

# Minutes

## Cabinet

### 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021



These minutes principally record decisions taken and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions. A recording of the meeting is available at <http://www.braintree.gov.uk/youtube>

#### Present:

Portfolio	Cabinet Member	Present
Leader of the Council	Councillor G Butland	Yes
Deputy Leader of the Council and Economic Development and Infrastructure	Councillor T Cunningham	Yes
Communities Culture and Tourism	Councillor F Ricci	Apologies
Corporate Transformation	Councillor J McKee	Yes
Environment and Place	Councillor Mrs W Schmitt	Yes
Finance and Performance Management	Councillor D Bebb	Yes
Health and Wellbeing	Councillor P Tattersley	Yes
Homes	Councillor K Bowers	Yes
Planning	Councillor Mrs G Spray	Yes

Also present as invitees of the Leader: Councillor J Abbott, Leader of the Green and Independent Group, Councillor D Mann, Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor Mrs J Pell, Leader of the Halstead Residents Group, Councillor Mrs D Garrod, Chairman of the Community Development Group and Councillor Mrs M Cunningham as Chairman of the Partnership Development Group.

#### 47 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** There were no interests declared.

#### 48 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** That the Minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman as soon as possible.

#### 49 **QUESTION TIME**

**INFORMATION:** There were no questions asked or statements made.

## **COUNCIL BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2020/21 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021/22 TO 2024/25**

**INFORMATION:** Members considered the proposed revenue and capital budgets for 2021/22; Council Tax for 2021/22; Fees and charges for 2021/22; and the Capital Strategy (including the Treasury Strategy and Investment Policy) for 2021/22.

Members were advised that there was still a lot of uncertainty and that the pandemic had caused a significant impact on the Council's business and ongoing financial consequences would only become apparent once the pandemic was over. It was difficult to forecast the impact on services, in particular how the Council's income generating services would recover and to what extent customer demand may change post Covid. As a result of this, no attempt had been made to forecast the anticipated impact at a detailed budget level.

It was reported that in respect of Government funding, the provisional Finance settlement for local government for 2021/22 was published by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and the Council's provisional allocation of Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) for 2021/22 was £3,486,929. This consisted solely of retained business rates and the amount was exactly the same as that allocated for 2020/21.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government also announced details of the Local Government COVID Support Package for 2021/22, this included an Emergency Fund allocation of £685,853; a Local Council Tax Support Grant of £189,919; and notification that the Sales, Fees and Charges Income Losses Compensation Scheme was extended to the first 3 months of 2021/22. This would be subject to an application in summer 2021 to this Scheme.

With regards the Business Rates, it was reported that the Business Rates Retention Scheme and Business Rate Tax base for 2021/22 had been calculated at £43,031,368. It was proposed that a number of Discretionary Business Rate relief schemes agreed previously by Council continued as requested by the Government, these were; Supporting Small Businesses, Rural Rate Relief; and Local Newspaper Offices Relief. The estimated amount of business rates that would be retained by the Council was £4,979,024, this was £1,492,095 more than the provisional Baseline amount.

The Council's tax base for 2021/22, calculated as at 30th November 2020, was £53,721. This compared to a tax base of £53,373 for 2020/21; an increase of £348 or 0.65%. The Secretary of State determined the level of increase above which a proposed increase in council tax must be subject to a referendum. For shire District Councils the referendum principles for 2021/22 have been set at the higher figure of 2% or up to and including £5. An increase of £4.95 on this Council's Band D council tax for 2021/22 would equate to a percentage increase of 2.68%.

The initial budget and council tax proposals agreed in November provided that the Council's council tax requirement be increased by £3.69 (2%) to £188.37 per annum (at Band D) for 2021/22. This equated to a council tax charge, for a Band D property, for the provision of this Council's services of £3.62 per week; an increase of approximately 7p per week over the current year. However, with the receipt of the provisional finance settlement, the notice of the proposed referendum principles for

shire district councils and the provisional allocation of Covid funding for 2021/22 a range of options of council tax increases for 2021/22, of 2.68%, 2%, 1% and Nil were provided for consideration by the Cabinet. For each option, the resultant shortfall in 2021/22 would be met from the unallocated General Fund balance and the shortfall for 2022/23 included the shortfall for 2021/22 which would still need to be addressed.

Members were advised that the options for council tax increases for 2021/22 were considered by the Performance Management Board on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021 and it was the opinion of Members that due to the impact of the Covid pandemic on local residents, that for this year the Council should not proceed with its original proposal of a 2% increase and should consider a lower option including a 0% increase.

It was noted that 0% increase would increase the withdrawal from the unallocated General Fund Balance to £320,165 in 2021/22 and also increase the estimated overall shortfall to be addressed over the following three years to £1.657million.

Cllr T Cunningham moved that there should be a 0% increase in council tax for the year 2021/22, this was seconded by Councillor McKee and was supported by Members and Group Leaders.

**DECISION: That it be Recommended to Council that the following be approved:**

1. The budget variations to the current base budget as detailed in Section 4 of the main report;
2. The additional income and cost reductions as detailed in Section 6 of the main report;
3. The allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant of £411,824 for 2021/22 be earmarked for housing purposes;
4. The allocation of Local Council Tax Support Grant, of £189,919, be held in reserve and that authority be delegated to the Cabinet members for Housing and Finance and Performance Management to agree a scheme with the major preceptors on the use of the funds to provide support to vulnerable households;
5. The unavoidable revenue budget demands and new investments added to the Base Budget of £98,000 as detailed in Section 5.2 of the main report;
6. The unavoidable revenue budget demands and new investments required to meet one-off or time-limited expenditure of £465,140 as detailed in Section 5.3 of the main report and to fund as detailed in section 5.5 of the main report:
7. A provision of £1million be set aside in a new earmarked reserve from the unallocated General Fund Balance to meet the potential financial impact of Covid on the Council's finances that is not covered by support from the Government;
8. The Braintree District Council's Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2021/22 as detailed on the Council's website: Proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22;

9. The package of support to claimants experiencing difficulties as a result of the Local Council Tax Support scheme as detailed in Section 11.9 of the main report, subject to a review of the effectiveness and value for money of the CAB money advice service with authority delegated to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance Management to agree and implement any changes as a consequence of the review;
10. The Council's discretionary fees and charges and housing rents for 2021/22 as detailed in the schedule on the Council's website;
11. Delegated authority is given to the appropriate Cabinet Members to determine the level of charges for Trade Waste collection, Environmental permits, core leisure and planning pre-application advice service and street naming and numbering for 2021/22;
12. That delegated authority is given to the appropriate Cabinet Member to agree variations to Trade Waste, Town Hall Centre, Building Control and Car Parking fees and charges for commercial purposes;
13. The sum of £7,368,666 be transferred from the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve to offset the estimated deficit on the Business Rates Collection Fund as at 31st March 2021, which is required to be taken into account for the 2021/22 Budget;
14. To continue the Council's Discretionary Business Rate Relief schemes, as detailed in section 9.2 to the main report, for 2021/22;
15. Discretionary council tax discounts and exemptions for 2021/22 are:
  - Discount applicable to empty dwellings undergoing major repairs is set at 0% for the twelve month period;
  - Discount applicable to vacant dwellings is set at 0% for the six month period;
  - Discount applicable to second homes is set at 0%;
  - Discretionary Council Tax Empty Homes Premiums charged on dwellings vacant for over two-years but less than five-years continue at 100%; on dwellings vacant for over five-years but less than ten-years continue at 200%; and on dwellings vacant for over ten-years be increased to 300%, with effect from 1st April 2021 and that this is duly published in a local newspaper within 21 days of this decision. In addition the refund arrangement, as detailed in section 13.5 of the main report;
16. The Council's Pay Policy for 2021/22 as detailed in Appendix B to the main report;
17. A transfer to the Revenue Account of £320,165 from the General Fund unallocated General Fund balance in 2021/22;
18. The estimated movements on the earmarked reserves as detailed in Appendix E to the main report;

## **Capital**

19. The General Fund Capital bids for 2021/22 listed in Appendix H to the main report;

## **Capital and Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy**

20. The Capital and Investment Strategy including the authorised borrowing limit, operational borrowing boundary, the policy on Minimum Revenue Provision and prudential indicators as detailed in Appendix I to the main report;
21. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement including the schedule of investment counterparties and limits and prudential indicators as detailed in Appendix J to the main report;

## **Council Tax**

22. The proposed estimates (producing a Braintree DC Council Tax Requirement of £9,921,194) as detailed in Appendix C and the Council Tax for 2021/22 of £184.68 for a Band D property, having taking into consideration:
- The consultation feedback, if any, received and reported verbally at the meeting;
  - The assessment of risks in the budget assumptions;
  - The Equalities Impact Assessments and
  - The Section 151 Officer's report (Corporate Director – Finance) on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of balances (Appendix G to the main report).

### **That Cabinet agreed to:**

23. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance Management to agree requests for unspent budgets, at the year-end, to be carried forward to the following year.

**POST MEETING NOTE:** Due to the scheduling of Precepting Authority's meeting (Essex County Council) and the date of Braintree District Council's meeting of Full Council it is not possible to undertake the council tax resolution at this time as part of this agenda and normal process. Under Agenda item 7, the Council will be asked to create a Council Tax Committee which will be delegated authority from Council to consider the Council Tax Resolution Report.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To determine the Budget and Council Tax level proposals for 2021/22 to be submitted to Full Council for consideration, in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution.

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## **SCRUTINY REVIEWS REFERRAL FROM FULL COUNCIL**

**INFORMATION:** In accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, Cabinet were required to formally receive the Scrutiny Review reports from the Community Development Group and the Partnership Development Group following their presentation to Full Council on 7th December 2020. Cabinet were invited to consider the Scrutiny Review reports and their respective recommendations and were further

requested to prepare a response to each of the Reviews, which would be reported to Full Council in due course.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod and Councillor Mrs M Cunningham as Chairmen of the Community Development Group and the Partnership Development Group were invited to present their reports to the Cabinet.

**DECISION:** That Cabinet agreed the following:

1. To formally receive the Scrutiny Review reports from the Community Development Group and the Partnership Development Group into:
  - a) Scrutiny Review into Community Woodlands (Appendix A)
  - b) Scrutiny Review into Childhood Vaccinations (Appendix B)
  - c) Scrutiny Review into Leisure Provision and Access to Sport (Appendix C)
2. To agree that the Cabinet Member for Environment and Place will provide a full and detailed response to the Scrutiny review into Community Woodlands.
3. To agree that the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing will provide a full and detailed response to the Scrutiny review into Childhood Vaccinations.
4. To agree that the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing will provide a full and detailed response to the Scrutiny review into Leisure Provision and Access to Sport.
5. To agree that the Cabinet responses to the Scrutiny Reviews will be reported to Full Council at the earliest opportunity.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Scrutiny Review reports to be formally received and responded to by Cabinet in accordance with the Procedure Rules for Scrutiny as set out in the Council's Constitution.

## 52 **NEW ARTIFICIAL GRASS PITCH FACILITY – HALSTEAD LEISURE CENTRE**

**INFORMATION:** Members considered a report on the funding options for a new artificial grass pitch facility at Halstead Leisure Centre.<sup>7</sup>

Members were advised that the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) at Halstead Leisure Centre was over 12 years old and was no longer fit for purpose. In consultation with the Essex County Football Association (ECFA) a review was undertaken looking at demand for high quality full size AGP's in the District. When looking at the AGP at Halstead it was suggested that by turning the orientation of the pitch by 90 degrees it would allow for the creation of a full size football pitch which would meet full Football Association and FIFA standards. This could allow the pitch to be used for competitive football matches, which would increase the usage of the pitch by local teams and improve football development opportunities for all age groups and gender's.

It was reported that the Council had made an application to the Football Foundation to fund the majority of the works needed, as the new facility will promote football development in Halstead and the surrounding area. Part of the Football Foundation's grant conditions required the Council to contribute towards the overall costs of the

Project. The total cost of the project was £751,600, accordingly the Council were required to contribute 30% towards the total cost, which would be sourced from Section 106 contributions together with a capital contribution of £45,000.

**DECISION:** That Cabinet agreed:

- 1a. To note the Football Foundation grant for part funding the improvements to the artificial playing surface at Halstead in the sum of £543,368.00;
- 1b. To note that £163,777.08 of the Councils 30% contribution is from S106 funding allocation.
2. To approve the allocation of £45,000 from the leisure capital reserve as Braintree District Councils contribution to the overall project; and
3. Award a NEC3 Engineering and Construction Contract to TigerTurf UK for the works at a value of £706,261.59

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure that the financial governance process is completed, ahead of the works commencing on site, and to enable the Council to enter into the associated NEC3 Engineering and Construction Contracts.

## 53 **CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS MADE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

**DECISION:** That Cabinet noted the delegated decisions.

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** The reasons for the decision can be found in the individual delegated decision.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.11pm.

COUNCILLOR G BUTLAND  
(Leader of the Council)