

ASSET POLICY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16th December, 2015

Present:- John Sellgren – in the Chair

Councillors Huckfield, Loades, Reddish, Shenton, Tagg, Turner and Williams J

Independent member Mr R Dougan

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr Ronald Dougan, who had been invited to sit on the Committee as an independent member, introduced himself to the Members.

It was confirmed that Mr Brian Carnes, who had also been approached, had stated that he would be willing to sit on the Committee as an independent member but could only attend the 6 January meeting. Members agreed that Mr Carnes would be able to review the paperwork and therefore make an informed decision. Mr Carnes would be invited to attend the January meeting.

Mr Dougan was asked if he would be willing to take the Chair for this meeting. He preferred to be a Committee member for this session and would make a decision regarding the two meetings in January.

It was confirmed that The Council's Chief Executive would chair/facilitate the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 December, 2015 be agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- Councillor Reddish being recorded as being present.
- Minute number two, second paragraph – first line, replace appointment with appoint.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Members requested that the information requested at the previous meeting under item 4 – Resolution (b) be provided to them.

5. PLANNED CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Planned Capital Expenditure.

Members were advised that the table at paragraph 5.2 included two new projects which had been approved, namely the Civic Hub and the new recycling service.

There was a further, more detailed, document relating to the table which was available to members of the Committee upon request from the Executive Director – Resources and Support Services.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

6. **FUNDING OPTIONS**

Consideration was given to a report providing details of the future funding options for the Council's Capital Programme.

The Committee were asked to reaffirm the Cabinet's decision taken in October, 2014 to seek to fund its known capital programme needs, as a first resort, through the annual asset management planning process and identify land that is capable of and appropriate for sale.

Members were advised that, where land is sold for residential development, under the New Homes Bonus the Council receives approximately £9000 for each new dwelling that comes into the Borough for a 6 year period. Attention was drawn to emerging Government thinking which indicates the potential for the non-payment of New Homes Bonus in the future in cases where the Local Authority refuse a Planning application which is later allowed on appeal.

Members enquired about the possibility of borrowing money. The Executive Director for Resources and Support Services stated that at present, Newcastle Borough Council was a debt-free Authority. An illustrative example of prudential borrowing was passed round to Members showing the costs of borrowing and an explanation of the figures was given.

An enquiry was made regarding the former Keele Golf Course as to how soon it could be sold and whether it would be sold all-together or in tranches. Officers indicated that due to its size it would be unlikely to be sold as a single whole site. It was confirmed that the Executive Director for Regeneration and Development would bring along an indicative timeline for the potential disposal of the site taking account of the Green Belt status of the site and the emerging Local Plan process. A map of the site was requested, showing which parts were in the Green Belt. This was provided during the course of the meeting and confirmed that the whole of the former golf course lies within the Green Belt.

Members were advised that the Council's borrowing policy is contained within the treasury Management Strategy which is approved by full Council each year.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That this Committee reaffirms the decision of Cabinet, taken in October, 2014 "that the Council as a first resort, will seek to fund its known capital programme needs through the annual asset management planning process by the identification of land or property in its ownership that is capable of, and appropriate for, disposal".
 - (ii) That the Committee recommends to full Council that provision is made in future revenue budgets for prudential borrowing.

7. **ASSET POLICY COMMITTEE POLICY PAPER**

Members considered a report on the Policy Paper in respect of this Committee's work. The document had been peer-reviewed by the Homes and Communities Agency and their comments had been fed into the document. The Executive Director for Regeneration and Development advised the Committee that full versions of the source documents quoted within the Policy were available upon request. The document sets a framework which will enable informed decisions to be made.

Members felt that the larger sites should be considered for disposal first as they would be more attractive to developers. In addition, before the meeting on 6 January, 2016, some criteria was required on what land was being judged by. Information was required on public interest and public usage.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the document be noted.
 - (ii) That the policy framework and approach to land disposals as set out in the current Asset Management Strategy be reaffirmed.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The independent member, Mr Ronald Dougan was invited to comment on the meeting. He provided an overview of the Committee's task as he viewed it and stated that whatever this Committee recommends to the Cabinet would need to be justified. Therefore, prior to the meeting on 6 January, criteria for which land is to be sold needed to be decided and agreed along with the process that would be followed.

In addition to the above Members requested that a matrix of some description be provided which could be used to rate each site along with information about the views of local residents and the maintenance costs of such sites to the Council.

The Executive Director for Regeneration and Development had brought along the current Asset Register (a forty five page document and a large map base) containing information about all sites owned by the Borough Council. This would be made available to Members to enable them so see if any other sites could be considered along with the twenty five sites which were being reviewed by the independent valuation team. Members were encouraged to meet with the Property Manager outside of the meeting to enhance their understanding of the full extent of the asset base in order to inform discuaaion at the next meeting. Members requested that the list of sites be put into size order (largest first) to enable clearer consideration. In addition, the status of the land should be made known, for example green belt etc.

- Resolved:** That the comments be noted.

JOHN SELLGREN
Chair