

Minutes

Cabinet



7 December 2010

Present:

Cabinet Members	Portfolio	Present
Councillor G Butland	Leader of the Council	Yes
Councillor Mrs J C Beavis	Customers and Community Support	Yes
Councillor N R H O Harley	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Culture	Yes
Councillor M C M Lager	Efficiency and Resources	Yes
Councillor Lady P Newton	Housing and Well-Being	Yes
Councillor Mrs W Schmitt	Clean, Green and Safe	Yes
Councillor R G Walters	Environment and Sustainability	Yes

Deputy Cabinet Members	Portfolio	Present
Councillor D L Bebb	Customers and Community Support	Yes
Councillor N G McCrea	Enterprise and Culture	Apologies
Councillor J McKee	Efficiency and Resources	Yes
Councillor R G S Mitchell	Environment and Sustainability	Apologies
Councillor Mrs C Sandbrook	Efficiency and Resources	Apologies
Councillor C Siddall	Leader's Portfolio/Clean, Green and Safe	Yes
Councillor Mrs G A Spray	Housing and Well-Being	Apologies
Councillor T S Wilkinson	Enterprise and Culture	Yes

The following Councillors were also present as invitees of the Leader

Councillor Dr R L Evans, Leader of the Labour Group and Councillor M G Gage, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Leader of Halstead Residents' Association.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J E Abbott, Leader of the Green Party, and Councillor S M Walsh, Chairman of Braintree Local Committee.

Councillors G Cohen, E R Lynch, A F Shelton and Mrs J A Smith were also in attendance.

54 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:-

- Councillor M C M Lager declared a personal interest in
 - (i) Agenda Item 5a – Medium Term Financial Strategy (Report Item 2.2) as he sits on the Local Government Pension Fund Board for Essex, and
 - (ii) Agenda Item 6a – Witham Leisure Centre, as a Member of Witham Town Council who had commented on the project.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct all Members remained in the meeting for all the items, unless stated otherwise, and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

55 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There was no questions asked or statements made.

56 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 22nd November 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader, subject to Councillor R Ramage being included with other Councillors in attendance.

57 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/12 TO 2014/15**

The Leader of the Council introduced the first stage report of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and stated that the financial figures display the current position of the Council on the assumption of a 33% grant reduction, although notification of the final settlement for 2011/12 from Government has not been received. The Council aims to maintain frontline services as far as possible; the commitment to capital projects of Witham Pool and development of the town centres, and for no increase in Council Tax in the next two years.

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, presented the report and Appendices that identify proposed savings to address the anticipated funding shortfall of £5m on the Revenue Account over the next four years. The proposals for consultation include Local Committees being abolished, merging the functions of Overview and Scrutiny, Audit and Standards Committee; and to consider the reduction of elected members by re-Warding.

With regard to Fees and Charges these will be increased by the VAT increase in January 2011, and then no further increase until April 2012. The main exception to this proposal is car parking charges where the 2½% increase in VAT would prove difficult for coinage in the payment machines, so current charges will remain until 1st April 2012 and at that stage car parking charges will be increased to allow for the VAT increase, and any other increase. The only other exceptions will be those agreed within contract conditions, and where a charge is made to the Council that is passed on to the service user and this is increased in 2011/12, i.e. trade waste charge made by Essex County Council.

At the Council meeting on 6th December 2010, a user of the Halstead Senior Citizens' Centre had requested that the closure of the Centre be extended from 31st March 2012 to 31st July 2012 to align with standard school terms. This request was accepted by the Leader of the Council.

Councillor Lager advised that Appendix C referred to internal arrangements within the Council, and proposed further use of emails and to send Council Tax bills by electronic means – to reduce printing and postage costs.

Members welcomed the clarity of the report and Appendices, to address the funding deficit and proposed that all Councillors, Parish Councils and the community support the proposals, and recognise the changes on how the Council will operate in the future. In response to a query on how the consultation will be implemented, it was explained that details will be published in the 'Contact' magazine to all households at the end of December 2010, and will invite the public to submit their views.

However, Councillor M Gage, reserved his comment to the proposals until the grant settlement figure was known and continued to refer to the 38% reduction in staff by 2012 that was considered significant to the Council.

Some concerns were also raised by Councillor Harley regarding the risk of inflation and volatility of the markets to the Pension Fund; and on services to isolated and vulnerable people, particularly in the rural parts of the District if community transport and visits by Officers were withdrawn.

Councillor Lager responded to these issues referring to the supportive processes to assist staff through this time; reassurance on the Pension Fund; and with regard to rural communities to enable the 54 Parish/Town Councils in the District to work with their neighbours more proactively, and share processes wherever possible.

DECISION: That as a basis to move forward in the budget setting process -

- a) That the budget position predicted for 2010/11, as at Quarter 2, be approved and used and reported on as Revised Estimates for the remainder of the year
- b) That the recovery period to meet the Pension Fund deficit be approved to continue at twenty years
- c) That the proposals contained in the appendices to the report constitute the initial budget proposals and that views be sought on them, as appropriate
- d) That the proposal to reduce the maximum number of weeks pay entitlement under the discretionary redundancy pay scheme to 45 weeks be approved and that this be taken forward to formal consultation with the Council's recognised Trades Unions
- e) That at Item 7 (Community Halls) in Appendix B the closure of Halstead Senior Citizens' Centre be amended from 31st March 2012 to 31st July 2012, to align with standard school terms
- f) That fees and charges be increased by VAT in January 2011 with no further increase until 1st April 2012. Exceptions are car parking charges, where there will be no increase to 1st April 2012 or where there is a statutory or contractual requirement.

That it be **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:-**

- g) That the transfer of £750,000 from the General Fund balance to a reserve to meet the cost of redundancy and early retirement in 2011/12 be approved
- h) That the Council exercises its 'Option to Tax' Causeway House in order to limit its liability of unrecoverable VAT on the proportion of refurbishment costs to accommodate Essex County Council.

****58 WITHAM LEISURE CENTRE**

Minutes Published: 16 th December 2010 Call-in Expires: 24 th December 2010
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Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Well-Being, presented a progress report on the Witham Leisure Centre project and proposed recommendations to agree the scope and relevant costs of the facility, enabling the project to proceed.

The Project Scope includes provision of a moveable floor to the learner pool, treatment rooms and squash courts. The new build is planned to BREEAM and sustainable design standards and has appropriate accessibility for people with disabilities. The cost options comprise of two options – with or without the moveable floor to the learner pool.

Councillor Lady Newton stated that the moveable floor will provide flexibility for use of the learner pool and the main pool, and allows further activities at the Centre. It was clarified that the learner pool with moveable floor will provide a disabled access platform and allows depths to be altered – also suitable for elderly people – an area scheduled to rise significantly in the Braintree District. The hard courts are not being re-provided under the scheme due to their minimal use previously generating poor revenue cost, and with a high capital cost; and this will be for the Academies to consider further.

During the discussion it was noted that the inclusion of any solar panels will be considered at the design stage; that the water will be retained beneath the moveable floor in a 'pit'; that the design images contained in the Appendices of the report are for illustrative purposes only and are not the actual design of the complex; and inclusion of a moveable floor gives flexibility to the learner and main pool with potential income of approximately £30,000 to £40,000 per annum.

DECISION:

- (1) That the scope of the project be approved and includes a moveable floor to the learner pool in the new facility.
- (2) That the costs for all aspects of the design and build of the new leisure centre, including RIBA project management and design fees, be approved.
- (3) That the project proceeds to the next stages as stated in Section 6 of the report; these are the planning application stage and procurement process to tender recommendation stage. (The award of the contract will be a key decision and reported to Cabinet in Oct/Nov 2011 for approval).
- (4) That the Council does not include the hard courts in the scope of the project unless external funding is secured to meet their cost.

59 **GREATER EFFICIENCY THROUGH WORKING DIFFERENTLY**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Butland, presented a report referring to a variety of potential working together initiatives to share services, merge management and improve two/three-tier working across the Braintree District. One area being explored is for a combined Regulatory Service across Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council and Essex County Council, capturing environmental health, trading standards, licensing, building control and environmental enforcement. This has also attracted interest from other Councils in Essex that could result with further savings.

The Leader advised of a proposed Memorandum of Understanding between Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council and Essex County Council for working together to achieve greater efficiencies, with the potential for further Councils in Essex to be involved in the process. A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding will be supplied to all Councillors.

DECISION:

- (1) That discussion continues with Brentwood Borough Council and Essex County Council regarding the potential of any sharing arrangement.
- (2) That where the business case is made to create a shared service with one or more Council, then this is brought forward for decision on a case-by-case basis.
- (3) That the Regulatory Services partnership with Essex County Council and Brentwood Borough Council be developed to a full business case.
- (4) That the Leader of the Council be authorised to sign the Memorandum of Understanding between Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council and Essex County Council regarding the principles on how we will work together to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness.

60 **CABINET MEMBERS' UPDATES**

Councillor Harley, Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Culture, advised that the proposed communications timetable for the **Town Centres Regeneration Projects** will commence on 28th December 2010 for a period of six months. Consultation will take place through the 'Contact' magazine, a 'High Street' competition, on-line and in social media and be launched early January 2011, with press activity throughout the entire period. The main targets are shoppers and businesses in the District.

Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Clean, Green and Safe, presented a report tabled at the meeting, regarding an invitation for the Council to tender for the **Grounds Maintenance Contract at Uttlesford District Council** for a five-year period. As the deadline for returning the tender is 20th December 2010 the Cabinet were requested to give delegated authority to the relevant Director and Portfolio Holder, for submission of the tender and to approve the final contract value.

DECISION:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director with responsibility for Operations to make the decision to submit the tender and approve the final contract value, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Clean, Green and Safe and the Corporate Director for Finance.

Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Clean, Green and Safe referred to the Community Safety Partnership item at the last Cabinet meeting (Minute 43 refers) and the availability of statistics in relation to **Hate Crime**. Collation of this data is nearing completion and will be circulated to all Members.

It was noted that the Community Safety Partnership is only involved in issues that it can influence the outcome of, and the stealing of catalytic converters is an area outside their remit. However, it was reported that perpetrators had been caught and arrested, and attended trial.

Councillor Lager reported on the Council's **Treasury Position**, and advised that the uncertainties regarding investments in the Icelandic Banks continue, with the issue

being dealt with in the Icelandic courts. It was advised that, at the end of October 2010, the Treasury investments totalling £45m were in various deposits as follows:-

- £7m Santander Group
- £7m Bank of Scotland
- £7m Barclays Bank
- £7m Royal Bank of Scotland
- £7m Nationwide Building Society
- Smaller investments in other institutions

Maturities of funds extend over a 12-month period, with a majority being available in March 2011. It was noted that the interest rates remain low, and that the investment limit with U.K. banks has been reached.

Councillor Butland, the Leader of the Council, advised that he had been approached by the Trustees of the **Braintree Museum Trust** to forward names of additional Trustees. The following members have been put forward to enable a suitable compliment of Trustees – Councillors Baugh, McArdle, McKee and Siddall.

DECISION: That Councillors Baugh, McArdle, McKee and Siddall be nominated as Trustees for the Braintree Museum Trust.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.38pm

G BUTLAND
(Leader)

