

Minutes of a meeting of the **CABINET** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 17 March 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

G A Porter (Leader)
C N Worth (Deputy Leader)

T A Carter

A Casson
P E Coupland

R Gambba-Jones
C J Lawton

Cabinet Support Members: Councillor H Drury, Councillor R Grocock and Councillor J D McLean

The Chief Executive, the Executive Director Commercialisation, the Executive Manager Governance, the Deputy Head of Financial Services and the Democratic Services Team Leader.

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors G J Taylor (Deputy Leader) J Astill (Cabinet Support Member), E J Sneath (Chairman of Governance and Audit Committee) and A R Woolf (Chairman of Policy Development Panel), together with South Holland Citizens Advice Bureau

In Attendance: Councillor B Alcock (Chairman, Performance Monitoring Panel).

86. MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18 February 2020 were signed by the Leader as a correct record.

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were none.

88. QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE PUBLIC UNDER THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION (STANDING ORDERS).

There were none.

89. TO CONSIDER ANY MATTERS WHICH HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO CALL-IN.

There were none.

90. TO CONSIDER MATTERS ARISING FROM THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANELS

Action By

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There were none.

91. Q3 2019-20 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Customer to provide an update on how the Council performed for the period 1st October 2019 – 31st December 2019.

In response to Members' concerns regarding long term sickness, the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Customer confirmed that figures reflected seasonal trends with recent figures indicating an improvement.

The Chief Executive commented on long term sickness, and reported that this was being monitored, support was being given to bring staff back to work and that more accurate figures defining the breakdown between long and short term sickness should be available shortly.

DECISION:

That the content of the report be noted.

(Other options considered:

- *To do nothing.*

Reasons for decision:

- *To ensure that the Council's performance is properly scrutinised.)*

92. Q3 FINANCE REPORT 2019/20

Consideration was given to the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Executive Director Commercialisation (S151) to provide information on the Quarter 3 (to 31 December 2019) financial position of the Council.

Members questioned a discrepancy between the figure in Table 8 Purchase of Units Ashwood Homes (£34k) and the **Notes to Table 8** (item 5) Purchase of Units Ashwood Homes (£17k). The Executive Director Commercialisation (S151) advised that the figures would be checked and updated appropriately.

DECISION:

- a) That the report and Appendix A be noted.
- b) That the estimated position with regard to the approved

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contributions to and use of Reserves be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- c) That the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital programme be approved as set out in table 5 and 7 of Appendix A.
- d) That the Planning Fee income shortfall and additional Homelessness costs of £600k be funded from the Council Tax Reserve.

(Other options considered:

- *To do nothing.*

Reasons for decision:

- *To provide timely information to Members on the overall financial position of the Council.)*

93. BUSINESS RATES - CHANGES TO RATE RELIEFS AND DISCOUNTS FOR 2020/21

Consideration was given to the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Executive Director Commercialisation (S151) to seek Cabinet approval for administration of the changes to Business Rates relief and discounts for 2020/21.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance provided the following Briefing and Aid Memoir in addition to the report:

Briefing and Aid Memoir – Cabinet 17 March 2019

Report: Business Rates – Changes to Rate Reliefs and Discounts for 2020/21

This report seeks Cabinet approval for the administration of changes to Business Rates reliefs and discounts for 2020/21 announced in the Written Ministerial Statement on 27th January 2020, as set out in section 1.2 of this report.

However recent events have now overtaken this report.

In response to COVID-19, at Budget 2020, the Government announced it would provide additional business rate support to some small businesses. The Chancellor announced as a temporary measure for 2020/21 that he would: -

- *Increase the level of the retail discount to 100 per cent for eligible retail businesses occupying a property with a rateable value of less than £51,000;*
- *Expand the retail discount to include hospitality and leisure*

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properties, with a rateable value of less than £51,000 (such as museums, theatres, gyms and hotels);

- *Increase the level of the pubs discount up to £5,000 for pubs with a rateable value of less than £100,000.*

The government is clear that it expects local authorities to use their discretionary relief powers to grant these discounts in line with the relevant eligibility criteria. No new legislation is required, and authorities will be compensated for the cost of granting the discount. State aid rules will apply to these discounts in the normal way.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will shortly publish updated guidance for local authorities reflecting the changes to retail discount as well as refreshed guidance on the pubs discount.

- *In addition to these measures, the government has announced small business grant funding of £3,000 for small businesses already benefiting from paying little or no business rates due to eligibility for Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) or Rural Rate Relief. This will help those businesses meet ongoing business costs. The Government will publish guidance to help local authorities implement the grant.*

As such, in addition to the two recommendations in this report, an additional recommendation is made to Cabinet today to: -

‘Approve the implementation of the additional business rates support as a temporary measure for 2020/21 as announced in the 2020 budget in response to COVID-19’.

This will enable the prompt administration of the additional support to businesses, in line with the latest government guidance.

Members were advised by the Portfolio Holder Finance that communications would be issued in due course advising business owners how to apply for support and which category they fall into.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council was awaiting further information and guidance and that the Inward Investment Manager was working proactively with businesses.

DECISION:

- a) That Cabinet approve the implementation of the changes to Rate reliefs and discounts as set out in the report

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- b) That Cabinet approve updating the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy to reflect the changes in the latest government guidance and that the S151 Officer will approve the final wording in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance
- c) That Cabinet approve the implementation of the additional business rates support as a temporary measure for 2020/21 as announced in the 2020 budget in response to COVID-19

(Other options considered:

- *There were no alternative options for consideration.*

Reasons for decision:

- *Administration , in line with Government expectation on local authorities, would ensure qualifying businesses in South Holland were supported at the start of the new financial year, with the additional reliefs and discounts.)*

94. DEBT WRITE OFF

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Executive Director Commercialisation (S151) which sought approval for the write-off of uncollectable debts.

Members noted that the report contained a breakdown of the individual debts within Appendices A – D, and the Operational Debt Write Off Policy, which were not for publication by virtue of Paragraphs 1 (Information relating to any individual), 2 (Information which is likely to reveal the identity of any individual) and 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

Members agreed that only the principles of the report would be discussed and there was therefore no need for the meeting to go into private session.

DECISION:

That the following debts be written off:

Council Tax	£19,590.20
Business Rates	£13,255.63
Housing Benefit Overpayments	£11,133.27
Sundry Debt	£ 5,945.30
Total:	£49,924.40

(Other options considered:

- *Do nothing; or*

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- *Approve the recommendations with amendments*
- Reasons for decision:*
- *All recovery methods available had been considered and where appropriate pursued before making the decision to write off.*
 - *Officer time can be maximised on greatest returns, at the same time as ensuring robust procedures for debt management are in place across all revenue streams.)*

95. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE LEADER DECIDES ARE URGENT.

There were no urgent items.

(The meeting ended at 10:45)

(End of minutes)

These minutes are published on **Friday 27 March 2020**. In accordance with the Council's Constitution the DECISIONS detailed above will, unless otherwise stated, come into force and may then be implemented on **Monday 6 April 2020** (i.e. after the expiry of 5 working days from the date of publication of these minutes), unless during that period a notice which is signed by either a Ward Representative (in relation to a matter in their ward) or two members of the Performance Monitoring Panel or any three members, and complies with the requirements of the Council's Constitution is served on the Executive Manager Governance requesting that the decision be called-in and the Executive Manager Governance approves the request for call-in. Where a decision is called-in it will firstly be considered by the Performance Monitoring Panel on a date to be fixed.

Any FINAL DECISIONS and any URGENT DECISIONS take effect immediately.

Any RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL detailed above will be submitted for consideration to the next available meeting of the full Council.