

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday 25 July 2019 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor J A Kite, MBE (Chairman)
Councillor C J Shippam (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs A D Allen, MBE
Councillor S H Brown
Councillor A R Lloyd
Councillor R J Wells

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

13. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 13 JUNE 2019

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 June 2019 be confirmed as an accurate record.

14. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

15. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE CABINET ADVISORY PANEL HELD ON 22 JULY 2019

The Cabinet received the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet Advisory Panel A on 22 July 2019 and had regard to the Panel's views throughout the meeting.

16. REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

There were no references from other committees.

17. DRAFT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS' POLICY - JULY 2019

The Cabinet considered a report which detailed the outcome of the latest review of the Housing Allocations' Policy which had been originally adopted by the Council on 18th March 2013 as the Council's framework for the allocation and management of the future allocation of properties. All housing authorities were required to have a Housing Allocations' Policy setting out how social housing properties would be allocated to eligible applicants in housing need. The policy had subsequently been reviewed in 2014 and 2018.

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In order to ensure a consistent approach a further review of the policy had been undertaken and amendments made, where appropriate, to reflect operational changes (including working practices) following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the new policy met the requirements of current legislation. The report detailed the proposed changes to the Housing Allocations' Policy and the general layout had also been revised to ensure ease of understanding, clarity and transparency.

The Cabinet had regard to the comments made by the Cabinet Advisory Panel, which had endorsed the recommendations contained in the report. The Chairman was advised that the Shadow Leader of the Council had taken up the invitation issued by the Housing Solutions and Private Sector Manager at the CAP meeting to be fully briefed on aspects of the policy. The Chairman was delighted to hear that the Shadow Leader had taken up an invitation that had been made on several occasions to his predecessor. His fresh approach was welcomed.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet agree the amendments to the Housing Allocations' Policy as set out in the body of the report and approve the revised Policy, attached at Appendix A to the report.

18. DRAFT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019-2023

The Cabinet considered a report which detailed changes to the existing Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 and the proposed Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023. The Housing Act 1996 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 placed a duty on local housing authorities to provide advice and assistance to homeless people and people threatened with homelessness in their areas. In order to ensure that a strategic approach was taken towards the Council's delivery of homelessness advice and assistance by the Housing Solutions Team the Housing Service carries out a review of homelessness and produces a Homelessness Strategy every five years as required under the Homelessness Act 2002. However in 2018 the Government announced new measures for tackling rough sleeping nationwide and that local authorities must prepare and publish a strategy in their area by December 2019, with a view to eliminating rough sleeping by 2027 and reducing it by half within the next couple of years. The existing strategy had therefore been updated to comply with the new legislation and changes in operational measures to meet the statutory requirement to publish a strategy for tackling rough sleeping. Although rough sleeping in the Borough was comparatively low, there were estimated to be 12 people sleeping rough at the time of the last rough sleeper count in 2018, it was recognised that rough sleeping could have a distressing and detrimental impact on people. The Council's aim was to reduce the levels of rough sleeping in the borough as far as possible and steps were taken to ensure that those individuals identified at the last rough sleeper count that could be helped would not be sleeping rough by the time of the next count. The Strategy sought to 'proactively prevent homelessness and rough sleeping through strong partnership working, and to provide an inclusive and accessible service to all'.

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The proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023 detailed the list of achievements from actions referred to in the previous Strategy and set out new actions to be delivered up to 2021. Progress would continue to be monitored by the multi-agency Dartford Homeless Strategy and Rough Sleeper Implementation Group (HSIG) formed under the last Strategy with the continuing aim that partner organisations should come together to drive implementation of the new Strategy for 2019-2023.

The Cabinet had regard to the comments made by the Cabinet Advisory Panel, which had endorsed the recommendations contained in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023, attached at Appendix A to the report.

19. ANNUAL TREASURY REPORT 2018/2019

The Cabinet considered a report which provided details of the outturn position (subject to audit) of the Council's investments and borrowing for the 2018/2019 financial year and which detailed the outturn position of the Council's treasury indicators.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance commented on the high quality work carried out by the Finance Department on treasury management which had allowed £30M of the £87M debt taken on in 2012 as a result of the Housing Self Financing regime to be repaid already. He asked whether he could be given more notice of the dates for future meetings of the Treasury Management Panel given that these were daytime meetings and asked whether there was any training that could be provided for Members of the Panel in view of the complexity of the matters considered by the Panel. The Managing Director advised that more notice would be given of the dates for future meetings but that these could change. In terms of training, this had been commissioned previously but had proved to be expensive and unproductive as the subject matter was very specialised. Time was now being set aside at each Panel meeting to consider a specific area of work and to build the Panel's knowledge base. The Managing Director also explained the checks and balances built into the Council's treasury management practices and the role of Arlingclose in providing outside expertise and challenge. Clarification was also provided on why some of the Council's non-treasury investments did not generate income.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Cabinet notes the outturn for the Council's treasury management operations for 2018/19; and
2. That the Cabinet notes the outturn for the Council's treasury indicators.

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20. WRITE-OFF OF NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES

The Cabinet considered a report which proposed writing-off National Non-Domestic Rate debts, amounting to £1,108,229.03, where it had not been possible to obtain payment because of insolvency, because it was not possible to trace the ratepayer or where the debt was otherwise irrecoverable.

RESOLVED:

That the sums shown in exempt Appendix A in the confidential part of the report, amounting to £1,108,229.03, be written-off as uncollectable.

21. WRITE-OFF OF COUNCIL TAX

The Cabinet considered a report which proposed writing-off Council Tax, amounting to £14,468.64, where it had not been possible to obtain payment because the taxpayer could not be traced or the debt was otherwise irrecoverable.

The Cabinet Member for Finance said that he used to receive regular reports from the Revenues and Benefits service on the rates of Council Tax arrears but had not received these for some time. It was confirmed that these reports were still produced and that they would be sent to him in future.

RESOLVED:

That the sums shown in Exempt Appendix A to the report, in the closed part of the agenda, amounting to £14,468.64, be written off as uncollectable.

22. HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENT WRITE-OFFS

The Cabinet considered a report which proposed writing-off Housing Benefit overpayments, amounting to £39,792.31, where recovery was prohibited, not considered appropriate or where the customer had absconded.

RESOLVED:

That the sum of £39,792.31, shown in Exempt Appendix A to the report, on the closed part of the agenda, be written-off as irrecoverable.

23. CAPITAL PROGRAMME INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS - OUTTURN 2018/19

The Cabinet considered a report which provided details of the final pre-audit figures for the 2018/19 Capital Programme, the capital resources that were used to fund it and those resources that remain available to fund future investment.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet note the draft outturn for the Capital Programme for 2018/19.

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2. That Cabinet note the draft outturn position for 2018/19 on Capital resources, and the balance available to be carried forward into 2019/20.
3. That the Cabinet recommend the total capital budget carried forward into 2019/20, as set out in Appendix C to the General Assembly of the Council.
4. That Cabinet note the outturn position on the Capital Prudential Indicators as shown in Appendix D.
5. That Cabinet agree a virement of 2019/20 budget from the new homes budget to the projects listed in Appendix C
6. That the General Assembly of the Council be asked to agree the capital budget carried forward into 2019/20 as per Appendix C, thereby increasing the total capital budget to £30.771m

24. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - OUTTURN 2018/19

The Cabinet considered a report which provided details of the final pre-audit 2018/19 figures for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, including reasons for significant variances compared to the probable outturn.

RESOLVED:

That the 2018/19 outturn for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, together with the reasons for significant variances compared to probable outturn, be noted.

25. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20

The Cabinet considered a report which updated Members on financial performance against the 2019/20 budget to date for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

The Cabinet had regard to the comments made by the Cabinet Advisory Panel, which had endorsed the recommendations contained in the report. The Chairman noted that a comprehensive response had been given to the CAP regarding the composition of the staff vacancy saving and in detailing the Council's programme of activities directed towards staff wellbeing, including stress management training. He noted the comment about budgeting for special events but felt that the budgetary approach taken was correct, budgets were kept under regular review and it was important to set challenging targets for income generation.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the monitoring report update for the year to date.

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26. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20

The Cabinet considered a report which detailed progress to date on the schemes in the approved Capital Programme for 2019/20 and reported the latest position on capital resources. The Chairman said that it was good that Dartford was able to sustain a healthy programme of capital projects which were outward facing and transformational and noted the good progress being made with works in the Town Centre, and at Acacia Hall and Stone Lodge.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet note the progress made to date on the 2019/20 Capital Programme.

27. WRITE-OFF OF NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES - EXEMPT APPENDIX A - EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46(1)(B)

RESOLVED:

That, following consideration of the main report (minute 20), Exempt Appendix A to the report be noted.

28. WRITE-OFF OF COUNCIL TAX - EXEMPT APPENDIX A - EXEMPT CATEGORY S)46(1)(B)

RESOLVED:

That, following consideration of the main report (minute 21), Exempt Appendix A to the report be noted.

29. WRITE-OFF OF HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS - EXEMPT APPENDIX A - EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46(1)(B)

RESOLVED:

That, following consideration of the main report (minute 22), Exempt Appendix A to the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.30 pm

Councillor J A Kite, MBE
CHAIRMAN

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