

Cabinet
9 January 2018

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET held on Tuesday 9 January 2018 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors J.Dean (Leader of the Council) (Chairman)
M.Perkins (Deputy Leader and Executive Member,
Planning, Housing and Community) (Vice-
Chairman)

D.Bell (Executive Member, Resources)
H.Bromley (Executive Member, Environment)
T.Kingsbury (Executive Member, Policy and Culture)
B.Sarson (Executive Member, Business, Partnerships
and Public Health)
R.Trigg (Executive Member, Governance, Community
Safety, Police and Crime Commissioner and
Corporate Property)

ALSO
PRESENT: T.Mitchinson

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (R.Bridge)
PRESENT: Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) (K.Ng)
Head of Law and Administration (M.Martinus)
Head of Housing Operations (S.Pearson)
Head of Property Services (P.Gray)
Governance Services Manager (G.R.Seal)
Senior Communications Officer (L.Bertram)

83. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

84. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 5 December 2017 in the report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

85. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

To consider the following items for decision in the current Forward Plan:-

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85.1. Council Tax Base 2018/19 (Forward Plan Reference FP817)

Report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) on the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2018/19.

The calculation itself was prescribed by regulations and reflected the reduction in tax base due to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19.

The tax base had been calculated at 41,363.2, which was a 2.58% increase on the tax base used in 2017/18. This reflected an assumption for property growth across the Borough and also an increased collection rate assumption for 2018/19 of 99.4% versus 97.7% for 2017/18. The in-year target for 2017/18 remained at 97.7%.

(Note: There were no declarations of interest by a Member(s) in respect of the matter decided).

85.2. Budget Proposals and Medium Term Forecasts 2018/19 (Forward Plan Reference FP818)

Report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) presenting the budget proposals for 2018/19 and covering the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Capital, Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy.

Within the General Fund the net cost of services would be reduced by 1.6% to £14.5M for 2018/19. The budget reflected a range of efficiency savings such as the review of Campus West entertainment services and additional income from the estate property portfolio. This had enabled frontline services to be protected with the investment of an additional £600,000 in services to ensure the Council could respond to forthcoming legislative changes and improve a number of statutory functions.

A further 11% cut in core grant funding however had to be absorbed (a 63% cut since the start of the decade) as well as inflation at 3.1%, the highest rate for nearly six years. In order to protect services and ensure that the Council's financial position remained sustainable, it was therefore necessary to propose a £5 increase in the Band D council tax rate. At 2.48% this was less than inflation and less than the 3% maximum allowed before a referendum.

Although the business rates pilot application for Hertfordshire had not been accepted by the Government in 2018/19, the Council would nonetheless be entering into a business rates pooling arrangement with Hertfordshire County Council and Broxbourne, Hertsmere, North Hertfordshire and Three Rivers Councils and the predicted financial benefits of this arrangement had been reflected in the 2018/19 budget.

Overall, it had been possible to produce a budget for 2018/19 that required no drawdown of General Fund reserves for the year.

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Within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), rent would continue to be reduced by 1% per annum as directed by national policy. The 1% reduction was set to apply in 2019/20 as well but the Government had confirmed that rents could rise by the Consumer Price Index plus 1% for 5 years from 2020.

The rollout of Universal Credit in the Borough from 6 December 2017 meant that the Council might face greater rent arrears and the provision for bad debts had therefore been increased by £725,000 in 2018/19.

Overall, there would be a budgeted deficit of £3.4M for the HRA leaving a reserve of £2.7M at the end of 2018/19 which was about 5.2% of turnover and was within the range considered to be best practice. The constraints of the HRA budget meant that it would no longer be possible to provide contributions from HRA revenue to the affordable housing capital programme which would have to be partly funded by new borrowing as a result.

The Council continued to have a sizeable capital programme going forward with a total of £45M of capital investment being made in 2018/19, including regeneration of Hatfield town centre, parking improvements, investment in play areas and a garage refurbishment programme. The Council would also be spending £16M to provide affordable housing in the Borough and a further £12M would be invested in the existing housing stock.

The General Fund in the medium term was faced with a budget gap of nearly £700,000 in 2019/20 and a further £1.4M would need to be found in 2020/21 to balance the budget.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Council's taxbase of 41,363.2 for the year 2018/19 be approved, incorporating an overall collection rate of 99.40% (the in-year target remained at 97.7%).
- (2) That in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by the Borough Council as its taxbase for the year 2018/19 shall be 41,363.2 and its constituent elements shall be:

	<u>100%</u> <u>TAXBASE</u>	<u>99.40%</u> <u>TAXBASE</u>
Welwyn Garden City	16,901.5	16,800.1
Hatfield	11,507.7	11,438.7
Welwyn	4,622.8	4,595.1

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Ayot St Lawrence	70.8	70.4
Ayot St Peter	115.1	114.4
North Mymms	4,367.1	4,340.9
Essendon	433.2	430.6
Northaw & Cuffley	3,059.7	3,041.3
Woolmer Green	534.9	531.7
Total	41,612.8	41,363.2

- (3) That the Cabinet approves the budget proposals for 2018/19 and notes that any comments from the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be returned to the Special Cabinet on 23 January 2018 for consideration before final recommendations were made to the Council.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The Council was required to calculate the Tax Base for its area each year in accordance with Regulations.

The requirements of the Council's budget and policy framework rules for setting the Council's annual budget had to be met.

These budget proposals would be submitted to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 January for consideration and any suggested amendments would be reported to the special Cabinet meeting on 23 January, together with any other updates, prior to the budget being considered at the Council meeting on 5 February 2018.

(Note: There were no declarations of interest by a Member(s) in respect of the matter decided).

85.3. Equality Policy (Forward Plan Reference FP832)

Recommendation from the meeting of the Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 November 2017 proposing a revised Equality Policy for the Council.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

That the new Equality Policy be approved.

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(2) Reasons for the Decision

The Equality Policy had been updated following the re-integration of the housing service back into the Council and reflected the Council's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for everyone it provided services to and to its employees and partners. A new steering group was formed following the re-integration of the Housing Service and five new equality objectives had been proposed to provide a framework for delivering on this commitment:-

1. Leading by example within the community, promoting equality and fairness
2. Valuing and understanding the diversity of our communities
3. Delivering fair and accessible services for all
4. Providing equality of opportunities for our employees
5. Consulting with residents and the community on matters which affect them, taking into account the diversity of our Borough

Following approval of this policy the Steering Group would develop a new single equalities scheme which was a statutory document and as such would be consulted on and then brought back to the Cabinet for approval, prior to being presented to the Council for adoption.

86. RISK MANAGEMENT

Report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) on the current strategic risks facing the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the current Strategic Risk Register and comments in respect of each risk where shown be noted.

87. APPOINTMENT TO PROCUREMENT PROJECT BOARD

Councillor S.Elam was nominated as a Member of the Splashlands Procurement Board to fill the vacancy left by former Councillor R.Basch.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor S.Elam be appointed as a Member of the Splashlands Procurement Board.

88. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100(A) (2) and (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting for Agenda items 12 and 13 (Minutes 90 and 91 refer) on the grounds that

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they involved the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A (3) and paragraph 3 (private financial or business information) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

In resolving to exclude the public in respect of the exempt information, it was considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

89. ITEMS OF AN EXEMPT NATURE REQUIRING KEY DECISION

The following item of an exempt nature for decision in the current Forward Plan was considered:-

89.1. Award of Contract for External Aids and Adaptions Work to Council Housing (Forward Plan Reference FP833)

Exempt report of the Executive Director (Housing and Communities) detailing the procurement process and the award of contract for these works.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet agrees the contract for the provision of external aids and adaptations to Council properties (housing) be awarded to Gracelands Complete Maintenance Services Ltd.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The work involved external works ranging from grab rails to concrete ramps and the tenders submitted were assessed on a combination of priced schedule of rates items and a range of other criteria such as health and safety and quality assurance.

All work would be contained within the current Aids and Adaptations budget for external works (£80,000) and with individual works ranging from £150 to £4,000, historically approximately 82 tenants would benefit from this work each year.

(Note: There were no declarations of interest by a Member(s) in respect of the matter decided).

90. EXEMPT RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET PANEL

90.1. Campus West Cabinet Panel - 16 November 2017

The Cabinet noted from the exempt Minutes of the meeting that the Panel had received a financial update on the Campus West operations which showed a

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much improved position compared to last year. Progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Campus West review was also reported and this included agreement of new fees and charges to be applied from April 2018, included in the 2018/19 budget papers.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Campus West Cabinet Panel on 16 November 2017 be received and the proposed 2018/19 fees and charges for Campus West applicable from 1 April 2018 be reported to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Special Cabinet meeting on 23 January for recommendation to the Council meeting on 5 February 2018 for approval as part of the budget process.

Meeting ended at 7.55 pm
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