



## **CABINET**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON WEDNESDAY, 1ST FEBRUARY 2017 AT 2.00 P.M.**

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#### **PRESENT**

Councillor K. V. Reynolds - Chair

#### **Councillors:**

Mrs C. Forehead (Human Resources and Governance/Business Manager), N. George (Community and Leisure Services), D.T. Hardacre (Performance and Asset Management), D. Havard (Education and Lifelong Learning), K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development), Mrs B. Jones (Corporate Services), D.V. Poole (Housing), and T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering)

#### **Together with:**

C. Burns (Interim Chief Executive), C. HARRY (Corporate Director - Communities) and N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer)

#### **Also in Attendance:**

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), M. Headington (Acting Parks Manager), L. Allen (Principal Accountant) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor R. Woodyatt (Social Services) and D. Street (Corporate Director – Social Services).

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs B.A. Jones declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 (Housing Revenue Account Charges - 2017/2018). Details are minuted with the respective item.

#### **3. CABINET - 18TH JANUARY 2017**

RESOLVED that subject to it being noted that the resolution contained within Minute No. 5 (Outcome of Informal Consultation on the Provisions to be included in a Public Spaces Protection Order relating to Dog Control) should refer to the Special Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2017 (minute nos. 1 - 7) be approved and signed as a correct record.

## **MATTERS ON WHICH EXECUTIVE DECISIONS WERE REQUIRED**

### **4. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CHARGES - 2017-2018**

Councillor Mrs B.A. Jones declared a personal and prejudicial interest (as a Council Tenant) and left the meeting during consideration of this item.

The report, which was considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 17th January 2017, sought Cabinet approval for proposed increased charges which are intended to be effective for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2017/18 financial year.

The report summarised the process involved in preparing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget. Cabinet noted that Welsh Government's (WG) new Policy for Social Housing Rents sets a target rent band for each Authority whereby councils have to adjust average rents for their properties in line with this banding. The uplift on the new rent policy is fixed for five years and uses the previous September Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation figure (as opposed to the RPI inflation figure) and also applies a 1.5% real increase to the average local authority rent. The previous September CPI inflation figure was 1%. WG announced the minimum rent uplift for 2017/18 to be 2.5% which is CPI at 1% plus 1.5%. This increase applied to the current average rent means that Caerphilly Council are just within the low end of the target rent. Due to a transitional protection arrangement in place, the maximum rent increase that can be applied by the Authority is 4.39%.

It was therefore proposed to apply a minimum rent increase of 3% per property from April 2017 to ensure compliance with the new rent policy and to maintain the viability of the Council's current business plan. All relevant charges were highlighted within the report, which also included proposals for Council-owned garage rent increases. There were no proposed increases across a number of other charges as these are currently under review.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report: -

- (i) in order to ensure compliance with the new rent policy and to maintain the viability of the current business plan, a minimum rent increase of 3% per property be applied from April 2017;
- (ii) the variable service charge at sheltered complexes be not increased pending completion of the service charge review;
- (iii) the meal cost at Tredegar Court be not increased pending completion of the service charge review;
- (iv) the guest room charge for sheltered housing complexes be not increased from April 2017;
- (v) the garage charges for Council and non-Council tenants be increased to £8.11 based on a 48-week basis from April 2017.

### **5. INTERMENT CHARGES FOR CHILDREN (UP TO AND INCLUDING THE AGE OF 16 YEARS)**

The report sought the views of Cabinet on the current pricing policy for the interment of children within the Council's municipal cemeteries and provided options for Members' consideration.

Reference was made to the recent campaign led by Carolyn Harris (MP for Swansea East) to abolish charges imposed by local Authorities for the interment of children. It was explained that the statutory arrangements for the management of municipal cemeteries is contained in the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO), which permits local Authorities “to charge such fees as they think proper for or in connection with burials in a cemetery”.

Officers outlined the current pricing policy for the interment of children, and referred to a comparative list of charges across other local authorities in Wales as appended to the report. Cabinet noted that several of these authorities do not levy any charges for the interment of children, or plan to remove these charges in the near future. It was explained that the loss of income arising from the removal of these charges within Caerphilly county borough would be negligible in the context of the overall income achieved by the service area. Cabinet were advised that should they be minded to remove this interment fee, there would still be costs associated with the purchase of the Exclusive Rights of Burial (currently £605) if chosen by the bereaved family.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that subject to it being noted that there will still be costs associated with the purchase of the Exclusive Rights of Burial if chosen by the bereaved family, for the reasons contained in the Officer's report, the interment fee of children up to and including the age of 16 years be removed.

The meeting closed at 2.18 p.m.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 15th February 2017.

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CHAIR