

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 20th January, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Akram (Vice-Chair, from 6.33pm), Anderson, Bains, Carter, Mann, Nazir and Pantelic

PART 1

87. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

88. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th December 2019

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th December 2019 be approved as a correct record.

(Councillor Akram joined the meeting)

89. 2020/21 Housing Rents & Service Charges

The Service Lead Finance introduced a report that presented the changes in housing rents and service charges for 2020/21 for social housing and asked that they be recommended to full Council.

Social housing rents had been reduced by 1% a year for the past four years in line with Government policy but from April 2020 national policy was to increase rents by Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) plus 1% per annum for at least five years. The CPI figure in September 2019 was 1.7% and the recommendations set out the proposed increases for Council house dwelling and garage rents, service charges and other rents such as properties leased from the Council owned James Elliman Homes and DISH properties. The impact of the changes would be to increase the estimated average weekly rent from £102.57 in 2019/20 to £105.34 in 2020/21. This represented an average rise of £2.77 per week from 6th April 2020.

The Cabinet asked about the impact the rent reductions had had on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The 1% decrease was estimated to have cost circa £0.3m per year. The HRA 30-year business plan had been updated to reflect the new rent regime and rental income was estimated to increase by £0.82m to £32.7m in 2020/21.

The rent proposals had been considered and noted by the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel on 14th January 2020.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was agreed to recommend the proposed changes to rents and service charges to full Council on 28th January 2020.

Recommended –

- (a) That Council house dwelling rents for 2020/21 increase by 2.7% (CPI + 1%) over the 2019/20 rent with effect from Monday 6th April 2020. This was in line with current government guidelines and legislation.
- (b) That garage rents, heating, utility and ancillary charges increase by 1.7% with effect from Monday 6th April 2020. This was based upon the September CPI figure.
- (c) That service charges increase by 1.7% with effect from Monday 6th April 2020. This was based upon the September CPI figure.
- (d) That 'Other committee' property rents increase by an average of 1.7% from Monday 6th April 2020 in line with the September CPI figure.
- (e) That properties leased from James Elliman Homes increase by an average of 1.7% from Monday 6th April 2020 in line with the September CPI figure.
- (f) That DISH property rents increase by 2.7 % (CPI + 1%) over the 2019/20 rent with effect from Monday 6th April 2020. This was as per the Council's recommendation to the DISH Board.

90. Council Tax Support Scheme 2020/21

The Lead Member for Inclusive Growth & Skills introduced a report that sought approval for the Council Tax Support Scheme 2020/21. It was a requirement for the Council to adopt a scheme each year by 11th March.

The scheme had been fully reviewed and it was proposed to introduce a newly devised income banded scheme which it was considered would be easier to administer, clearer and with less administration for both the customer and the Council. Details of how the scheme would operate were summarised and the new scheme was set out fully in the appendix. In line with the relevant legislation, there had been a full 6 week public consultation on the proposed changes to the scheme. The overall impact of the change was cost neutral compared to the current scheme. It was estimated that of the 434 households directly effected by the changes, 295 would be better off and 139 worse off, which was 1.2% of the caseload for Council Tax support.

Members asked about the communication that would take place to notify effected residents and it was responded that all households negatively effected would be contacted and supported. It was also noted that hardship support was available through the Local Welfare Provision scheme and the budget would propose an additional £50k in resources in 2020/21. The Cabinet welcomed the principles of moving to an income banding scheme with all residents making a contribution and support targeted at the poorest residents of Slough.

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The revised scheme as set out in Appendix 1 was agreed and the Section 151 Officer was given delegated authority to approve any changes to the upratings from any national guidance published following Cabinet approval.

Resolved –

- (a) That a new banded income Council Tax Support Scheme be adopted by Slough Borough Council for the 2020-21 financial year.
- (b) That the Council Tax Support scheme as detailed in Appendix A to the report be approved for 2020-21.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer to approve any changes to the upratings or other technical matters arising from national guidance.

91. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The Cabinet considered a reference from the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 14th January 2020 regarding Airbnb Licensing.

The Panel had expressed concern about the potentially negative impact short term lettings could have on family accommodation and the community. It therefore resolved:

“That the Cabinet allocate sufficient resources to allow planning enforcement to be considered for all Airbnb properties that require planning permission for change of use. This is intended to safeguard family accommodation.”

The Cabinet welcomed the work of the scrutiny panel on this emerging issue and agreed in principle that sufficient resources should be made available to take the necessary action to avoid the potentially negative impacts of regular short term lets of this nature. Officers had not yet fully scoped or costed the activity that would be undertaken but it was indicated that additional staff resource costing £62,000 per annum would be sufficient. This proposal would be taken forward in the budget setting process and it was noted that some of costs could be offset from monies recovered from the Proceeds of Crime Act. It was proposed and agreed that any funding be reviewed in twelve months.

Officers advised that there were various approaches that could be taken to identify and address the negative impacts. It was agreed that the Council should use its communication channels to make residents more aware of the issue to ensure they knew how to report any concerns about properties in their neighbourhoods. Consideration would be given to the type of enforcement or policy led approach likely to be most effective. It was suggested that the scrutiny panel add a further report to its work programme to monitor progress.

Resolved –

- (a) That the recommendation of the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel be supported in principle.
- (b) That the proposed resources be considered as part of the budget setting process.
- (c) That the monies recovered from the Proceeds of Crime Act be utilised to offset the costs where possible, and that the funding be reviewed after a year.

92. Notification of Forthcoming Decisions

The Cabinet considered and endorsed the Notification of Decisions published on 20th December 2019 which set out the key decisions expected to be taken by the Cabinet over the next three months.

Resolved – That the published Notification of Key Decisions for the period between January to March 2020 be endorsed.

93. Exclusion of Press and Public

Lead Members agreed that the item in Part II of the agenda – the Part II minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16th December 2019, could be considered without disclosing any of the exempt information. It was therefore agreed that it was not necessary to exclude the press and public from the remainder of the meeting.

Resolved – That agenda 8 – ‘Part II Minutes – 16th December 2019’ be considered during Part I of the meeting.

94. Part II Minutes - 16th December 2019

Resolved – That the Part II minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th December 2019 be approved as a correct record.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.12 pm)