

CABINET

Wednesday, 18th January, 2012

Present:- S Sweeney – in the Chair
Councillors Studd, A Howells and M Reddish

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Bannister and Cllr Jones.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

4. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2011/12

A report was submitted regarding the Annual Audit Letter from the Audit Commission dealing with the Audit of Accounts 2010/11. External Audit was an essential element in the process of accountability for public money and made an important contribution to the stewardship of public resources and corporate governance of public services. One of the challenges faced by the Council had been the introduction of International Financial Reporting Standards but due to the hard work of the finance team, the financial statements had few errors, the working papers comprehensive and the draft set of accounts in line with good practice.

Resolved: That the Audit Commissions Annual Letter be received.

5. CALCULATION OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE 2012/13

A report was submitted requesting approval of the Council Tax Base to be used to calculate the 2012/13 levies for the Borough Council, the County Council, the Police Authority, the Fire Authority and each Town and Parish Council.

Resolved: That in accordance with the Local Authorities (calculation of tax base) Regulations 1992, the amounts calculated as the Council Tax Base for 2012/13 be as follows:

Band D Equivalent Properties

Newcastle Borough Council	39,136
Kidsgrove Town Council	7,219
Audley	2,669
Loggerheads	1,957
Balterley, Betley and Wrinehill	574
Chapel and Hill Chorlton	197

Keele	332
Madeley	1,558
Maer	254
Silverdale	1,446
Whitmore	805

6. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2012/13

A report was submitted to review progress on the completion of the revenue and capital budgets for 2012/13 following agreement of the 5 year Medium Term Financial Strategy.

There was not a proposed Council Tax increase for 2012/13 and the Government were again offering to pay a non specific grant to those councils which did not increase their Council Tax for 2012/13. If the Council decided to make no increase to Council Tax, the amount required from the Budget Support Fund was £179,000. The 'gap' for 2012/13 was £2.621m and a number of proposals had been put forward to bridge this gap including further savings from the Budget Service Review carried out in the previous year, from the Way We Work Programme and other reviews of service provision carried out by the Executive Management Team.

Cabinet members congratulated the Executive Director (Resources and Support Services) and the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Efficiency.

Resolved:

- (a) That the assumptions set out in the report be approved.
- (b) That the Cabinet recommend to Council that the revised minimum balances requirement be £1,500,000 with the excess of £350,000 above the current levels being transferred to the Contingency Reserve (£80,000), the Insurance Fund (£120,000) and the Provision for Bad Debts (sundry debtors) (£150,000)
- (c) That the Cabinet put forward their views on the level of Council Tax increase to be set for 2012/13.
- (d) That the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider what comments it wishes to make on the draft Budget and Council

7. SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

A report was submitted requesting approval for the proposed scale of fees and charges to apply from 1 April 2012.

The preparation of the 2012/13 budget assumed an overall 3.5% increase in the level of fees and charges for 2012/13 in line with assumptions about the rate of inflation over the period that the charges would be in force. A new environmental levy on adult cremations (£55 per cremation) had been included and it was not proposed to increase the fees for market traders or for town centre car parking.

Resolved: That the fees and charges proposed to apply from 1 April 2012, as set out in Appendix A be approved and submitted to the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment.

8. HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2012-13

A report was submitted seeking approval for the 2012/13 Housing Capital Programme.

It was stated that under the New Homes Bonus, from year 2012/13. The Government would pay an enhancement of £350 for each new affordable unit. It was however thought that the Council would need to tread carefully regarding this scheme as developing affordable housing purely to access further grants in future years would not be sufficient justification to promote this approach.

Resolved: That the proposed housing capital programme for 2012/13 be approved.

9. HOUSING RENEWAL ASSISTANCE POLICY 2012/16

Cabinet Members received a report outlining the requirement to review the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy and to seek approval to a revised Policy.

Officers had been working with partner agencies to review the current schemes included in the current policy. Following these discussions a consultation document highlighting the main proposed changes and a proposed revised policy had been issued for consultation. The key issues, consultation comments and preferred solution were included in the recommended revised Housing Assistance Policy 2012-16.

Resolved: That the revised Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2012-16 be adopted

10. CAPITAL STRATEGY 2012/15

A report was submitted requesting Members to consider the Capital Strategy 2012 to 2015.

The Council's current detailed capital investment plan was contained in its Approved Capital Programme. A two year programme was approved by Full Council on 23 February 2011. This programme provided for £21,638,800 of investment over the two-year period in projects across all of the Council's priority areas, of which £10,374,500 was programmed to be spent in 2011/12. Since then, programmed expenditure for 2011/12 had been reviewed resulting in a revised 2011/12 outturn figure of £16,783,300 being agreed. This took account of slippage coming forward from 2010/11 and the addition of the cost of acquiring a town centre development site at Rycroft. Full Council would consider a capital programme to continue investment beyond 2011/12 on 15 February 2012.

The Strategy had been prepared against a background of unprecedented reductions in funding provided to local authorities by central government and its agencies, arising from the need to restrain public expenditure owing to the ongoing economic recession and to rebalance public finances. At the same time, the Council's own resources available to finance capital projects were diminishing and would need replenishing before any substantial further capital investments could be made. As a result the Council had initiated a programme of asset disposals to address this situation. In the interim period, before asset sales could provide these additional

resources, the Capital Programme was restricted to cover a two year period, 2010/11 to 2011/12.

Resolved: That the Capital Strategy be agreed and forwarded to Council for approval.

11. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

A report was submitted seeking approval, in principle for the Asset Management Strategy dated 2012-2-14.

The Asset Management Strategy sought to provide a robust and formal approach to the management and use of the Council's land and property assets to obtain the best value for money and to help keep Council Tax rates at a minimum. It was stated that any proposed disposal of land would be considered within the strict context of public consultation.

Resolved: (a) That Members approve, in principle, the Asset Management Strategy 2012- 2014.

(b) That officers report back to the next Cabinet meeting for a final decision following receipt of comments from the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

12. PROVISION OF RECYCLING BRING BANK SITES

Members received a report providing background to the current Recycling Bring Bank Service, a review of locations and materials collected at the sites and considerations regarding the future levels of service and contractors involved.

Resolved: a) That the redevelopment of Bring Sites as detailed within the report be agreed.

(b) That the range of material collected from the Bring Site include paper, mixed glass, cans, plastic on all site and where possible textiles, WEEE and cartons.

(c) That the Executive Director (Operational Services) be authorised to enter into agreements with the contractors detailed in this report and align with the extension of the Council kerbside recycling and treatment contracts until July 2016.

(d) That a project budget as detailed be agreed to deliver cost savings through new agreements, site improvements and servicing.

13. FUTURE COMMISSIONING FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY (THIRD) SECTOR

A report was submitted to ratify the Council's budget for funding commissioned contracts with the Third (Community and Voluntary) Sector, to establish the duration of the funding (previously, funding was made available for a three year period) and to agree on the Council's preferred route to market for the commissioning of Third Sector services. It was agreed that work with the third sector was of importance and needed to continue but that value for money had to be secured.

Resolved: (a) That, as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Cabinet ratify available funding for commissioning, and agree to the duration for this funding (£248,510 p.a. has already being allocated in the MTFS for this purpose).

(b) That the three-year availability of these funds be made conditional on a budgetary review 3 months prior to the anniversary date to ensure on going funding can be supported.

(c) That collaborative procurement/commissioning be considered (where available) to maximise efficiencies and to jointly commission services with other organisations, ensuring in the process that there is no detrimental effect on the overall service to residents of the Borough in line with service outlines.

S SWEENEY
Chair