

SPECIAL COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 18 MARCH 2013

PRESENT:- Councillors Roderick Bluh (Chair), David Renard (Vice-Chair), Mark Dempsey, Fionuala Foley, Jim Grant, Garry Perkins, Brian Mattock, Des Moffatt and Stan Pajak.

13. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

The Chair advised that the Council's Standards Committee had under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 granted dispensations to Councillors Roderick Bluh, Fionuala Foley, Brian Mattock, Des Moffatt and Garry Perkins in respect of any discussions on any matters which had a bearing on the setting of the discounts and exemptions for Council Tax (Agenda item 6).

14. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th December 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

15. Public Question Time

No public questions were asked under Standing Order 28.

16. Exempt Items - Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved – That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred to in Agenda Item No. 9 (Redundancy Severance) of the Notice of the Meeting on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information concerned.
(Minute 20 refers.)

17. Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Exemptions

The Cabinet Member for Finance and the Head of Revenues and Benefits submitted a joint report concerning proposed changes and clarification of changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions that were agreed by the Council on 20th December 2013 (Minute 80(1) of the Council refers) in order to encourage empty homes to be used.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented the report and explained the proposed changes to be made to Council Tax discounts and exemptions and the reasons why the changes were necessary to protect the Council's interests and revenue and to encourage properties to be brought into use.

Resolved – That the Special Committee, on behalf of the Council, approves that –

- (a) In respect of the amendments to empty and unfurnished properties (former Class C), properties undergoing structural exemptions (former Class A) and properties that are subject to the empty premium as a result of being empty and unfurnished for two years, a property must be occupied and furnished for a minimum of 6 weeks and 1 day, in order to qualify for any new discount period or period without a premium applying.
- (b) The discount period that applies to the Swindon Borough determined empty and unfurnished discount (former Class C) of 50% for three months, shall expire on 1st April 2013, for properties that have been empty in excess of three months. 100% Council Tax will be chargeable on such empty dwellings. Those properties that have been empty and unfurnished for less than three months, as at 1st April 2013, will receive discount a 50% discount until the end of the three month period, but will not receive a further 3 months discount after 1st April 2013.
- (c) The discount period that applies to the Swindon Borough determined structural alterations discount (former Class A) of 50% for 12 months, shall expire on 1st April 2013, for properties that have been empty in excess of 12 months. 100% Council Tax will be chargeable on such empty dwellings. Those properties that have been undergoing alterations for less than 12 months, as at 1st April 2013, will receive a 50% discount from 1st April 2013 until the end of the 12 month period, but will not receive a further 12 months discount after 1st April 2013.
- (d) The 150% premium will be payable from 1st April 2013, for those properties empty and unfurnished for two years or more, as at this date. Those properties that have been empty and unfurnished for less than two years as at 1st April 2013, will be subject to the premium on the exact date that the two years ends.

18. Appointment to Council Bodies

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report concerning proposed changes to appointments to Council bodies for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2012/13, that had been requested by the Council's Labour Group.

Resolved – That the Special Committee, on behalf of the Council approves the following appointments –

Committee	Councillor Appointed	Councillor Replaced
Swindon Children's Trust Board	Cindy Matthews	Rochelle Russell
Joint Commissioning Board (Adults and Children)	Cindy Matthews (Deputy to Councillor Ray Ballman)	Rochelle Russell (Observer status)

19. Adjustments to the Council's Organisational Structure

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive submitted a joint report concerning proposed changes to the Council's Stronger Together Management Structure to (i) reflect the outcome of recent restructuring consultation processes and exercises to identify cost savings, (ii) ensure that the Council's safeguarding requirements were managed in the most effective way, (iii) deliver the Council's strategic objectives in the most effective and efficient way, and (iv) enable the transfer of Public Health into the Council on 1 April 2013.

The Chief Executive presented the report and explained the reasons for the proposed changes and the way in which it was intended the new management structure would operate to deliver the outcomes the Council required.

The Chair and Special Committee Members asked questions regarding the proposed changes and asked the Chief Executive and the Head of People and Development to review, in consultation with the political group leaders, the proposed titles of "Change Leader and Stronger Together Programme Director" and "Change Leader and Head of Finance" in order that any risk of ambiguity or misunderstanding of the roles associated with these posts could be avoided.

The Committee noted that the Change Leader and Programme Director Stronger Together had, further to the decision of the Council on 21st February 2013, developed three possible future Locality Team Structure options. Special Committee Members believed that it would be useful for the implications of these options to be clarified with the political group leaders and the political groups, prior to a preferred option being agreed.

Resolved – (1) That the changes to the Council's Management Structure, as referred to in paragraph 3.3 of the joint report and set out in the Appendix (2) circulated at the meeting, be approved, and that the revised structure be implemented on 1st April 2013.

(2) That the Director of Law and Democratic Services be authorised to amend the Council's Constitution accordingly to reflect the decision in (1) above.

(3) That the Chief Executive and the Head of People and Development be requested to review, in consultation with the political group leaders, the proposed titles of "Change Leader and Stronger Together Programme Director" and "Change Leader and Head of Finance" in order that any risk of ambiguity or misunderstanding of the roles associated with these posts can be avoided.

(4) That the issue of future Locality Team Structure options be deferred to enable the Change Leader and Programme Director Stronger Together to explain and clarify the available options to the Council's political group leaders and political groups, prior to him submitting a report and preferred options to the Council meeting on 11th April 2013.

20. Redundancy Severance

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive submitted a joint report concerning the redundancy severance arrangements for Employee No. 1440844A.

The Head of People and Development and the Director of Law and Democratic Services explained the rationale that had been adopted in arriving at the

financial position set out in the report and how this was comparable to the approach adopted in other similar circumstances.

Councillor Jim Grant referred to his political group's continued support for a situation where redundancy severance arrangements were based on the same criteria for all employees regardless of their position within the authority and that additional discretionary compensation payments to certain categories of senior employees should be avoided.

The Chair highlighted the contents of the reports and the reasons why he believed the proposals put forward were in the best interests of the Council.

The Chief Executive and Committee Members referred to their disappointment that confidential personal information contained in the "Not for Publication" report had been published in the local media. The Chief Executive advised that he would write to the Editor of the Evening Advertiser expressing the Council's concern in the strongest terms at its actions and asking that such disclosures not be published.

The Chief Executive confirmed that together with the Director of Law and Democratic Services and the Head of People and Development he would undertake a review of how sensitive personal information was currently presented to this Committee in order that confidentiality could be maintained without hindering the openness and transparency of the Council's Committee process.

Resolved – (1) That the redundancy severance arrangements for employee 1440844A, as set out in the joint report, be approved.

(2) That the Head of People and Development be authorised to issue notice to employee 1440844A by no later than 31st March 2013.

(Councillors Dempsey, Grant and Moffatt requested that their vote against the decision in (1) above be recorded. Councillor Pajak abstained from voting in respect of the above item.)