

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

2ND MARCH 2016 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors M. A. Sherrey (Leader), C. B. Taylor (Deputy Leader),
G. N. Denaro, R. L. Dent, R. J. Laight and P. J. Whittaker

Observers: Councillors M. Glass and P.L. Thomas

Officers: Mr K. Dicks, Ms S. Hanley, Ms S. Morgan, Mrs S. Sellers, Mr D.
Allen, Mr D. Riley and Ms R. Cole

89/15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

90/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

91/15 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD
MEETING ON 29TH FEBRUARY 2016**

It was noted that there were no recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 29th February 2016 for consideration by Cabinet. The minutes would be included on the next Cabinet agenda.

92/15 **LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2017/18**

The Cabinet considered a report on a range of options which could be included in a public consultation on the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18. The outcome of the consultation would help to inform the development of a draft scheme for 2017/18. The report set out the background to the requirement for each Council to design its own Council Tax Support Scheme which replaced Council Tax Benefit in 2013. The Council was under a duty to undertake consultation on proposed changes to the Scheme and this was a pre-requisite of the Scheme being changed.

Members were reminded that with effect from April 2015 support had been capped at 80% of Council Tax liability for all working age claimants. The Council had implemented a Hardship Fund in order to support the most vulnerable and to provide transitional support where there was exceptional hardship as a result of the changes. As at 31st January 2016, a total of £12,141 had been awarded from the fund and 345 customers provided with additional support through the Hardship Assessment Scheme.

It was noted that the full cost of the administration of the Council Tax Support Scheme were carried by this Council and therefore there was an incentive to lower the costs of administering the Scheme as far as possible. The proposals being put forward for consultation were not intended to reduce the overall cost of support provided to residents but to bring the scheme into line with national changes to welfare support and to reduce the administrative burden wherever possible.

Members considered the areas contained in the proposals for consultation and raised a number of issues including:

- the importance of the Scheme remaining “in line” with other benefits such as Universal Credit;
- the demographics of the customers who had received support to date;
- the response level in respect of previous consultations and the importance of ensuring there was full consultation;
- the timetable for the consultation;
- the importance of “uprating” various allowances that are taken into account in assessing support in line with the Secretary of State’s annual announcement;
- the issue of Child Maintenance Disregards and the duty to mitigate against child poverty.

Members were mindful of the Council’s Strategic Purposes, particularly in relation to financial inclusion. The Chief Executive referred to potential workshop sessions for Members to help with the understanding of what the data was showing, which together with results of the consultation would help to inform discussion.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the options as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be included in the public consultation in order to inform potential changes to the Council’s Council tax Support Scheme for 2017/18 and/or later years;
- (b) that the Head of Customer Access and Support be authorised to consult on the options set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (c) that the Head of Customer Access and Support be requested to report back to the Cabinet on the outcome of the consultation and any proposals for changes to the scheme , for further consideration and resolution by the Cabinet, to consult on a draft scheme;
- (d) that further to the outcome of the Cabinet’s decision on the draft regulations, the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support be authorised to carry out the statutory consultation required on the draft scheme; and
- (e) that the final scheme be submitted to Cabinet to make recommendations to Council to allow for the necessary regulations to be published by 31st January 2017.

93/15

HOMELESSNESS GRANT FUNDING APPROVAL FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND TO SUPPORT HOMELESS FAMILIES FOR 2016/17

The Cabinet considered a report on proposals to award Homelessness Grant to specific schemes to support homeless families and prevent homelessness within the District in 2016/17.

Members were aware that funding reductions made by the County Council to housing related support were now having an impact on financial position of local service providers.

The Strategic Housing Manager reported that discussions had been held with partners and they had been made aware that funding was likely to be reducing for the forthcoming financial year. The discussions had been largely constructive with partners understanding the changes in the financial picture and looking at alternative ways in which services can be delivered.

It was noted that the table at 3.5 which set out the proposed allocations for 2016/17, also contained an unallocated sum of £16,258.

Members were aware of the recent decision of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board to undertake a short sharp review entitled "Preventing Homelessness in Bromsgrove." It was noted that it may be that recommendations which required some funding to implement could arise from that review which the Council would wish to support.

In addition the cessation of County Council funding for the Emergency Living Fund, would mean the fund was supported only by the District Council (at a cost of £30k). There may prove to be a need therefore to provide additional resources or services to enable customers of all tenures to avoid homelessness.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the grant funded initiatives of £108,742 set out in section 3.5 of the report, as recommended by the Strategic Housing Manager, be approved to receive funding from the Homelessness Grant for 2016/17; and
- (b) that delegated authority be granted to the Head of Community Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing to use £16,258 unallocated Homelessness Grant during the year, or make further adjustments as necessary, to ensure full utilisation of the Homelessness Grant for 2016/17 in support of existing or new schemes.

94/15

FINANCE MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 3 2015/16

The Cabinet considered a report on the Council's financial position for Revenue and Capital for the period April – December 2015.

In relation to the Revenue budget it was noted that there was an overall underspend of £239k with a increase in this projected to the end of the financial year. It was reported that this was due to a number of factors including additional income generation, vacancy management and a planned reduction in non essential spend to support the financial pressures facing the Council.

In relation to the Capital budget it was reported that the significant projected underspend was due mainly to the deferment of the vehicle replacement programme until the Place Team implementation was stabilised and to the Dolphin Centre which was originally anticipated to be undertaken in 2015/16. It was intended to carry forward the underspend to 2016/17.

The Financial Services Manager drew the attention of Members to the detailed figures contained in appendix 1 to the report.

Members discussed car parking income/costs , including a renegotiation of the contract with Wychavon District Council and issues relating to the cesspool service which had lead to a variance in the budget.

Following discussion it was

RESOLVED that the current financial position on Revenue and Capital as detailed in the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.42 p.m.

Chairman