

Minutes of a meeting of the **Policy Group** of the Purbeck District Council held in the Council Chamber, Westport House, Wareham on Wednesday 31 January 2018 at 7.00pm.

Present:-

Councillor Gary Suttle (Chairman)
Councillor Barry Quinn (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Cherry Brooks, Laura Miller, Bill Pipe and Peter Webb

Also present: Councillor David Budd

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting: Fiona Brown, Housing Manager; Paul Gammon, IT Manager; Sue Joyce, General Manager – Resources; Rebecca Kirk, General Manager – Public Health and Housing; Steve Mackenzie, Chief Executive; Kirsty Riglar, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager; Emma Webb, Senior GIS Officer and Richard Wilson, Environmental Design Manager.

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Group).

67.17/18 **Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

68.17/18 **Urgent items**

The Chairman reported there were no urgent items.

69.17/18 **Public participation time**

No members of the public wanted to speak.

70.17/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2017 be taken as read, confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

71.17/18 **Declarations of Interest by Members**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

72.17/18 **Forward Plan**

The Policy Group considered the current Forward Plan. In response to a Member's question, the Chief Executive confirmed that the report on the East Creech Conservation Area review would be presented to Council in February.

The General Manager – Public Health and Housing informed Members that the report on the Purbeck Sports Centre was unlikely to be brought to the meeting of Policy Group in March as Dorset County Council and the Dorset Councils Partnership were

still seeking initial approval for the procurement process through their decision-making processes.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be received.

73.17/18 **Local Plan Review**

The Chief Executive reported that the Local Plan Review consultation had now commenced, with a special edition of About Purbeck being delivered to all households and publication of a series of drop-in events across the district. He added that an event to launch the consultation to town and parish councils had taken place on the previous evening and had been well received.

The Chairman encouraged residents to attend these events and respond to the consultation. He confirmed that further copies of the questionnaire could be requested from Public Perspectives to enable more than one person in a household to respond. As every questionnaire was individually barcoded, photocopies would not be accepted.

The Environment Portfolio Holder noted the large amount of comprehensive background information published on the Council's website and encouraged Members to direct residents to this in order to inform their responses.

74.17/18 **Purbeck Sports Centre - proposed fees and charges 2018/19**

The General Manager – Resources presented a report on benchmarking work comparing fees and charges for sports centres in Dorset and seeking support for the proposed 2018/19 fees and charges for the Purbeck Sports Centre. Members were reminded that the fees and charges for the Sports Centre were normally set to come into effect on 1 January each year. However, following questions raised by Policy Group at its meeting in October 2017, further benchmarking had been undertaken resulting in a delay in the approval and implementation of these fees and charges. This had informed the fees and charges now proposed to come into effect from 1 April 2018.

Resolved that the budget report submitted to Council in February include recommendations on the proposed fees and charges for activities at the Purbeck Sports Centre, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report, with effect from 1 April 2018.

75.17/18 **Draft Revenue Budget 2018/19**

The General Manager – Resources presented a report seeking support to recommend to Council the level of council tax and the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2018/19. She explained that the draft budget had been prepared on the basis of the budget assumptions agreed by Council in September 2017, aimed at broadly continuing current service levels and with business rates remaining on the safety net. It had been assumed, as part of the budget preparations, the Council would agree:

- (i) to increase council tax by the maximum of 2.99%;
- (ii) the proposed fees and charges and draft capital programme supported by Policy Group; and
- (iii) the Treasury Management Strategy supported by the Audit and Governance Committee.

She reported that the settlement for 2018/19 was as anticipated with the complete loss of Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and a reduction of £16,000 in New Homes Bonus. However, Rural Services Delivery Grant would provide £9,000 additional income and the council tax referendum threshold had been increased to 3%. If the Council set the council tax increase to 2.99%, an additional £9,000 would be raised.

Members were informed that the draft budget was showing a £72,000 deficit when the report was prepared. However, there had been more movements, the most significant of which was the business rates forecast which took the Council off the business rates safety net and generated extra income sufficient to balance the budget and create a surplus of £95,000. Given the time lag in relation to business rates, it was proposed that the surplus should be used to reduce risk in the 2018/19 budget, rather than being built into the base. The General Manager – Resources proposed that, to better align the Council’s budget with that of its neighbouring authorities in preparation for potential local government reorganisation, most of the surplus be used to remove the unallocated savings target from the budget. For 2018/19, this had been set at £75,000. Should reorganisation not take place, this could be reintroduced to the budget from 2019/20, if required. Additionally, it was proposed that an impairment provision of £20,000 be included for ‘bad debts’.

Particular attention was drawn to the recommended delegation of council tax setting to the Audit and Governance Committee if it was not possible for Council to undertake this when approving the Council’s budget requirement and council tax calculation. This situation had arisen due to the County Council being scheduled to meet to agree its council tax requirement after the Council’s own budget setting meeting. It was possible that this situation would change before the Council met but the inclusion of this recommendation in the budget report would ensure that the Council could meet its obligations as billing authority.

In response to a Member’s question, the Chief Executive reported that the Local Government Association was lobbying Government to remove the proposal for RSG to go negative.

In response to a question from another Member, the General Manager – Resources confirmed that an increase in contributions from reserves of £54,000 was realistic based on known commitments and risks.

Resolved that a detailed report be submitted to Council recommending:

- (1) increasing the council tax by 2.99% from an annual Band D council tax of £182.41 to £187.86;
- (2) approval of the draft General Fund Revenue Budget, based on the assumptions included within this report;
- (3) approval of the proposed fees and charges included in this report and those already considered by Policy Group;
- (4) approval of the proposed Capital Programme for 2018/19 – 2022/23 considered by Policy Group, updated for any Council approvals and timing information;
- (5) the removal of the unallocated savings target in the budget and the inclusion of an impairment provision of £20,000; and

- (6) delegation of council tax setting to the Audit and Governance Committee if it is not possible for Council to undertake this when approving this Council's budget requirement and council tax calculation.

76.17/18 **Adoption of the Street Naming and Numbering Policy**

The IT Manager presented a report seeking support for the adoption of the Street Naming and Numbering Policy. He explained that the Council did not currently have such a policy relating to this function and the aim of introducing this was to provide guidance about what should be contained in applications for street naming and numbering and how these would be dealt with by the Council. The adoption of the proposed policy, together with the addition of fees to cover the cost of non-statutory elements of the service was intended to enable the Council to recover its costs on these and provide the best service available to its customers.

In response to Members' questions, the Senior GIS Officer confirmed it was rare to re-number a whole street and it tended to be the addition of infill numbers and that the street signs for new developments were paid for by the developer in the first instance.

Resolved that a report be submitted to Council recommending the adoption of the Street Naming and Numbering Policy.

77.17/18 **Northbrook Road pedestrian bridge, Swanage – proposal for replacement**

The Environmental Design Manager presented a report regarding a proposal for the replacement of the pedestrian bridge adjacent to Northbrook Road, Swanage. He reminded Members that the Council had acquired this bridge in 2009 in order to implement the Swanage flood alleviation scheme. However, due to a lack of maintenance for a considerable time, the bridge had become a dangerous structure and had been closed. Consequently, pedestrians unable to use the bridge were using an alternative route through the adjoining cemetery, which had led to dog fouling and the tranquillity of the area being disturbed.

It was therefore proposed that the bridge be replaced using low maintenance materials at an estimated cost of £24,300. The Environment Agency had confirmed that it would contribute to the cost of this and Swanage Town Council had agreed to fund up to £8,000 of a replacement structure and cover 50% of the cost of future maintenance. The Council's share would therefore be £8,300 of the total cost.

Members welcomed the report and supported the proposed replacement of the bridge.

Resolved that a report be submitted to Council recommending that:

- (1) subject to the partnership funding support from the Environment Agency and Swanage Town Council, the bridge be replaced; and
- (2) a supplementary capital estimate be approved of £24,300; £16,000 of which will be met by partners and the remaining £8,300 to be financed from capital resources.

78.17/18 Exclusion of Public and Press

Resolved that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

79.17/18 Capital grant request from East Boro Housing Trust

The Housing Manager presented an exempt report regarding a request received from East Boro Housing Trust for capital grant to provide nine properties at Abbascombe, Worth Matravers. Members were reminded that five of these would be available for rent at social rents and four for sale at 75% of market value to first time buyers with a local connection. The Trust needed to ensure that the scheme was affordable with the long term income covering costs. Taking into account the sources of funding available to the Trust such as rental income, sales income and a combination of borrowing and reserves, the Council had been asked to consider making a grant available to finance part of the scheme costs.

One Member expressed concern that the scheme was deemed to not be viable without such a grant. However, it was noted that the viability of the scheme had been affected by cost increases due to the delay in implementing the planning permission. It was also noted that the Council currently had £400,000 in its capital receipts set aside for such housing schemes.

The Housing Portfolio Holder welcomed the report and the opportunity for the Council to contribute to the provision of more social rented housing and properties that were affordable for local people to buy. This was echoed by other Members.

Resolved that a report be submitted to Council recommending approval of the recommendations set out in the exempt report.

The meeting ended at 7.43pm.

Chairman