

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

4TH OCTOBER 2017, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors G. N. Denaro (Leader), K.J. May (Deputy Leader),
M. A. Sherrey, C. B. Taylor and P. J. Whittaker

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

Officers: Ms. S. Hanley, Ms. D. Poole, Mr G. Revans, Ms. C. Flanagan,
Mr D. Riley, Ms. R. Dunne and Ms. R. Cole

40/17 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor B. T. Cooper.

41/17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

42/17 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6th September 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6th September 2017 be approved as a correct record.

43/17 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 22nd August 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that with reference to the recommendation contained in minute no 28/17 relating to staff surveys, the Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff assist in the formation of all future staff surveys and attend staff briefings;
- (b) that the remainder of the minutes be noted.

44/17 **COMMUNITY PANEL SURVEY 2017**

The Cabinet considered a report on the arrangements proposed for the new Community Panel Survey which it was intended to launch in October 2017.

It was noted that previously Bromsgrove had been part of the Worcestershire Viewpoint Project which had involved a Worcestershire-wide Panel and consultations on a wide range of public sector services and concerns.

The new arrangements comprised Bromsgrove District residents from the membership list for the Worcestershire Viewpoint Panel together with additional members recruited recently. It was felt that this would better meet the needs of the Council and would provide greater flexibility at a reduced cost.

Members considered the draft survey which could be completed by post or on line. It was reported that questions had been drawn up in consultation with service managers and whilst all Council services could not be covered in one survey, areas focussed on were relevant to the Council's Strategic Purposes. Members felt it would be useful to include a link to the Council's website to enable respondents to check their Ward.

Following discussion it was

RESOLVED that the Community Panel Survey attached as Appendix 1 to the report be noted and approved.

45/17

BLACK COUNTRY CORE STRATEGY ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT

Members considered a report on the draft officer response to the Black Country Core Strategy Issues and Options report. It was noted that consultation at this stage was non statutory and it would be possible to submit further responses through the ongoing engagement between this Council and the Black Country Authorities.

The Cabinet were well aware of the potential implications for this District of the Black Country Strategy, particularly in relation to housing figures and the need to review the green belt around the Black Country. The response stated the Council's wish to be involved in any consideration of sites which are on the periphery of the Black Country and which could have implications for this District.

In addition in relation to development within the Black Country's boundaries, there was concern regarding the impact on this Council's infrastructure. The cabinet endorsed the response reflecting this together with the need for a joined up approach to transport modelling.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that the contents of the report be noted; and
- (b) that the draft officer response to the Black Country Core Strategy Issues and Options report, as attached at Appendix A to the Cabinet report, be approved and submitted to the Black Country Authorities as this Council's consultation response.

46/17

TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE (THI) GRANT) - 67 HIGH STREET, BROMSGROVE

The Cabinet considered a report on an application under the Town Heritage Initiative scheme in respect of 67 High Street Bromsgrove. The THI scheme was jointly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Worcestershire County Council and was to facilitate the restoration of historic buildings on the High Street and sections of Worcester Road and New Road.

It was noted that the property in question was a Grade 2 Listed Building and was designated as a “priority plus” building as it clearly contributed to the enhancement of the Conservation Area and was eligible for THI funding. The proposal was to insert a new traditional shop front, carry out window and front elevation repairs and convert the upper levels into two apartments.

The application had been approved at a previous Cabinet in March 2015, prior to final tenders being received and at that time the grant had been capped at £195,000. The required documents had subsequently been received and used to calculate conservation deficit. The proposed grant was £218,820 and the owner of the property would contribute £73,666 of the total renovation costs.

Members welcomed the benefits the THI scheme was bringing to the improvement and regeneration of the High Street area.

RESOLVED that the award of a Townscape Heritage Grant of £218,820.34 in respect of 67 High Street Bromsgrove be approved.

47/17

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2018/2019

The Cabinet considered a report on the review of the Council Tax Support Scheme which is required to be undertaken annually.

It was proposed that there be no changes made to the level of support provided by the Council for 2018/19. As previously agreed the various allowances would be uprated in line with the Secretary of State’s annual announcement.

It was reported that in these circumstances there was no requirement to consult as set out in section 3.7 of the report. It was intended however that the continuation of the current scheme and the uprating of allowances would be publicised.

RECOMMENDED that no changes be made to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19.

48/17

DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATES REVALUATION SUPPORT SCHEME

The Cabinet considered a report on the proposed introduction of a Discretionary Non-Domestic Rates Revaluation Support Scheme.

It was reported that nationally the 2017 revaluation of Non Domestic properties had led to significant increases payable by some Ratepayers.

The Government had provided funding to Local Authorities for the award of Discretionary Revaluation Support and the amount awarded to this Council was set out in section 3.1 of the report. Local Authorities were able to design their own local schemes to support Ratepayers facing significant increases. The proposed scheme was set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

It was noted that the level of funding available from Government was fixed and would not be adjusted if the costs of the Scheme exceeded this level. The proposed scheme had been designed therefore to ensure that the cost of relief remains within the allocated funding whilst maximising support for eligible Ratepayers. In this regard Members noted the Risk Management section of the report.

Following discussion it was

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that the criteria for allocation of Discretionary as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved and adopted;
- (b) that the Executive Director for Finance be provided with delegated authority to adjust the percentage relief awarded in years 2018/19 and onwards in order to ensure that the maximum level of support is provided to businesses and that the Government funding meets the overall costs of the relief.

49/17

COMMERCIALISATION AND FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Cabinet considered a report on a proposed Commercialisation and Financial Strategy 2017-2020. The Strategy was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Officers reported that the Strategy would direct the Council's approach to commercialisation and to financial sustainability. The Strategy broadly outlined the Council's approach to these. There would be an increasing need to adopt a culture of actively looking for commercial opportunities whilst still focussing on the transformation programme including service reviews and redesign, shared services, revenue generation, pricing and maximising the value of Council assets.

It was noted that a Commercialisation Programme Board had been established and the Board had identified and prioritised three work

streams which it was felt provided the greatest opportunities for the Authority to become more commercial. These were:

- Use of land and assets
- Contracts
- Income including fees and charges

Members noted the Commercialisation Principles which were set out in section 1.5 of the Strategy. It was also noted that a culture and skills review would be undertaken and that it was important to ensure that officers had the correct skills to deliver the Programme.

Members also considered the Financial Strategy section which set out the Council's strategic approach to the management of its finances and provided a framework to enable the Medium Term Financial Plan to be developed to include indicative budgets and Council tax levels over a four year period.

Members recognised that this was an important overarching Strategy which was aligned to many other Council Strategies and Policies.

Following discussion it was

RECOMMENDED that the Commercialisation and Financial Strategy 2017-2020 as attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved and adopted.

50/17

REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND CONTRACT PROCEDURES

The Cabinet considered a report on a review of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules. The review had been undertaken with a view to the Rules being updated in line with best practice. The Contract Procedure Rules would provide clarity on roles, responsibilities and limits whilst the Financial Procedure Rules would provide certainty on what is permitted and formed a key part of the Council's internal framework.

Officers highlighted some of the areas within the Contract Procedure Rules including:

- Procurement Limits – including the £3,000 - £25,000 band for a requirement to obtain three written quotations as this will ensure this is undertaken on the majority of Council transactions;
- Limited exemptions where the rules would not apply;
- The ability to procure through collaborative and e-procurement arrangements;
- Requirements to be followed on the procurement of goods and services;
- The steps required if there is a need for consultants

In respect of the appointment of consultants, Members requested an amendment to section 11.5.7 (v) to require that the Director of Finance and Resources is always consulted on the documentation and that the relevant portfolio Holder is always notified.

It was noted that the Financial Procedure Rules included an important link to the Contract procedure Rules and this was set out in section 6.3. Other areas highlighted included:

- Key processes covered by the Financial Procedure Rules in addition to the arrangements for preventing financial irregularities and money laundering;
- The writing off of uncollectable debt;
- Budgetary controls and virements including virement limits;

Cabinet noted that Executive Summaries of both sets of Rules had been considered by the Budget Scrutiny Group and their considerations were reflected in the Rules.

Cabinet welcomed the proposed revised Contract Procedure and Financial Procedure Rules and felt they would provide greater clarity regarding processes and would encourage good decision making.

Following discussion it was

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that the revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report be approved, subject to the amendment to section 11.5.7 (v) of the Contract Procedure Rules as contained in the preamble; and
- (b) that the revised Rules come into effect as from 23rd November 2017.

The meeting closed at 6.50 p.m.

Chairman