

Minutes

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee Tuesday, 16th February, 2016

Attendance

Cllr Mrs McKinlay (Chair)	Cllr Clark
Cllr Kerlake (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Hirst
Cllr Aspinell	Cllr Parker
Cllr Barrett	Cllr Russell

Apologies

Cllr Hossack

Substitute Present

Cllr Poppy

Also Present

Cllr Kendall
Cllr McCheyne
Cllr Mynott
Cllr Mrs Pound
Cllr Tee

Officers Present

Helen Gregory	- Interim Head of Housing
Chris Leslie	- Finance Director
Ramesh Prashar	- Financial Services Manager
Philip Ruck	- Head of Paid Service
Jean Sharp	- Governance and Member Support Officer
Daniel Toohey	- Monitoring Officer
David Wellings	- Corporate Health & Safety Advisor

333. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Hossack.

334. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 15 December 2015 were approved as a true record.

335. Service Delivery Hub - Update Position

The report before Members provided a status report on the present position of the Service Delivery Hub (SDH). The SDH was key to improving the occupancy of the Town Hall, provided a centre of excellence for customer service for the residents and users of the Town Hall whilst at the same time reducing the cost to the Council of operating in the Town Hall.

Further information was provided within the report on the work which would result in the potential of some early adopters who would relocate to the Town Hall prior to the completion of the SDH project.

Members proposed that groups who had initially expressed an interest in moving into the Town Hall but who would not now be able to be accommodated should be advised of the progression of the Service Delivery Hub.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerlake SECONDED an amended recommendation and following a discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED

That approval is given to the Head of Paid Service and Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Chair of P, F & R and group leaders to finalise the detailed negotiations for the Service Delivery Hub to co-locate the interested parties.

(Cllr Clark declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being a trustee of the Citizen's Advice Bureau).

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

This would enable effective decision making to the point where wider Member consideration was required.

336. Approval for Restructures in Service Areas

The report requested the approval of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee to allow the Head of Paid Service to conduct and implement restructures in service areas of the Council. The Council's Organisational Change Policy made it clear that approval was sought from Members prior to restructuring being carried out at a senior level of the organisation.

The budget approved in June 2015, required a further saving of £100,000 to be made in the Senior Management Team, also known as the Corporate Leadership Board (CLB). Thus a restructure of this area was required.

If agreed, the proposed restructures would be implemented as soon as possible in accordance with agreed policy and procedure.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY that:

- 1. The Head of Paid Service be granted delegated authority to undertake, manage, and implement the restructure of the Corporate Leadership Board (CLB) provided that consultation takes place with the Leaders of all political groups (or in their absence, their appointed deputies). Such consultation shall include meetings with the said Leaders and shall include advice as to progress.**
- 2. The PFR committee notes that the Head of Paid Service already has the authority to implement restructures below CLB level but will consult with Leaders of all political groups (or in their absence, their appointed deputies) as to progress and impact on the organisation.**

Reasons for Recommendation

To enable the Council to align its available resources with its service delivery model and to meet its operational budget.

337. Shared Service Options

Members were reminded that the Council was continuously looking for opportunities to protect front line services in the face of a challenging financial environment. Economies of scale, sharing best practise and efficiency gains from combining resources with nearby authorities were being considered by most Councils.

The report recommended that officers provide a business case for further consideration by Members.

Cllr Parker MOVED and Cllr Russell SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That Members agree to the Head of Paid Service preparing a business case incorporating options for combining the delivery of our public

services with other Councils which will be brought back to Members for consideration.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To investigate how transforming service delivery might assist in maintaining or enhancing the local delivery of these services whilst saving costs through efficiency gains and economies of scale. Added value benefits of such an arrangement would be those from sharing best practice with other Authorities together with increased capacity and resilience.

338. Revised Health and Safety Policy

The Health and Safety Policy had been revised as required under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and was appended to the report for Members' information. It was reflective of current organisational and management structures within the Authority. The Health and Safety Policy had been passed to Corporate Leadership Board and all Health and Safety Committee members for comment and review in accordance with its conditions.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That the revised Health and Safety Policy (February 2016) be approved.

Reason for Recommendation

A review and revision of the Council's health and safety policy was required to ensure that it reflected the organisation arrangements, structure and health and safety management system. This timely revision and endorsement would enable the Council to continue its commitment to develop the health and safety culture and management system of the organisation and fulfil its legal duty.

339. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2016/17

The report considered the Medium Term Financial Plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and included results of the tenant consultation and the consideration of the Environment & Housing Management Committee concerning the proposed rent charges for 2016/17.

Cllr Hirst MOVED and Cllr Poppy SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was RESOLVED that the Committee recommends to Ordinary Council on 2 March 2016:

1. To approve the HRA Business Plan for 2016/17 and beyond as shown in Appendix 3 of the report.
2. To agree a 1% decrease in rents for General Need Housing for 2016/17 and for the following 3 years.
3. To agree to freeze the rents for Supported Housing for 2016/17 and then apply a 1% decrease for the following 3 years as outlined in paragraph 4.18 of the report
4. To agree to freeze the proposed Service Charges for 2016/17 for tenants.
5. To agree to apply the formula rent to all new tenancies from April 2016/17.
6. To agree the Fees and Charges proposed at Environment and Housing Management Committee on 9 December 2015 (attached to the report as Appendix 1).
7. To note the Section 151 Officer's Assurance Statement on the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of the reserves.
(Cllr Barrett declared a pecuniary interest under the Council's Code of Conduct by virtue of being a leaseholder of a Council property and advised that the Monitoring Officer had granted a dispensation so that he could take part in the discussion but not vote).

Reasons for Recommendation

Effective financial management underpins all of the priorities for the Council.

The Council is required to compile a budget which collates all the income and expenditure relating to the Council's housing stock. The Council is also required to agree the rent levels and notify tenants of any changes to their rents.

340. General Fund Budget 2016/17

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) considered by Policy, Finance and Resources Committee on 15 December 2015 gave Members an update on the various significant changes that would impact on the Council's financial position following announcements made since the General Election in May 2015 and the Autumn Statement in November 2015. Particular issues highlighted, relevant to the General Fund, included the phasing out of the Revenue Support Grant, changes to the New Homes Bonus & the Business Rates Retention schemes and the creation of Combined Authorities.

The fundamental principles of the Council's MTFP were to:

- (i) Maintain a sustainable financial position against a background of unprecedented financial uncertainty and reduced government funding, including the delivery of efficiency targets.

- (ii) Support the vision of our Borough through appropriate identification of resources required to deliver the key priorities outlined in the 'Vision for Brentwood'.
- (iii) Maximise opportunities and mitigate risks associated with the fundamental change to the way in which local government was financed.

The report before Members considered:

- (i) The General Fund budget proposals for 2016/17 to 2018/19.
- (ii) The Capital Programme 2016/17 to 2018/19.
- (iii) The Treasury Management & Investment Strategy for 2016/17.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendations subject to the addition of a clause and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends to Council on 2 March 2016:

- 1. To approve the General Fund - Revised MTFP for 2016/17 as shown in Table 8 at paragraph 5.8 which includes the proposed savings targets as shown in Table 7 at paragraph 5.7 of this report.**
- 2. To approve the proposed Capital Programme and Funding totalling £23.7 million for 2016/17 to 2018/19 as set out in Tables 13 and 14 of this report.**
- 3. To approve the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy as set out in Section 10 of this report.**
- 4. To note the Section 151 Officer's Assurance Statement as set out in Section 11 of this report.**
- 5. That Members consider the financial position of the Council when proposing a level of Council Tax for 2016/17.**

Reasons for Recommendation

The Council was required to approve the Budget as part of the Budget and Policy Framework.

341. Brentwood Town Centre Action Plan

The Council's Corporate Plan, "Vision for Brentwood" highlighted the need to develop a Town Centre Action Plan to link key development opportunities, including William Hunter Way. The Action Plan should also take into account the wider themes of quality of design, community/landowner engagement, heritage, economy, and the deliverability of the overall plan.

In order to bring forward a high quality Action Plan for the Borough's major town centre, it was proposed to appoint high quality planning and development consultants to help officers prepare the plan. To ensure the Council achieved the right Plan and the best value for money, it had been agreed to work with one of the country's leading experts in this field, the Design Council, to prepare a high quality tender brief for the work. This brief would be used to procure the consultancy for the Brentwood Town Centre Action Plan. A timeline for taking this forward had now been proposed and was included in the report to take the Action Plan forward as a key Council priority.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Agrees the proposed timeline for the preparation of the Brentwood Town Centre Action Plan outlined in Table 1 of this report.**
- 2. Agrees to establish a cross-party working group to focus on the design and requirements for the Town Centre Action Plan. This group will comprise 4 Conservatives, 2 Lib Dems and 1 Labour. The group will be chaired by Cllr John Kerslake.**

Reasons for Recommendation

The future planning of Brentwood Town Centre requires a holistic approach to its development to maximise the benefit for local residents and businesses. To do this, the Council needs to appoint experienced planning and development consultants to help undertake this task. To make sure that the best consultants are appointed, a clear and detailed tender brief needs to be prepared to procure this work. By engaging the Design Council in this process, the Council will ensure that the initial tender brief and consultants subsequently appointed to develop the Action Plan will be of the highest calibre.

342. Termination of meeting

During the preceding item, in accordance with Rule 28 of Part 4.1 of the Council Procedure Rules, the business of the meeting not having concluded by two hours after its start, Members voted and agreed to continue with the meeting for a further 30 minutes.

343. Wash Road Allotments

The report considered the granting of a new Lease to Wash Road Allotment Association Ltd previously occupied by Hutton Horticultural Society (HHS).

It was proposed that Wash Road Allotment Association Ltd take a new 5 year lease of the Allotment from 1 January 2016 at a rent of £150pa.

Cllr Russell MOVED and Cllr Poppy SECONDED the recommendation and following a discussion and a vote taken on a show of hands it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

1. That a new lease be granted to Wash Rd Allotment Association Ltd subject to the Heads of Terms set out in Appendix B.

2. That delegated authority be granted to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Chair or Vice Chair of the Policy Finance and Resources Committee to grant leases and licences, to consent to lease assignments and any other interest in property of up to £25,000 (excluding VAT) per year on properties leased or licensed at market value.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay advised that to avoid incurring the expense of commissioning independent valuation reports where income from a lease would be low she had requested that officers undertake valuations in house where rental would be less than £400pa.

Reasons for Recommendation

To ensure continuity of the Wash Road Allotment site and proper administration of the Council's assets.

344. Termination of meeting

In accordance with Rule 28 of Part 4.1 of the Council Procedure Rules, the business of the meeting not having concluded by two hours and 30 minutes after its start, Members voted and agreed to continue with the meeting for a further 30 minutes.

345. Warley Scout Lease

The report before Members considered the surrender of the existing lease and the granting of a new lease to the Warley Scouts in respect of the Scout building (known as Eagle Hall) in The Drive, Warley.

Attached to the report for Members' consideration were confidential appendices showing the Heads of Terms and the Assessment of the extent to which the organisation's activities contributed towards achieving the Council's aims and objectives, including details received from Warley Scouts.

Cllrs Aspinell and Poppy left the Chamber during consideration of this item and therefore took no part in the vote.

Cllr Russell MOVED and Cllr Hirst SECONDED the recommendation and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That a new lease be granted in accordance with the terms set out in Heads of Terms at Appendix A (Exempt).

Reason for Recommendation

A new lease for the Scouts being put in place on the basis outlined in Appendix A would provide continuity.

346. Exclusion of the Public

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED, Cllr Kerslake SECONDED and it was RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded and the following item be considered in private session on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

347. Warley Depot

Members were reminded that at the Asset and Enterprise Committee meeting held on 27.03.15 it was agreed to report back to a future meeting the results of an initial investigation into the viability of the redevelopment of the Depot site, adjoining land and the relocation of existing activities.

The report before Members considered the initial information gathered and the next stage of the project to enable a definitive decision to be made on whether to move towards implementation.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a full discussion it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

that the recommendations as set out in the report be agreed.

348. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 10.10pm