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ITEM 3a

milton keynes council

Minutes of the meeting of the CABINET held on TUESDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2021
at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council).
Councillors Baume, Darlington, Nolan, O'Neill, Townsend, J Wilson-
Marklew

Apologies: Councillor Middleton

Officers: M Bracey (Chief Executive), T Aldworth (Deputy Chief Executive),
S Richardson (Director of Finance and Resources), S Bridglalsingh
(Director of Law and Governance), A Rulton (Joint Head of Finance and
s151 Officer), N Hutchin (Joint Head of Finance and s151 Officer),
W Rysdale (Head of Housing Delivery), A Jordan (Welfare Reform
Manager), L Wheaton (Budget and Financial Planning Manager), P Brown
(Head of Democratic Services) and R Tidman (Committee Services
Manager).

Also Present: Councillors R Bradburn, Carr, Ferrans, Gilbert, McLean, Rankine, Walker
and 1 member of the public

C52 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 December 2020
be approved and signed by the Leader of the Council as a correct record.

C53 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

None declared.

C54 ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

C55 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

C56 COUNCILLORS' ITEMS

None received.

C57 COUNCILLORS QUESTIONS

- (a) Question from Councillor R Bradburn to Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Public Realm)

Referring to the missed waste collections in Wolverton, Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell North, Loughton & Shenley, Councillor R Bradburn asked Councillor Darlington if she could provide an update on missed collections and clearance plans.

Councillor Darlington advised that, she appreciated those Councillors who were working collaboratively and helping to identify areas that had missed collections or needed clearing. It was unfortunate due to absences at Serco caused by Covid-19 that some rounds were not able to be completed. The service was now back on schedule with the hope that staffing levels would remain stable to ensure the best service to residents whilst keeping frontline staff safe. Councillor Darlington apologised that some rounds were not able to be completed and agreed to keep ward councillors up to date with the situation with regard to missed collections and any clean up days that were scheduled.

- (b) Question from Councillor McLean to Councillor J Wilson-Marklew (Cabinet member for Climate Action and Sustainability)

Councillor McLean, referring to the flooding of 23 December 2020 which affected many villages in surrounding Olney, asked Councillor J Wilson-Marklew if she would give an assurance that the flood defences for all villages that were affected would be reviewed not just the three villages that met the criteria for a S19 Flood Impact Assessment.

Councillor J Wilson-Marklew, indicated that she would be happy for Councillor McLean to send her the information about the villages affected and she would take the matter up with the appropriate officers.

- (c) Question from Councillor Gilbert to Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Public Realm)

Councillor Gilbert, referring to the recent disruption to waste collection services, asked Councillor Darlington what plans had been put in place to protect waste collection services over the winter particularly from any impacts from the Pandemic.

Councillor Darlington advised that the tragic deaths of two Serco employees from Covid-19 had been referred to the Public Health team to ensure that key workers were being protected as much as possible. She indicated that plans had been put in place in advance, to deal with the normal winter pressures and any impact from the Pandemic on

services, but unfortunately, staffing levels at Serco had been impacted to the level that the Council could no longer continue the food and garden waste service and more recently a number of household waste rounds had also not been able to be completed. The Council was putting pressure on Serco to protect staff and to deliver the service that was expected by Milton Keynes residents.

As an additional question, Councillor Gilbert referring to his understanding that there had been no overruns in the waste pilot areas asked Councillor Darlington why this area had been prioritised when services in other areas of the borough were in crisis.

In response, Councillor Darlington indicated that the waste pilot was a small, trial area that used additional resources and a different vehicle to other areas in the borough. It had therefore not taken away any resources from the waste service in the rest of the Borough.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Gilbert asked Councillor Darlington to confirm that the waste pilot had remained unaffected while resources were lacking in other areas of the borough.

In response, Councillor Darlington offered to meet with Councillor Gilbert to discuss the issues he was concerned about.

C58-61 REFERENCES FROM OTHER BODIES

(a) Referrals from Council – 25 November 2020

(i) Motion – Mass Testing for COVID-19 in Milton Keynes

The referral was introduced by Councillor Walker, the motion owner, who welcomed the cross party support for the motion which was designed to stimulate debate, challenge the administration and focus minds in these difficult times. Councillor Walker thanked the Leader of the Council for the written response.

Councillor Marland, referring to the published response, added that in addition more work had been done on the efficacy of mass testing and that he was pleased that the Council was in the position to be able to offer lateral flow tests to key workers from a testing base at the Central Library.

RESOLVED:

That the written response provided by Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council) be noted.

- (ii) Motion – The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Mental Health Services

Councillor Walker, on behalf of the motion owner, introduced the referral as part of his comments on the motion on Mass Testing.

Councillor O’Neill, in addition to her written response, added that she had met with leaders from the voluntary sector who were keen to be involved with this work and she wished to reassure Councillor Walker that there was lots of activity happening and the Council was taking the issue very seriously.

RESOLVED:

That the written response provided by Councillor O’Neill (Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing) be noted.

- (iii) Motion – No Child Should go Hungry

Councillor Carr, the motion owner, thanked the Cabinet member for her response and the Administration for adopting the recommendations of the Child Poverty Commission and for its work to tackle child poverty. Councillor Carr further added, that numbers of those needing free school meals was increasing and this was an issue that was not going to go away.

Councillor Nolan added, in addition to her written response, that the Administration had committed to providing free school meals in the holidays so that families knew where they stood and so that no child would go hungry. Councillor Nolan further added that she would be happy to write to the local MPs on the matter but did not feel this would be a particularly beneficial exercise.

RESOLVED:

That the written response provided by Councillor Nolan (Cabinet member for Children and Families) be noted.

- (iv) Motion – Keeping Affordable Homes Affordable

Councillor Ferrans, the motion owner, thanked the Administration for the response and welcomed the commitment to write to Government to press for the options requested. Councillor Ferrans further added that she felt there were historic issues with the leases of original Milton Keynes Development Corporation properties which should be investigated in terms of potential clauses around first refusal on properties that were subsequently sold.

Councillor Darlington responded that Councillor Ferrans had raised a number of really important issues that were being investigated. She further added that this might be a growing issue in Milton Keynes with the number of shared ownership properties being built alongside any historic issues from the Development

Corporation.

Councillor Marland also added that issues related to this that had implications for Planning could be considered by the Planning Cabinet Advisory Group as well.

RESOLVED:

That the written response provided by Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Public Realm and Housing Services) be noted.

**C62 COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2021/22 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN
2021/22 – 2024/25**

The Cabinet considered the draft Council Budget 2021/22, the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25 and the report from the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the draft Budget 2021/22.

Councillor Marland introduced the item by stating that it had been a difficult and unique year for the Council. Covid-19 had impacted on all aspects of our lives including the setting of the budget. Councillor Marland commended the work of the Finance and the Revenue and Benefits teams alongside the work over the last twelve months of all officers, members of the public, parish, town and community council's and the voluntary and community sector. Difficult choices have had to be made including a 2.5% Council Tax rise and the use of £3 million from reserves to balance the budget, but on balance these choices were considered to be the right thing to do. This was a Budget that would invest in reducing child poverty and health inequalities, get the basics right whilst still investing in the future of our economy and delivering a green and sustainable future for Milton Keynes.

Councillor R Bradburn (Chair of the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee) introduced the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee report on the Draft Budget 2021/22, he began by also commenting that this had been an extremely challenging year for many but the Committee had still managed to meet nine times and provide robust challenge to the Cabinet's draft Budget. Councillor R Bradburn thanked all those who had assisted with the budget scrutiny process, particularly, Council offices, elected members and scrutiny officers. Councillor R Bradburn indicated that he took pride in the budget scrutiny process in Milton Keynes and commended the report of the Committee to Cabinet and to Council.

Councillor Rankine passed on his thanks to the Finance team for the excellent work it had done under challenging circumstances. However, he indicated that he did not see this as a budget for jobs and struggling families, instead it was a business as usual budget. He considered that this budget did nothing to ensure the Borough's Covid-19 recovery and that the Conservative Group would propose a number of amendments to the budget at Council that would get Milton Keynes back on track.

A representative from the MK Cycling Forum spoke in support of the efforts and energy that the Council was putting into the cycling and walking agenda. However, the Group was concerned that there was only £1.2 million allocated in the Transport Capital Programme for Redway improvement and the Redway super network. The Group recognised that there were funding opportunities available but given the importance of the Redway network in Milton Keynes funding for this work should be ringfenced.

In summing up, Councillor Marland agreed that investment in sustainable transport was high up the Council agenda but that an investment programme needed to be developed and be right over the long term. With regard to comments from Councillor Rankine, Councillor Marland indicated that he looked forward to the amendments that the Conservative Group would bring forward but that he considered that the budget was fiscally sound, delivered on the Council Plan and was the right thing for the people of Milton Keynes.

Councillor Marland welcomed the constructive criticism from the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee and agreed to bring forward a proposal for an extra £57,000 of extra funds for councillor's ward based budgets for Covid-19 work and to bring forward £50,000 for highway repair work.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Revenue Budget 2021/22 totalling £210.434m be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council.
2. That the Council Tax at Band D of £1,465.59, for the Milton Keynes element of the Council Tax, be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council. This is an increase of 2.50%, consisting of a 1.99% general increase and 0.51% Adult Social Care Precept.
3. That the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2021/22 (excluding Parish Precepts) of £126.354m, be noted.
4. That the estimated position for the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2021/22 be noted.
5. That the forecast parking surplus be noted.
6. That the Housing Revenue Account Revenue Budget 2021/22 be recommended to Council for adoption.

7. That the Housing Revenue Account Dwelling Rent 2021/22, an increase of 1.5% as set out in paragraph 2.63, an average of £1.33 per week, be recommended to Council.
8. That the advance payment of £17.606m employer pension contributions for 2021/22 be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council.
9. That the fees and charges for 2021/22 (including those fees and charges which are exceptions to the Income and Collection Policy) be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council.
10. That the Capital Strategy be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council.
11. That the Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2024/25 be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council.
12. That the resource allocation for the 2021/22 Tariff programme be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council.
13. That the Treasury Management Strategy for 2021/22 to 2025/26 and the Treasury Policy Statement, including the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, Borrowing Limits be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council.
14. That the financial forecast set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), in relation to both resources and expenditure, be noted.
15. The equalities impact assessments for the Revenue Budget 2021/22, as set out in Section 3 be noted.
16. That the following be added to the Draft Budget Proposals to be recommended to Full Council:
 - a) That for 2021/22 only, Ward Budgets are increased by £1,000 to enable individual members to support local organisations and groups to fund the costs of COVID prevention, education and support projects and schemes. Funded from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund.
 - b) That £50,000 funding be allocated immediately from reserves from additional highway defect repairs to be spent before 30 March 2021.

C63 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN

Councillor Darlington indicated that this was the first of a Rolling Business Plan Model for the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The Plan had been first published in September and had been amended to reflect the views received when the Plan was subject to consultation. The Plan set out the most ambitious Council house building programme since the days of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation and how it would be funded. The Plan also included £165 million of investment in existing Council homes, including making them more environmentally friendly and helping to cut energy bills.

Councillor Darlington advised that the Plan was established as a rolling programme of investment so it could be as sensitive as possible to any economic changes. It would be reviewed annually and she was confident that it was the first step to address many years of under investment in Council housing.

Councillor Ferrans indicated that she welcomed the revisions to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. She commented that the last year had taught us that things can come out of the blue and the Plan provided an increased rigour and financial certainty which would enable the implications of proposals to be evaluated and understood. Councillor Ferrans recognised that there was more work still to be done, particularly on the maintenance programme but overall the Plan provided a good baseline to work from.

In summing up, Councillor Darlington expressed her excitement to be moving forward with this ambitious Council build programme.

RESOLVED:

1. That the updates to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan be noted.
2. That the Rolling Business Plan Model at Annex B (which sets out the projected 30-year forecast based on achieving Decent Homes Standard and investment in approved new build and regeneration schemes) and forecast borrowing capacity based on these current assumptions be noted.
3. That the Rent and Service Charge Policy at Annex D, which sets out the principles the Council applies in calculating rents and service charges for its housing stock and creates the procedural framework for rent setting, service charges and income collection, be approved.

C64 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2021/22

Councillor Marland introduced the item and indicated that the Council had a Local Welfare Scheme which replaced the national scheme in 2012. The Scheme allowed the Council to set the level of assistance it gave people of working age with paying their Council Tax. In Milton Keynes the Council paid 80% of the Council Tax of people that were unemployed or on certain benefits and this was one of the most generous schemes in the country.

RESOLVED:

That, in relation to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to take effect from 1 April 2021, Council be recommended to approve the:

- (a) introduction of a tolerance rule on all working age cases, which would prevent the reissue of a Council Tax bill in every case where the Council Tax Reduction award has changed by £0.50 or less a week;
- (b) delegation to the Director of Finance and Resources of approval of any additional technical legislative amendments required to reflect changes to related benefits and retain administrative simplicity; and
- (c) retention of all other aspects of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, as adopted by the Council on 22 January 2020.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 7.27 PM.