

## **CABINET**

Wednesday, 12th November, 2014

**Present:-** Councillor Mike Stubbs – in the Chair

Councillors Mrs Beech, Kearon, Turner, Williams, Mrs Shenton and Hambleton

### **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of Interest.

### **2. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT TO END OF QUARTER TWO (JULY-SEPTEMBER, 2014)**

A report was submitted to provide Cabinet with the Financial and Performance Review report - second quarter 2014/15.

The Financial and Performance Management monitoring reports provided information on a quarterly basis regarding the performance of individual council services, alongside related financial information on the organisation. This report was originally presented to the Finance, Resources & Partnerships Scrutiny (FRAPS) Committee meeting on 5 November 2014.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Members note the contents of the attached report and agree to the recommendation that the Council continues to monitor and scrutinise performance alongside the latest financial information for the same period.
- (b) That Members note the comments made through the Scrutiny process and the responses from officers and others to these comments.

### **3. DRAFT COUNCIL PLAN SUMMARY 2015-20**

A report was submitted to present the proposed new draft Council Plan Summary, covering the period 2015-20.

The Council Plan Summary 2015-20 provided information on the priorities and actions planned to be delivered by the Council. The document communicated the clear vision of the Council and the Council's strategic priorities around promoting economic development, growth and regeneration in the borough and was a response to the findings of the recent Planning Peer Review.

**Resolved:** That Cabinet notes the contents of the summary and recommends that it is progressed.

### **4. PLANNING PEER REVIEW**

A report was submitted requesting Cabinet to approve an Action Plan to address the recommendations of the Planning Peer Review Team.

Cllr Nigel Jones had submitted a question in advance of the meeting in relation to this item. Cllr Jones' questions focused on recommendations 6, 9 and 1 listed in the report. Cllr Jones highlighted the importance of member involvement in the preparation of the action plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Assets stated that the representations put forward by Cllr Jones would be taken into consideration but that it was unfortunate that the representations had not been put forward prior to the action plan being put together.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Assets provided background to the preparation of the action plan and highlighted the fact that the process had been undertaken in accordance with a nationally agreed approach including consultation with Members, officers and other stakeholders.

The Portfolio holder for Finance and Resources requested that the resource implications mentioned in section 8.2 of the report be expanded upon when the report was next presented to the Cabinet.

**Resolved:**

- (a) That Cabinet agree to the Action Plan attached as Appendix 2 to this report
- (b) That Cabinet receive in 6 months' time a report back on progress made in implementing the agreed Actions
- (c) That the Planning Committee similarly receive the same report

**5. APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF**

A report was submitted requesting Cabinet to consider the granting of Discretionary Rate Relief in accordance with powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The rate relief would enable the Borough Council to provide financial assistance to charitable and not for profit organisations occupying business premises within the council area where it was deemed appropriate in accordance with regulations detailed in The Local Government Finance Act 1988.

**Resolved:** That, in accordance with Section 47 of The Local Government Finance Act 1988, Discretionary Rate Relief be granted in respect of the organisations and premises detailed in the appendix to the report.

**6. HARDSHIP RELIEF - BUSINESS RATES**

A report was submitted requesting Cabinet to consider an application for hardship relief in relation to business rates liabilities.

Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 gave the Local Authority power to reduce or remit business rates on the grounds of hardship. Each application needed to be assessed with regard to its own individual merits.

**Resolved:**

That the application for hardship relief detailed at appendix (b) be dealt with in accordance of the reasons stated.

**7. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ACCESS STRATEGY AND CUSTOMER PROMISE**

A report was submitted to seek Cabinet approval for the replacement of the Customer Access Strategy and Customer Charter with the Customer Service and Access Strategy and Customer Promise.

The Customer Access Strategy and accompanying Customer Charter had been in place since 2007. A review had been undertaken and an organisation wide Customer Service and Access Strategy ('the Strategy') and Customer Promise would better reflect and incorporate the national 'Customer Service Excellence Standard' best practice along with the latest industry guidelines.

**Resolved: a)** That Cabinet approve the Customer Service and Access Strategy and Customer Promise.

**b)** That a timetable for implementation of the strategy across the Council is submitted to the Portfolio Holder by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014.

**c)** That any required changes to the Council's communications policies are implemented following consideration by the relevant portfolio holders in conjunction with the Head of Communications and the Head of Customer Services and ICT.

**8. REVIEW OF ALLOTMENTS SERVICE**

A report was submitted to report the outcome of the consultation on the draft Allotments Strategy and to request that Cabinet formally adopts the Strategy.

**Resolved:**

a) That the responses received during the consultation are noted

b) That the minor changes to the Allotments Strategy, arising from the consultation, as detailed in this report, are approved.

c) That the Allotments Strategy 2014-2020 is formally adopted and Officers are authorised to implement the actions set out in the Action Plan.

**9. ASSET DISPOSALS**

Cllr Jones and Cllr Tagg had submitted representations in relation to the agenda item. Cllr Jones and Cllr Tagg highlighted the main areas listed in their representations.

Cllr Jones' highlighted the main area of concern for the public as being the effect of the disposal on the Whitfield Community Centre which had been using one of the sites listed. Cllr Jones also disputed whether the car parking space would be increased to 33 spaces as stated in the report.

Cllr Tagg highlighted the concerns listed in his representation regarding the land at Sandy Lane including the fact that the space was used by local people for recreation, that it soaked up rain water that could otherwise lead to flooding and that it was situated near a busy roundabout which would make any development difficult to access.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Assets responded to the questions and representations.

Desk top assessments (including a mining report) had been produced in respect of all sites which had brought to light any significant technical constraints (which could inhibit alternative use or development). In relation to the Wedgewood Avenue Site, The Portfolio Holder was satisfied that a robust consultation had been undertaken regarding this and all of the sites listed and urged the Cabinet to accept the recommendations.

The Portfolio Holder further highlighted that elected members and members of the public would have a further ability to become involved in the process when it reached the planning application stage.

Cllr Turner considered the options available and agreed that the recommendations were the best way forward for the council in comparison to other possibilities such as borrowing money.

**Resolved:**

a) That Members approve (with the exception of the sites at Church Lane, Knutton and Gallowstree Lane, Westlands) the disposal of the tranche 2 sites, subject to having first secured an appropriate outline planning permission for each parcel of land.

(b) That Members approve the procurement of specialist consultants to prepare and submit planning applications in respect of the sites at Sandy Lane/Brampton Road, May Bank, Market Drayton Road, Loggerheads and Eccleshall Road, Loggerheads and the associated costs.

(c) That members agree to add the cost of procuring the specialist consultants referred to in recommendation (b) to the current capital programme in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.

10. **COUNCIL RESPONSE TO NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME AND STOKE-ON-TRENT JOINT LOCAL PLAN- CALL FOR SITES**

A representation had been submitted by Cllr Mark Holland. Cllr Holland outlined his representation which focused on concerns of the residents of the Westlands Ward regarding the in principal earmarking of green spaces for development.

Cllr Naylor had also submitted 2 questions in relation to this agenda item. Cllr Naylor put her questions to the Cabinet. Cllr Naylor requested information regarding where the master plan could be viewed and what was the likely timescale

Cllr Williams stated that there was currently not a master plan and that the report to Cabinet only recommended that that officers be authorised to proceed in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder, to agree the principles of a brief with appropriate land owners.

Cllr Kearon requested confirmation that there were currently no brownfields sites available in the Borough. The Executive Director responded that there were none available for development at the moment and highlighted the current situation relating to the main brownfield sites in the Borough which were all already earmarked for future development in some way. Cllr Kearon requested clarity that by having a Joint Plan with Stoke, the brownfield sites available in the City would be taken into consideration prior to the green spaces in the Borough. The Executive Director stated a brownfield first policy was hoped to be included in the Joint Local Plan.

**Resolved:**

- (a) That officers be authorised to complete and submit pro-forma responses to the local planning authority for all Borough Council owned sites listed in the appendix to this report.
- (b) That officers be authorised to incorporate the identified sites listed in the appendix in the scope of the proposed masterplan (around the former Keele Golf Course and western / southern fringes of urban Newcastle) and to proceed, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to agree the principles of a brief with appropriate land owners.
- (c) That the financial implications arising from recommendation (b) be addressed through the 2015/16 budget setting process.
- (d) That the sites listed in the appendix to this report be used to inform the next and future Asset Management Strategies / Plans.
- (e) That officers bring forward at the earliest opportunity a further report identifying any additional sites which may be identified as appropriate for alternative use or development once key strategy documents have been finalised as described in the report.

**11. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**12. EXCLUSION RESOLUTION**

**Resolved:** That the public be excluded.

13. **HARDSHIP RELIEF - BUSINESS RATES**

**Resolved:** That the application be refused.

14. **QUESTION FROM MR TONY COX**

A question had been submitted in accordance with the Council's Constitution by Mr Tony Cox.

Mr Cox asked the Cabinet if they would be willing to engage in real consultation, as was undertaken in 2011 by the previous administration, and would they make a determined effort to include more brownfield sites in the development and disposal plans in order to save more of our much loved green spaces.

The Leader of the Council responded to Mr Cox's question. The Leader stated that he was in full agreement that brownfield sites should be used for housing but that this had to be balanced alongside the need for economic regeneration in the Borough. The Council as Land Owner currently had few if any Brownfield Sites suitable for building within its portfolio.

In relation to Keele Golf Course the Leader confirmed that the Council were engaging with the local community regarding the future of the site, the Golf Course was included in a Keele Master Planning exercise which would give the Authority more scope to investigate sustainable developments in keeping with the green areas around Keele.

**COUNCILLOR MIKE STUBBS**  
**Chair**