

## Relevant Extract of minutes of Cabinet dated 11 February 2014

### 22 Wiltshire Council's Policy on Fees, Charges and Concessions

**Key** Cllr Dick Tonge presented a report which explained proposals to harmonise the setting of fees, charges and concessions across the County. Accordingly, Cabinet's approval was sought on a proposed policy for onward recommendation to Council.

If approved, the proposal would not be applied to the fees and charges initially set as part of the 2014/15 budget process. However, this did not preclude fees and charges being amended during that year as a result of a review of the current charges against the principles set out in the proposed policy.

Cllr Laura Mayes had slight reservations over the wording in the proposed policy which referenced the provision of accommodation for children under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 – paragraph 3 (6) of the policy refers. Cllr Mayes agreed to clarify this further with the relevant Corporate Directors. Cllr Thomson referred to a recent court case which could have implications on the charging policy in this regard and it was agreed that this be referred to the Associate Director, Law and Governance to investigate.

Cllr Jon Hubbard questioned whether the proposed policy should make provision for the Council not providing services where there were commercial alternatives. Cllr Tonge whilst appreciating the point being made, clarified that the proposed policy was for where charges were being made; the decision on whether or not particular services should be provided was a separate issue.

#### **Resolved:**

**That Cabinet agree the Wiltshire Council Fees, Charges and Concessions Policy and recommend its approval to Council (subject to any clarification required as a result of the points raised in the third paragraph of this minute).**

Reason for decision:

To enable the Council to:

- Maintain a consistent approach to setting its fees and charges.
- Deliver the outcomes of its Business Plan through effective pricing, subsidising those areas of strategic need.
- Recover costs and contribute to the medium term financial plan.

### 23 Wiltshire Council Financial Plan 2014/2015

**Key** The Leader presented the draft Financial Plan for 2014/15 for Cabinet's consideration, agreement and onward recommendation to Council on 25 February 2014.

The Leader explained that once again, in the face of continued reduction in Government grant, increased demand for services particularly children's services and adult care and the Council's commitment to protect front line services as far as possible, it had not been an easy task. She acknowledged that next year was likely to be even more challenging. The proposed budget included savings from services of £25.540 million. Every effort had been made to optimise efficiency savings internally to minimise the impact on the public and maintain a zero increase in council tax.

Cabinet received a report which provided an assessment of draft proposals to Council to set a budget for 2014/15 and the impact on Council Tax, rents, fees and charges, the capital programme, school budgets as well as reserves.

Cllr Dick Tonge presented the Financial Plan and guided members through the document and the detailed financial information in the Budget Book.

It was noted that the specific changes to the Financial Plan also reflected decisions that the Council was already progressing and the Plan thus confirmed the commitments to resource the 12 key actions as detailed in the report presented, in order to ensure delivery.

The budget for 2014/15 would redirect and invest £18.085 million of resources in line with the Business Plan. To date in response to the consultation responses received, investment as set out at Section 7 of the report presented, supported money being directed into the identified priority areas, namely the maintenance of roads, older people and adult social care and affordable housing.

It was noted that £1.994 million net was proposed to safeguard vulnerable Children. Provision was being made for £2.548 million before savings to increase pay by 1%, the first pay rise for staff in five years. The proposals also protected ongoing investment in building more homes and campuses which would help stimulate the local economy. £10.481 million of new capital money would be invested in Highways in 2014/15 and £45 million over the next four years. Aligned to the Business Plan the budget would also safeguard the commitment to Military Civil Integration and creating / protecting jobs.

Cllr Roy While, presented the report of the Special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee held on 5 February to consider its response to the budget proposals. Cllr While guided Cabinet through the key points raised by the Committee and acknowledge the challenges faced by Cabinet in drawing up a budget in difficult financial circumstances.

The report also detailed the various forms of consultation undertaken on the budget which included a household survey, details of which were presented; a meeting with trade unions; a meeting with non-domestic rate-payers had been arranged; People's Voice; a very well attended budget consultation event on 10 February with various sectors and ages of the community and the Wiltshire Council's Housing Board on 27 January, the minutes of which were presented.

Cllr Jon Hubbard commented that works to highways should also include residential and rural roads. Cllr John Thomson explained that Area Boards would be involved in prioritising works to rural roads and footpaths in their respective areas.

Cllr Thomson referred to concessionary fares which cost the Council £4.2 million and was well received. There was an argument that the scheme should be targeted with some of the funds directed towards provision for youth facilities.

Cllr David Jenkins commented on the high collection levels of council tax and asked what the administration attributed this to. Cllr Tonge explained that this was down to improved efficiencies and taking a prudent approach on anticipated levels. He did acknowledge that nationally, debt levels were on the increase and this could well impact on future collection levels.

Cllr Tonge paid tribute to the immense hard work on the budget by officers and thanked Michael Hudson and his team.

**Resolved:**

**That Cabinet recommend to Council that it:**

- a. Endorses the update of the Financial Plan for 2014/15.**
- b. Approve the savings and investment proposals summarised at Sections 9 and 7 respectively of this report and at Appendix 1, to provide a net revenue budget for 2014/15 of £333.063 million.**
- c. To:**
  - i. Freeze Wiltshire Council's element of the Band D council tax for 2014/15 £1,222.43, as calculated in accordance with statute, as set out in Section 10 of this report.**
  - ii. Set the Council's total net expenditure budget for 2014/15 at £333.063 million.**
  - iii. Set a 3.7% increase for dwelling rents in accordance with rent restructuring;**
  - iv. Set the HRA Budget for 2014/15 (original) as set out at Appendix 1G of this report;**
  - v. That all other service charges related to the HRA be increased by 3.7%, and Garages rents to be increased by 2%**
  - vi. Approve the Capital programme proposed at Appendix 1F of this report.**
  - vii. Set the changes in fees and charges set out in detail at Section 8 of and at Appendix 1H of this report.**

Reason for decision:

To enable the Council to:

Set its revenue, capital, housing revenue accounts, fees and charges, levels of reserves and resultant Council Tax 2014/15 to then issue Council Tax and rent bills. Provide the council with a strong business and financial plan for sustainable delivery for the remaining years of those plans.

## 24 **Treasury Management Strategy 2014/15**

Councillor Dick Tonge, presented a report which set out the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2014-15 for approval by Cabinet and onward recommendation to Council.

The report set out:

- a) the Prudential and Treasury Indicators (Prls and Trls) for the next three years;
- b) other debt management decisions required for 2014-15 that do not feature within the Prls or Trls, as shown in paragraphs 3.11 to 3.20;
- c) the Annual Investment Strategy for 2014-15 (only one change from 2013-14 as detailed in paragraph 3.23 of the report); and
- d) the updated Treasury Management Practices.

Cllr Tonge explained that whereas he was aware that some authorities had chosen to sell on their Icelandic bank debts, this Council had not given we were classified as preferred creditors.

**Resolved:**

**That Cabinet recommend to Council to:**

- a) adopt the Prudential and Treasury Indicators (Appendix A of the report presented);**
- b) adopt the Annual Investment Strategy, including the proposed increase in the lending limit associated with Government backed UK banks (Appendix B of the report presented);**
- c) adopt the updated Treasury Management Practices (TMPs) (Appendix C of the report presented);**
- d) delegate to the Associate Director, Finance, Revenues & Benefits and Pensions the authority to vary the amount of borrowing and other long term liabilities within both the Treasury Indicators for the Authorised Limit and the Operational Boundary;**

- e) **authorise the Associate Director, Finance, Revenues & Benefits and Pensions to agree the restructuring of existing long-term loans where savings are achievable or to enhance the long term portfolio;**
- f) **agree that short term cash surpluses and deficits continue to be managed through temporary loans and deposits; and**
- g) **agree that any surplus cash balances not required to cover borrowing are placed in authorised money-market funds, particularly where this is more cost effective than short term deposits and delegate to the Associate Director, Finance, Revenues & Benefits and Pensions the authority to select such funds.**

Reason for decision:

To enable the Council to agree a Treasury Management Strategy for 2014/15 and set Prudential Indicators that comply with statutory guidance and reflect best practice.