Number of volunteers benefiting from the grant;
 - For applications over £500 and up to £5,000:
 - (a) And (b) above, plus at least three additional appropriate indicators.
- Applicants may not apply for funding for projects, services or activities that their organisation were already delivering in the District as part of an existing contract or service level agreement with another funder.
- In addition, a minimum application amount of £100 was suggested. The maximum application amount remains unchanged, at £5,000;

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Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That the proposed Community Grant guidelines as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed.

26. Annual Treasury Management Report 2012/13

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced a report providing an overview of investment activity during 2012/13 as required by the Council's Financial Procedure Rules. The report outlined the strategy adopted during the year, showed the position of the investment portfolio at the beginning and end of the year and gave details of how the fund performed in comparison with the previous years and various benchmarks.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources reported that 2012/13 had been a challenging year in terms of both the economic conditions and the investment environment. Ever since the financial crisis of 2008, the Council had adopted a very cautious investment approach. The consequences had been to restrict the number of counterparties to whom the Council had been prepared to lend and the acceptance of lower rates of return than otherwise could have been achieved.

The Portfolio Holder was pleased to report that the interest budget had been exceeded by approximately £117,000 and that the return on the fund exceeded the recognised benchmarks.

The Chief Finance Officer reported that recovery of the Icelandic investment was on-going and, so far, three dividend payments had been received totalling approximately 50% of the outstanding amount.

The Leader of the Council reported that he had been approached by the manager of the new Sevenoaks branch of Handelsbanken which was offering attractive interest rates.

The Cabinet thanked Officers for exceeding the anticipated return on the Council's investments.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That the Annual Treasury Management Report for 2012/13 be approved.

27. Financial Prospects and Budget Strategy 2014/15 and Beyond

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced a report setting out the major financial pressures the Council was likely to face over the next ten years, together with a proposed strategy for setting a balanced and sustainable budget for 2014/15 and beyond. The Council had an excellent track record in identifying, planning for and

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addressing financial challenges. In light of the challenging financial position facing all authorities three years ago, for 2011/12 the Council produced a 10-year budget together with a four-year savings plan for the first time.

The Portfolio Holder reported that this would be the fourth year of using the current Business and Financial Planning Strategy that included the 10-year budget which had proved successful to date and put Sevenoaks District Council in a much stronger financial position than many other Councils.

The assumptions presented to Cabinet used the latest information available and were intended to start the debate. The assumptions would be updated as more accurate information became available during the process.

The overall emphasis was on building on the strong framework provided by the 10-year budget, whilst taking into account any new Government funding and policy announcements as well as changes in the economy that had an impact on budget assumptions. The report also provided Members with the proposed timetable for the budget setting process.

The Leader of the Council reported that the Government was considering two options for the New Homes Bonus. Option (a) was a 40% top slice from the funding received by all Authorities. This was the 'worst case scenario' for SDC and was the option that would be reflected in the budget. Option (b) was that County Councils would lose 100% of their New Homes Bonus and the District Council proportion would be cut by 18.9%. The New Homes Bonus had been intended to support local councils in providing services to local people. The consultation was on-going and no decisions had been taken.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That:

- (a) The ten-year financial planning approach and principles set out in the report be endorsed;
- (b) The Advisory Committees be requested to review Service Plans and advise Cabinet of possible growth and savings options;
- (c) Officers be requested to continue to review the assumptions in the report and report back to Cabinet on 5 December 2013; and
- (d) The budget timetable set out in Appendix A be noted.

28. Procurement Strategy Update

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced a report setting out the updated Procurement Strategy. The Council's current Strategy was adopted in September 2010. Since this time the Council's Officer Procurement Group had kept the Strategy under review to ensure it continued to comply with relevant legislation and best practice in procurement as well as supporting the Council in meeting its priorities.

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Minor amendments had been made to more accurately reflect the role of the Council's Officer Procurement Group. The design and layout of the Strategy had also been updated to align with other policy and strategy documents and to improve the readability of the document.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That the updated Procurement Strategy be adopted.

29. Performance Report

Members considered a report summarising the overall performance within each Portfolio Holder's area of responsibility against indicators and targets agreed by Cabinet in July 2013.

The Head of Transformation and Strategy reported that 80% of indicators were on target however, there were four indicators that were currently performing 10% or more below target and therefore in the 'red' category.

The Leader of the Council noted that a number of the targets had only been missed by a small amount. However, the number of missed refuse collections was important as the refuse service was a key universal service that the Council provided to every resident of the District. This service therefore needed to be gold standard.

The Cabinet discussed the 'red' indicators relating to the Planning Service and agreed that these should be referred to the relevant Cabinet Advisory Committee.

Resolved: That the indicators relating to Planning Performance be referred to the Environment and Local Planning Advisory Committee for further investigation.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.30 PM

CHAIRMAN