

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2014 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)

Cllrs. Ms. Lowe and Ramsay

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Hogarth and Piper

Cllrs. Ayres, Mrs. Ayres, Dickins, Eyre and Searles were also present.

54. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 13 November 2014, be approved and signed as a correct record.

55. Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

56. Questions from Members (maximum 15 minutes)

There were none.

57. Matters referred from Council, Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committee or Cabinet Advisory Committees

- a) 'Budget 2015/16: Service Reviews and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAS)' (References from the Advisory Committees)

These were considered under Minute 58.

58. Draft Budget 2015/16

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources reported that the first stage of the budget process was the 'Financial Prospects and Budget Strategy' report which was reported to Finance & Resources Advisory Committee and Cabinet. The report before Members took the budget agreed by Full Council in February and updated it which included rolling the 10-year budget on a further year, and set out progress made in preparing the 2015/16 budget since then. All of the Advisory Committees had been asked to provide Cabinet with their growth and savings recommendations which were included in the report and the minute references on the agenda (Minute 57). Since the 10-year budget was first used in 2011/12, over £4.6m of savings had been made or were planned. The Financial Prospects report showed a shortfall of £0.6m over the 10 years, but by making the changes to assumptions contained in the report, and including the growth and savings recommended by the Advisory Committees, the Council was left with a surplus of £1.9m over the 10 years.

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However there was still uncertainty around the Government Support figures as these were not expected until later in December 2014. Therefore, a further report would be presented to Cabinet in January 2015.

The Chief Finance Officer further advised that, as agreed in September the Council was continuing to use the 10-year budget strategy, which was now in its fifth year. This remained unusual in local government. The Advisory Committees growth and savings recommendations were listed in Appendix D to the report.

An additional savings idea had been put forward by the Housing & Community Safety Advisory Committee (SCIA20) Air Quality Monitoring, but the Committee had been divided on the amount to be saved, either £13,000 or £18,000 per annum. The figures in the report assumed that the higher amount would be approved. The changes since the last report to Cabinet were also highlighted in the report.

In response to a question the Chief Finance Officer advised that the vast majority of reserves were earmarked apart from about £3m in a general reserve which was within acceptable amounts. He further advised that the Council Tax assumptions within the report were for 3% from 2016/17 onwards. The Chairman asked what the impact of reducing that assumption to 2% would be, and was advised that for the ten year period there would be an adverse impact of £4.9m; and for the next four years an adverse impact of £2.6m.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That

- a) the recommendations for the Advisory Committees be agreed; and
- b) an additional saving be made on the Air Quality Monitoring Budget of an ongoing annual reduction of £18k (SCIA20b).

59. Economic Development Strategy

The Chief Officer Communities and Business presented the report which asked Members to consider the final draft of the three year Economic Development Strategy and three year Action Plan (2015-2018), following the public consultation period in August and September 2014.

Members noted and considered the relevant minute and the recommendations received from the Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee who had considered the same report. Comments made by the Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee and consultations had been included within the attached final draft of the Strategy and Action Plan.

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The Chairman requested that reference to Zone 6 for the Bat & Ball Station be amended to reflect more the ability to use Oyster or other such pre paid travel cards. It was noted that the reference to the number of homes on Fort Halstead needed to be updated.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That the final draft of the Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan, subject to the comments above, be approved.

Members requested their thanks be conveyed to the Officers for all their hard work.

60. Asset Management Plan Update

The Chairman welcomed Mark Bradbury the Council's new Head of Economic Development & Property to the meeting.

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report which updated Members on the Asset Management Plan. A previous update had been presented to the Finance and Resources Advisory Committee on 26 March 2014 and to Cabinet on 10 April 2014 when approval was given in principle to the disposal of several items of land and property. This report advised Members on the outcome of the bids received in respect of the proposed sale of Timberden Farm, Shoreham and contained recommendations for the proposed disposal method of three other sites previously approved for disposal.

The report was split in to two parts: details of the disposal process for Timberden Farm were public and details of the offers for the farm and suggested disposal actions for some other land were in the exempt part of the report.

The Chief Finance Officer reported that before instructing any agent for Timberden Farm, the Council sought advice from three recognised agricultural agents, each with a lot of experience in selling such holdings. All proposed a reasonably consistent asking price in respect of the farm and their advice as to value reflected not only the quality and steepness of the land, the presence of the farm buildings offering a good base for a farming enterprise but also comparables of recent similar disposals.

Following interviews, Carter Jonas had been appointed as the Council's agents for the sale of Timberden Farm. Their advice had been to market the farm on the open market for disposal as a whole or in lots with bids invited for the whole in excess of £2.1million. Following this advice, bids were invited to be submitted by 18 November 2014. Advice had also been sought from an auctioneer on the sale of three of the other lots, who had recommended set reserves for each.

Members noted and considered the relevant minute and the recommendations received from the Finance & Resources Advisory Committee who had considered the same report.

Some concerns had been raised outside of the meeting which had included: Shoreham Parish Council questioning the professionalism of Carter Jonas as they were telling

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people that the Council would sell the lot with the farm buildings in it and yet Cabinet had yet to take a decision; that the Council did not buy the farm in lots but as one, and therefore should reconsider how to lot it; and, a need to sort out access and maintenance to the cross.

The Head of Economic Development & Property advised that Richard Liddiard of Carter Jonas had been in discussion with each of the bidders as well as several parties that were expected to bid, and that this had been appropriate in order to inform the advice to be given to the Finance & Resources Advisory Committee and Cabinet. He had been assured that all bidders had been advised that no decision had yet been taken but that the recommendation was that no bids were accepted at this stage as there was no single bid for all four lots or combination of bids for all lots which could be recommended for acceptance. Where bids had been significantly below the guide price the bidders had been advised that their bids were not at a level that could be recommended. One bidder had been advised that their bid (which was above the advertised guide price) was at a level worthy of further consideration but that the recommendation was not to proceed at this stage as the Council was seeking to ensure that an acceptable offer or offers were in place for the whole of the farm before proceeding with sales by lots. The Head of Economic Development & Property was satisfied that this approach was professional and appropriate in the circumstances to ensure that bidders were kept up to date and also managed the expectations of bidders.

He further advised that the property had been offered for sale at auction in 1990 as four lots which were the same lots as those now offered for sale, and he had been advised that the Council had reached agreement with the vendor to acquire all four lots in a single transaction.

With reference to access to the Cross, this had been agreed from the path to the North. The Head of Economic Development & Property agreed to amend the map within the marketing particulars to clearly show this access and to exclude from future sales the small patch of land between the access road and the Cross.

It was moved by the Chairman and

Resolved: That, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Appendix C to the report, on the ground that likely disclosure of exempt information was involved as defined by paragraph 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)) as identified in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

Members discussed the recommendations that were in the confidential appendix.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That, subject to reserve prices as agreed at Finance & Advisory Committee,

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- a) the outcome of the recent marketing of Timberden Farm be noted, and subject to further review of the market value of the land, the land be remarketed in Spring 2015;
- b) the disposal of the land at Viking Way by way of auction on the terms set out in the confidential part of the report, be approved;
- c) the disposal of the land rear of 140 Hever Avenue, West Kingsdown by way of auction on the terms set out in the confidential part of the report, be approved; and
- d) the disposal of the land rear of Deanery Road, Crockham Hill, Edenbridge, by way of auction on the terms set out in confidential part of the report, be approved however prior to disposal the Council investigate, with the local Town Council, whether the property could be progressed as a rural exception site.

IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS

This notice was published on 15 December 2014. The decisions contained in Minute 58 takes effect immediately. The decisions contained in Minutes 59 and 60 take effect on 23 December 2014.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.40 PM

CHAIRMAN