

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday 27th May 2020

**Present: Councillor A Barnes (Chair)
Councillors Hughes, Lythgoe, Oakes, Serridge and Walmsley**

**In Attendance: Mr N Shaw, Chief Executive
Mrs C Burns, Director of Economic Development
Mr A Allen, Director of Communities
Ms C Birtwistle, Monitoring Officer
Ms K Spencer, Head of Finance
Mr M Atherton, Head of Planning (in part)
Mrs C Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager
Miss G Ashton, Committee and Member Services Officer**

**Also Present: Mr B Greenwood, Media Team
Councillors Haworth, Neal and Pendlebury
1 member of the press**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th March 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No written questions had been submitted.

6. RAISING OF PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE FEES

The Portfolio Holder for Operations and Development Control outlined the report which asked members to approve the increase of pre-application fees in relation to planning applications. This would bring the Council in line with neighbouring authorities. The Head of Planning advised that Conservation Area charges had not changed.

There were no questions from Cabinet or Members.

Resolved:

1. Cabinet approved the increase in pre-application planning fees.

Reason for Decision:

To maintain the status quo was not a favourable option as it would result in less income being received than is possible to achieve. The preferred option would be to secure authorisation to

increase the fees in line with the recommendation of the report, in order to increase the income generated by the Planning Department.

Alternative Options Considered:

None.

N.B. Mr M Atherton, Head of Planning left the meeting

7. COUNCIL PRIORITIES 2020/21

The Leader of the Council outlined the report which asked members to approve the Council's priorities for 2020/21.

Cabinet members were invited to comment on the report:

- It was beneficial to review what had been achieved so far and what priorities were ongoing.
- The COVID-19 pandemic had financial implications on the Council. It also identified mental health implications for residents which needed to be addressed.
- Climate change was an important issue.

In response to a question raised it was noted that:

- There would be a significant financial shortfall due to COVID-19.

Resolved:

1. Members approved the Council's priorities for 2020/21.

Reason for Decision:

It was important for the Council to be clear on its priority areas to ensure it was focusing the use of its resources and has a clear management plan to guide the activity of services throughout the year. The priorities would also provide clarity to members and the public on the key activity for the Council for the forthcoming year. The Council had to retain a degree of flexibility to ensure it could react to issues which emerge during the year, but was keen to be clear about its focus for the next year.

Alternative Options Considered:

None.

8. IMPACT OF COVID 19

The Leader of the Council outlined the report which asked members to note the impact of COVID-19 on the Council and the support the Council had provided to local communities and businesses. That the Council continued to lobby the Ministry of Housing & Local Government for sufficient Government funding to replace lost revenue income, manage the cost of recovery and support the economic recovery of the borough.

Since publication of the report:

- £900,000 in discretionary grants would be available for businesses not covered by the first round of grants. These would be available for market traders, charities etc. Further guidance was awaited.
- Extra funding was to be provided to keep High Streets safe e.g. the installation of temporary barriers. Around £60,000 would be available.

The Chief Executive advised that Rossendale was one of the first Council's to appoint a

member of staff to take business grants forward. Despite Government funding the Council were suffering losses of £200,000-£300,000 and would worsen as businesses struggled to pay business rates etc.

The Council continued to work with Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF) to help communities and businesses recover from the pandemic.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged the level of extra work the Council had been involved in and was very proud of the way the Council had risen to the challenge.

Some Operations services had continued to run as normal which was a huge credit to the team.

Cabinet members were invited to comment on the report:

- The Council had coped well during the pandemic.
- Going forward the financial impact was unclear.
- The financial impact on individuals needed to be considered going forward.
- Mental health and homelessness needed to be considered.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet noted the impact of COVID-19 on the Council to date and the support the Council had provided to local communities and businesses.
2. That the Council continued to lobby the Ministry of Housing & Local Government for sufficient Government funding to replace lost revenue income, manage the cost of recovery and support the economic recovery of the borough.

Reason for Decision:

The speed and scale of the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on local communities has been unprecedented. The Council has managed the emergency response phase of the pandemic well to date but needs to remain vigilant. The short term financial impact on cash flow is significant. There is a strategic risk to the Council's medium term income, like many local authorities. The Council has limited ability to mitigate this and will keenly monitor its cash flow.

Despite additional Government funding for 2020/21 the Council will currently experience a significant revenue funding shortfall. The Council needs to continue to lobby the Ministry of Housing & Local Government for sufficient Government funding to both replace lost revenue income (currently estimated in the region of £200-300k) and to manage the additional cost of recovery (currently estimated at £116k).

Until the Government's plans for relaxing lockdown restrictions become clear it will be difficult for the Council to plan accurately for the recovery phase but preparations are being made. The longer the lockdown remains the more acute the financial implications for the Council will be. The Council, along with national organisations like the District Councils Network and the Local Government Association, continue to lobby Government for sufficient short and medium term funding for Council to weather the disruption associated with COVID-19.

Alternative Options Considered:

None.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 7.00pm

_____ CHAIR _____ DATE