

Minutes

Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee Wednesday, 8th January, 2020

Attendance

Cllr Tumbridge (Chair)	Cllr Kendall
Cllr Mrs Hones (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Lewis
Cllr Barrett	Cllr Mynott
Cllr J Cloke	Cllr Poppy
Cllr Hossack	

Apologies

Substitute Present

Also Present

Cllr Chilvers
Cllr Jakobsson
Cllr Parker
Cllr Mrs Pearson
Cllr Mrs Pound
Cllr Reed

Officers Present

Steve Summers	- Chief Operating Officer & Interim Monitoring Officer
Jacqueline Van Mellaerts	- Director of Corporate Resources
Jonathan Stephenson	- Chief Executive
Philip Drane	- Director of Strategic Planning
Claire Mayhew	- Corporate and Democratic Service Manager
Chris Leslie	- Director of SAIL
Phoebe Barnes	- Corporate Finance Manager
Rob Manser	- Shared Service Revenues & Benefits Manager
Samantha Stanley	- Revenues and Benefits Operational Manager

301. Apologies for absence

No apologies were received for this meeting.

302. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Policy, Resource and Economic Development meeting were approved as a true record, subject to the amendment to a spelling mistake under minutes 269 page 7. This will be amended by the clerk.

303. Economic Development

Economic Development updates had been provided to previous meetings of the Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee with a resolution to commission an economic report (or study). Work to prepare the study had been commissioned and an update was provided.

Members expressed their concerns relating to parking within the borough and the ongoing request for a Town Centre Action Plan and the concerns about the Planning process.

The Leader of the Council suggested that an all member session to workshop the issues that could be included in an Action Plan takes place. Officers to arrange.

The Chair informed the committee this was an information item and requested that members note the report.

304. Communication Protocol

The report set out proposals for a Communications Protocol.

Discussion took place on the correct approach to member involvement in press releases where a matter was local to their ward or an issue they were closely involved in, the chairman suggested amendments that were accepted by the members.

After a full discussion, Cllr Tumbridge **MOVED** and Cllr Mrs Hones **SECONDED** the recommendation in the report.

Members are asked to:

- 1. Recommend that this Communication Protocol (Appendix A of the report) be adopted by the Council.**

A vote was taken by a show of hands and is was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Reasons for Recommendation

To increase transparency

To safeguard members and officers with a shared Communication Protocol.

To ensure the reputation of the Council is protected

305. Council Tax Technical Changes 2020/21

The report recommended amendments to the scheme of Council Tax Discounts and Premiums with effect from 1 April 2020, using discretionary powers granted by the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018.

The report outlined the changes and the potential impact on the tax base.

Cllr Hossack, informed the committee on the high demand area on second home discount and will be included on the workplan for next year.

Cllr. Tumbridge explained his concerns to ensure the imposition of any charges were fair and did not penalise empty home owners on technicalities when the owner was seeking to make a home habitable, or otherwise occupied but was unable to do so for a variety of reasons such as lengthy probate or works on the dwelling, officers assured members that a variety of circumstances could see the charges waived to ensure they were imposed fairly.

Cllr Tumbridge **MOVED** and Cllr Mrs Hones **SECONDED** the recommendation in the report.

Members are asked to agree:

That, in exercise of powers granted to billing authorities in the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, Full Council be asked to determine the following amendments to this Council's scheme of council tax premiums chargeable on empty dwellings:

- **100% where empty for more than two years, commencing 1 April 2020**
- **200% where empty for more than five years, commencing 1 April 2021**
- **300% where empty for more than ten years, commencing 1 April 2022**

A vote was taken by a show of hands and is was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Reasons for Recommendation

To review powers the Council has with regards to Council Tax premiums on empty dwellings. By exercising premiums on Council Tax, this will be

encouragement for residents to bring empty properties back into use and help the demand for housing within the borough.

306. Revenues and Benefits Penalties Policy

The Committee was asked to consider approving the Revenues & Benefits Penalties Policy attached in Appendix A of the report. The purpose of the policy is to ensure consistency of approach by Officers in applying penalties in prescribed circumstances for Council Tax and Benefits customers, so that these customers are treated equally and fairly.

Director of Corporate Resources to circulate the list of special circumstances to all members.

Cllr Tumbridge **MOVED** and Cllr Mrs Hones **SECONDED** the recommendation in the report.

To approve The Revenues and Benefits Penalties Policy attached as Appendix A of the report.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and is was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Reasons for Recommendation

The Revenues & Benefits Penalties Policy would allow Officers to apply penalties fairly and as such supports all the promise and core principles.

307. Fees and Charges

Fees and charges made by the Council for various services are reviewed on an annual basis by the relevant Committees relating to the services provided.

Recommended amendments to the fees and charges are incorporated into the budget setting process to take effect from the following financial year.

Cllr Cloke, made reference to the amount not shown in the account for the income received by Ingatestone Parish Council in the sum of £1200.00 per annum for Market Place Car Park.

Cllr Kendall referred to the Parking Strategy. Officers explained the this will take a period of procurement between 6/8 weeks and will being in the new municipal year.

Members queried the proposed Parking Fees relating to King Georges Playing Fields. Officers informed members that still be reviewed and a separate fee and charge will be brought back to a future meeting of PRED.

Cllr Tumbridge **MOVED** and Cllr Mrs Hones **SECONDED** the recommendation in the report.

Members are asked to:

Agree to the proposed charges for 2020/21 as attached in Appendix A-C of the report subject to the annual budget setting process.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and is was **RESOLVED**.

Reasons for Recommendation

Officers review fees and charges annually and this will be used to inform the 2020/21 budget setting process.

(Cllr Kendall declared a non-pecuniary interest by the virtue as Chair of the Rail and Bus Users Association that uses the Council Chamber for meeting. Therefore, didn't take part in the debate or vote)

308. 2019/2020 Midyear/Quarter 3 Budget Review and draft 2020/2012 Medium Term Financial Plan

The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) sets out the key financial management principles and budget assumptions. It is then used as the framework for the detailed budget setting process to ensure that the Council's resources are managed effectively in order to meet its statutory responsibilities and deliver the priorities of the Council, over the medium term.

The report was due to be reported in November but was postponed due to purdah. It sets out the approval for the proposed budget timetable and guidelines that would be followed to develop the budget for 2020/21 and the financial forecast up to 2022/23. The current draft forecast as outlined in the report is to aid Members in understanding the basis of what is known now, the financial trajectory of the Council and identifying actions that can be taken to address the continuing deficit of resources over expenditure. These actions may involve Members having to take difficult decisions to address the budget gap.

The report also provided the Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee with an update to the 2019/20 General Fund Revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account and Capital program as well as the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2019/20.

At Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee on 11th September 2019 the General Fund was forecasting a deficit of £267k, revised forecast indicated as at period 8 the general position as £213k deficit.

The Housing Revenue Account also forecast a net operating deficit of £267k as at period 8 this forecast has been revised to £418k.

The Capital Programme had indicated that there was an underspend of £9.593m this has been revised to £11.044m excluding the borrowing to Seven Arches investment Limited.

Cllr Cloke, referred to the income received by Ingatestone Parish Council for parking at Market Place. This was noted by Officers.

Cllr Tumbridge **MOVED** and Cllr Mrs Hones **SECONDED** the recommendation in the report.

Members are asked to:

1. **Approve the budget guidelines and assumptions for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix A of the report.**
2. **To note the projected outturn forecasts for 2019/20 as set out within Appendix B, Appendix E and Appendix G of the report.**
3. **To note the draft 3-year financial forecast as set out in Appendix B of the report for General Fund and Appendix E for Housing Revenue Account.**
4. **To note the Treasury Management Activity for the year to date.**

A vote was taken by a show of hands and is was **RESOLVED**.

Reasons for Recommendation

Effective financial management underpins all of the priorities for the Council and will enable the Council to operate within a sustainable budget environment.

309. Exclusion of the Press and Public

A motion was **MOVED** by Cllr Tumbridge and **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs Hones that the public be excluded from the meeting on the items of business (10 and 11) on the grounds that the disclosure of exempt information as defined in schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY**.

The Chair moved that item 11, is discuss before item 10 this was agreed.

310. Minutes of the 21 November 2019 - EXEMPT

The exempt minutes of the Policy, Resource and Economic Development meeting were on 21st November were approved as a true record.

311. Seven Arches Investments Limited Update - EXEMPT

Cllr Tumbridge informed the committee this was an information only item and the requested members to note the recommendation set out in the report.

312. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting concluded at 20:42

