

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in a virtual environment on Monday 15th March 2021.

Present:

Councillors D Goodfellow (Chairman), G Allen, Mrs B Ashcroft, R A Faulkner and B G Peters.

Officers Present:

The Chief Executive, the Heads of Service (Sal Khan and Mark Rizk), the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Accountant (Min no 155/21 only), the Programmes and Transformation Team Leader (Min no 156/21 only), the Housing Options Manager (157/21), the Shared Services Centre Manager (Revenues, Benefits & Customer Contacts) (Min nos 158-159/21 inclusive), the Environment Manager (Min no 160/21 only) and the Principal Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present:

Cabinet Support Member Councillor M Metcalfe.

An apology for absence was received from Cabinet Support Member Councillor S McGarry.

PART II

151/21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting.

152/21 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the public minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2021 be approved as a correct record.

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
D Goodfellow		
G Allen		
Mrs B Ashcroft		
R A Faulkner		
B G Peters		

153/21 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business submitted to the meeting pursuant to Rule 12.

154/21 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan for the period 1st March 2021 to 30th June 2021 was submitted for information.

NOTED.

155/21 **QUARTER 3 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2020/21**

The report of the Head of Service (Sal Khan) on the forecast outturn position in relation to the Council's revenue budget, capital programmes of expenditure, treasury and risk management activities was considered.

The following appendices had been circulated with the report:

- 1) Appendix A: Forecast variances against budget – Quarter 3 2020/21;
- 2) Appendix B: Investments at 31st December 2020;
- 3) Appendix C: Corporate and Strategic Risks – Quarter 3 2020/21.

Cabinet noted that the report highlighted that overall there were forecast net pressures against the original budget of £2.4m for the full financial year against a net budget of £11.024m. The vast majority of the pressures had arisen due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and related lockdown. Once the actual and estimated additional funding of £2.6m is taken into consideration, there would be a small forecast net surplus to £0.2m.

The reasons for making the decision below were set out in the report.

Resolved:

- 1) That the financial position at quarter three of 2020/21 in relation to revenue and capital budgets together, with the degree of financial uncertainty that existed due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, be noted;
- 2) That the latest position in respect of the Council's investments and borrowing be noted;
- 3) That the corporate and strategic risks, together with actions being taken to manage these be noted

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
D Goodfellow		
G Allen		
Mrs B Ashcroft		
R A Faulkner		
B G Peters		

CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21 QUARTER 3

The report of the Head of Service (Sal Khan) on the update on progress at the end of the third quarter of the 2020/21 financial year towards achieving the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan was considered. Appendix 1: comprehensive data on all Corporate Indicators had been circulated with the report.

Cabinet noted that out of the 109 targets, 84 were green; 3 were amber and 6 were red status; 3 were not yet due to be reported (Including 2 proposed to be deferred); 11 had been previously agreed to be deferred and 2 had previously agreed to be deleted. Of the 93 live targets: 90.32% were green; 3.23% were amber and 6.45% were red status.

The reasons for making the decision below were set out in the report.

Resolved:

- 1) That performance at the end of the third quarter of the 2020/21 financial year towards achieving the Council's Corporate Priorities be considered;
- 2) That targets VFM03 and VFM04 be deferred to 2021-22, pending the outcome of Green Paper in relation to Public Procurement Regulations.

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
D Goodfellow		
G Allen		
Mrs B Ashcroft		
R A Faulkner		
B G Peters		

PROGRESS REPORT ON REDUCING THE NUMBER OF EMPTY HOMES IN THE BOROUGH

The report of the Head of Service (Sal Khan) on the review of the first 18 months of the Council's Empty Homes Service provided by Grafton UK was considered.

The following appendices had been circulated with the report:

- 1) Appendix 1: Relevant Statutes;
- 2) Appendix 2: Options for Enforcement;
- 3) Appendix 3: Legislative Basis for Enforced Sale;
- 4) Appendix 4: EHIA

Councillors noted that following the appointment of Grafton (UK) Ltd to provide an Empty Homes Service it has responded to a total of 320 empty homes, of

these 101 homes had been successfully brought back into use and of the remaining 219 empty homes, a small minority needed to be considered for enforcement in order to bring the home back into use.

Cabinet noted the overview of service delivery and approach to enforcement as detailed in the report.

The reasons for making the decision below were set out in the report.

Resolved:

That Enforced Sale as the Council's preferred mechanism for taking enforcement action against problematic empty homes be endorsed.

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
D Goodfellow		
G Allen		
Mrs B Ashcroft		
R A Faulkner		
B G Peters		

158/21

REVIEW OF COURT COSTS FOR COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

The report of the Head of Service (Sal Khan) on the review of court costs for Council Tax and Business Rates was considered. Appendix 1: Council Tax and Business Rates Recovery Procedure had been circulated with the report.

Councillors noted that a benchmarking exercise had been conducted to identify the costs applied for unpaid Council Tax and Business Rates throughout Staffordshire. The results contained in tables 1 and 2 at section 5.1 of the report highlighted that the Council currently had the lowest Court Costs for Council Tax and Business Rates in Staffordshire.

A detailed costing exercise had also been undertaken to determine the expenditure that had been reasonably incurred by the Council in obtaining the liability order. In 2019/20 the Council issued 18,029 reminders and final notices for non-payment of Council Tax which lead to 5,561 summons notices being issued and 4,152 liability orders being obtained. In the same period 1,379 business rates reminders and final notices were issued which lead to 412 summonses being issued and 204 liability orders being obtained. The analysis of costs included the costs across Revenues, Benefits and Customer Contacts service due to generic working. Using this analysis, three cost options became apparent:

- 1) Costs to remain as is;
- 2) Costs to increase to £95.00 match the average level across Staffordshire authorities;

- 3) Costs to increase to £99.00 to recover the costs incurred by the Council to recover unpaid amounts.

The reasons for making the decision below were set out in the report.

Resolved:

- 1) That Court Costs for Council Tax and Business Rates be increased to £95.00 with effect from 1 April 2021, as proposed in paragraph 5.6 of the report;
- 2) That summons notice costs for Council Tax and Business Rates be increased to £65.00 and liability order costs remain at £30.00 with effect from 1 April 2021, as proposed in paragraph 5.6 of the report;
- 3) That a review of Court Costs be undertaken in quarter 2 of 2022, as proposed in paragraph 5.6 of the report.

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
D Goodfellow		
G Allen		
Mrs B Ashcroft		
R A Faulkner		
B G Peters		

159/21

REVIEW OF RECOVERY AND WRITE OFF POLICIES

The report of the Head of Service (Sal Khan) on the review of recovery and write off policies was considered.

The following appendices had been circulated with the report for the meeting:

- 1) Appendix 1: Table of revisions made to proposed Recovery policy (revised 2021);
- 2) Appendix 2: Proposed Recovery policy (revised 2021);
- 3) Appendix 3: Proposed Write Off policy (revised 2021).

Cabinet noted that the Recovery and Write Off policies provided essential guidance and a framework to ensure that the process was carried out in a consistent, firm but fair way, which assisted those having difficulty in paying whilst protecting those who do pay. The emphasis was to encourage early contact from those facing payment difficulties and to maximise take up of benefit where ever possible. The Recovery and Write Off policies previously approved in 2017 had been updated to add more emphasis on supporting local residents, businesses and debtors with their payments, and included reference to the legislation surrounding the implementation of the Debt Respite Scheme

(Breathing Space) legislation due to be implemented with effect from 4 May 2021.

The reasons for making the decision below were set out in the report.

Resolved:

- 1) That the revisions to the proposed Recovery policy as shown at Appendix 13.1 of the report be approved;
- 2) That the revisions to the proposed Write Off policy as shown in table 1 of paragraph 5.3 of the report be approved.

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
D Goodfellow		
G Allen		
Mrs B Ashcroft		
R A Faulkner		
B G Peters		

160/21

SMARTER STREET CLEANING PROGRAMME – UPDATE REPORT ON THE IT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The report of the Head of Service (Sal Khan) on the update on the implementation of the IT management system to support the SMARTER street cleaning programme was considered.

Cabinet noted that the implementation of the street cleaning module would deliver a number of key benefits as detailed below:

- Management of planned and reactive operations, combined with mobile working and live reporting;
- Scheduling of regular jobs and seasonal demands (e.g. sweeping of leaves);
- Mobile working and telematics to build an evidence base for improved planning of resources - e.g. which streets need sweeping more frequently and which litter bins are most often full;
- Automated reporting of cleanliness levels to support corporate plan performance targets;
- Mapping system linked to the gazetteer;
- Health and safety monitoring.

Further work would be required with Bartec to link the in-cab hardware to the back office system and to set up the scheduling of routine work streams and it was anticipated that the system would launch during May 2021.

The reasons for making the decision below were set out in the report.

Resolved:

That the current position with IT management system for street cleaning and the proposed timescale for implementation be noted.

Voting concerning the above decision was as follows:

Those voting for the motion	Those voting against	Those abstaining
D Goodfellow		
G Allen		
Mrs B Ashcroft		
R A Faulkner		
B G Peters		

161/21

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it was likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Chairman