

CABINET

Wednesday, 14th March, 2012

Present:- Councillor Stephen Sweeney – in the Chair
Councillors R Studd, J Bannister, A Howells, N Jones and M Reddish

9. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

11. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT TO END OF QUARTER THREE (DEC) 2011

A report was submitted providing Members with the Financial and Performance Review for the 2011/12 Third Quarter.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Transformation stated that the Customer Services Department would shortly be reassessed regarding the Customer Services Excellence Award it had achieved in the previous year. There was no guarantee that this award would be re awarded but Members and Officers were certain that more improvements had been made.

The Portfolio holder for Regeneration and Planning applauded the work done by the Newcastle Housing Association Team which was evidenced by all targets having been met.

Section 4.2 of the report referred to the Council's frozen investment in Heritable Bank, the Portfolio holder stated that the Council would be reimbursed at least 90% of the money invested. It was also stated that the variance of 0.3% was also a good achievement even though the target showed as 0%.

The target listed under ER5 which referred to pollution inspections had been below target due to staff shortages and ER6 had suffered over the Christmas period with business preferring not to be inspected over the festive period. The Portfolio Holder the Environment and Recycling stated that both of these issues had now been resolved and the targets were now improving.

The Portfolio holder for Culture and Active Communities stated that CA1 was currently showing under target but that this was due to the transitional period between the closures of Jubilee 1 and Knutton Recreation Centre and the opening of the new Jubilee 2 Centre.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted and it be recommended that the Council continue to monitor and scrutinise performance alongside finances.

12. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2012-2013

A report was submitted seeking Cabinet approval for the Communications Strategy which covered the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2015. The document outlined how the Council would use good communications to build a stronger reputation, involve and inform residents, engage effectively with stakeholders and improve customer satisfaction.

A series of best practice visits had been undertaken to see how beacon councils carried out customer engagement and consultation. This had taken place at the same time as the Government ended the Place Survey and urged councils to look again at how they engaged with residents.

The borough council was now in the infancy of a new way of working modelled on beacon councils which involved more qualitative, face-to-face engagement and a focus on key front line services. The proposed changes were intended to help save approximately £15,000 for the 2012/13 financial year.

Resolved: That the Communications Strategy 2012-15 be approved.

13. STRONGER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES STRATEGY 2012-2017

A report was submitted providing Cabinet with a draft of the Stronger and Safer Communities Strategy 2012-2017. The Strategy had been developed in line with the other key Borough Council strategies on Economic Development and Health and Well-Being. A version of the report had been presented to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 February 2012.

The Strategy provided the main framework for the work being done by the Borough Council in conjunction with its partners, communities and other key stakeholders in seeking to develop stronger and safer communities in the Borough and beyond.

The Strategy brought together previously disparate areas of work and provided a common basis for future work programmes as well as a set of key indicators and outcomes which those projects listed in the Strategy sought to deliver.

Members stated that the performance indicators listed on page 7 of Appendix A could be made clearer and that some benchmarks were required.

RESOLVED: (a) That the contents of the Strategy and the comments received from the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview & Scrutiny Committee be noted.

(b) That the list of Key Measure for Success on page 7 of the Appendix be made more clear and benchmarks added.

(c) That the Strategy be circulated to partners and communities and that updates on the Strategy's development be brought to future meetings of the Cabinet.

14. LOCALITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP (LAP) REVIEW UPDATE

Cabinet received a report which had been produced to provide an update on the progress of the Locality Action Partnerships (LAPs) Review and Development Plan.

The report built on the work undertaken as part of the Borough Council's Transformation Programme, previous reports to Cabinet and the Locality Action Partnership Review and Development plan recommendations submitted to the Executive Management Team and Cabinet in October 2011.

Cabinet had approved the Locality Action Partnership review report – The Story of 'Our Place' on 7 September 2011 with the caveat that a development plan be put together to support the report. The development plan enabled actions, milestones, leads and timeframes to be clearly set out and ensured that progress was made and monitored. The development plan had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 19 October 2011.

RESOLVED: (a) That the contents of the report be noted.

(b) That Cabinet support the continued work and development of LAPs

(c) That the potential issues relating to the full time LAP Co-ordinator post and issues around small projects funding related to the LAPs be noted.

(d) That Cabinet approve the continuation of the LAP Co-ordinator post to be funded through the Local Member Initiative Fund.

15. PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING THE RYECROFT SCHEME AND APPOINTMENT OF RETAIL SPECIALIST CONSULTANCY

Members received a report advising them of the progress made in relation to the Ryecroft redevelopment scheme and in particular to advise of the results of a tendering exercise for retail specialist consultants.

The Council aimed to bring forward a comprehensive redevelopment of the Ryecroft area of the town centre, so assisting the Council to better shape the future development of the overall town centre (and, in particular, to promote its long term economic prospects as a viable and attractive retail centre).

Both officers from Staffordshire County and the Borough Council were satisfied that value for money had been demonstrated through the competitive tendering of the service. This meant that whilst the tender price of the selected consultancy was the most expensive, the qualitative evaluation of their submission resulted in them achieving the highest score. Additionally it was noted that the brief for this commission required interested parties to submit fee proposals which demonstrated incentive to deliver a development partner.

The Borough Council's contribution of 25% for the cost of this service would be met from the existing capital budget allocation for the Ryecroft scheme; the County Council would meet the other 75% of the cost as required by the Joint Venture agreement between the partners.

RESOLVED: (a) That the progress made on taking forward the Ryecroft redevelopment scheme be noted.

(b) That the Portfolio Holder's decision to award the retail consultancy contract to Cushman Wakefield as the most economically advantageous tender be noted.

16. TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND INITIATIVES

A report was received updating Members on the activities of the embryonic town centre partnership and seeking approval for council involvement and / or action in respect of the following emerging initiatives:

- (a) The council becoming a director of the town centre Partnership Company (not-for-profit and limited by guarantee).
- (b) Submission of a bid in response to the Government's invitation to become a "Portas Pilot".
- (c) Taking part in national campaigns to support street markets and independent retailers.
- (d) Consulting users (and non-users) of Newcastle town centre as to why they do/do not visit the town and, in particular, the effect of parking charges on their decision.

RESOLVED (a) That Newcastle under Lyme B.C. becoming a director of the Newcastle town centre partnership company and officers be authorised to take the necessary steps to facilitate the same; the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning would represent the Council on the company.

(b) That officers work under the auspices of the Newcastle town centre partnership to prepare and submit a bid to become a "Portas pilot", in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning and for the Council to act as the accountable body for administering any grant.

(c) That the Council be involved in campaigns to support the safeguarding and growth of markets (e.g. Love your local market) and independent retailers (Independents' month in July) by running its own campaign themed around what Newcastle town centre had to offer for shoppers, visitors and those interested in starting a new business, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning.

(d) That the preparation and execution of a town centre user survey be carried out, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning.

17. REGISTER OF LOCALLY IMPORTANT BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES IN NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME SPD

A report was submitted updating Members on the recommendation of the Planning Committee to adopt a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) relating to a Register of Locally Important Buildings and Structures in Newcastle under Lyme. The list was provided to Cabinet Members and it was agreed that it be distributed to all Borough Councillors and comments invited.

RESOLVED: That the SPD relating to a Register of Locally Important Buildings and structures be adopted and distributed to all Elected Members for comments.

18. **RESPONSE TO PETITION TO PROTECT THE DOGS OF LYME VALLEY PARK FROM BEING POISONED**

Members received a report outlining the Council's response to a petition seeking action by the Council to prevent dogs being poisoned. The report gave a brief explanation of the issues that had occurred and actions that had been taken by the Council and the Police. No further incidents had been reported since September 2011.

RESOLVED: That a suitable notice be retained on the park notice board for a period of six months and that Officers review the requirement for further signs on a regular basis.

19. **PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH NEWCASTLE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SUPPORT**

A report was submitted providing Members with an assessment of a possible Partnership Agreement between the Borough Council and NCVS to help develop the voluntary and community sector response to the Council's Corporate Priorities, with a particular focus around delivering outcomes.

It was proposed that a formal Partnership Agreement be drawn up to help cement joint working and offer support to the further development of voluntary and community sector work in the Borough. The recent Partnership Agreement drawn up between the Borough Council and the New Vic Theatre would provide a template for a similar agreement with NCVS.

RESOLVED: (a) That consideration be given to the proposal for a Partnership Agreement between the Borough Council and the NCVS with specific reference to supporting the voluntary and community sector's contribution in delivering outcomes that support the Council's Corporate Priorities

(b) That, following this consideration, a Partnership Agreement be drafted and agreed in principle between the Borough Council and NCVS, with a view to further developing partnership working between the two organisations in a positive way prior to the re-commissioning of the 'Infrastructure Support' contract as part of the Third Sector Commissioning process and also taking into account the Staffordshire wide Public Sector Commissioning in Partnership (PSCiP) project, of which Infrastructure Support is a key element.

20. **TRANSPORTATION OF MATERIAL AND PROCESSING OF STREET SWEEPINGS**

Cabinet received a report informing it of the out come of a tendering Process for the contract for the Transportation of Material and Processing of Street Sweepings for Newcastle-under-Lyme BC - Tender Reference: NULBC/WTS-1.

All the bids had been evaluated both on cost and quality. The financial evaluation had been undertaken for the first full year of service (2012-13), based upon the rates provided within the tender documents and the estimated tonnage figures. The evaluation indicated that H. Browns and Sons would provide the most economically advantageous tender and as such complied with the Council's Financial appraisal.

The cost of the tender had been considered as one of the components of the integrated waste service and the estimated costs compared to the budget for 2012-13; this comparison indicated that the contract cost was within the available revenue budget for the integrated collection service.

RESOLVED: That the contract for the Transportation of Material and Processing of Street Sweepings for Newcastle-under-Lyme BC - Tender Reference: NULBC/PFW-1 be awarded to H. Browns and Sons of Stoke on Trent as set out in the report.

21. JOINT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW

A report was submitted informing Members that the current Joint Housing Allocations Policy with Aspire Housing had been reviewed and to enable Cabinet Members to consider the proposed final draft policy changes for adoption.

RESOLVED: That the revised Joint Housing Allocations Policy be adopted.

22. STRATEGIC TENANCY STRATEGY

A report was received advising Members of the statutory duty Local Authorities now had to prepare and publish a Strategic Tenancy Strategy within 12 months of the publication of the Localism Act 2011. This duty applied to all Local Authorities whether or not they still retained housing stock and was seen as part of the authorities' strategic housing role, not their landlord role.

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Tenancy Strategy be adopted.

23. LETTINGS OF SURPLUS OFFICE SPACE, CIVIC OFFICES, MERRIAL STREET, NEWCASTLE

A report was submitted updating Members on the letting of surplus Civic office space to third party partner organisations. Following an accommodation audit and implementation of a rationalisation programme of floor space used by the Borough Council within the Civic Offices negotiations had taken place and lease terms agreed with third party partners for their use of the surplus accommodation arising. This approach was consistent with the Council's objectives about making the best use of resources and achieving efficiencies in operational activities without detriment to front-line services.

RESOLVED: (a) That officers be authorised to take the necessary actions to complete new leases with the Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Police Authority in respect of the Civic Offices premises.

(b) That the actions taken by officers in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning in respect of the letting of office accommodation at the Civic Offices to Public Health partners be noted.

24. KIDSGROVE TOWN HALL AND VICTORIA HALL

Members received a report informing them of the negotiations taking place with Kidsgrove Town Council in respect of formalising the ownership of the Town Hall and the Victoria Hall and to update them as to the current situation in respect of the letting of surplus space to third party partner organisations.

RESOLVED: That the actions detailed below be approved:

- (i) That an offer has been made to Kidsgrove Town Council in respect of formalising the freehold ownership of the Town Hall and the Victoria Hall.
- (ii) That agreement for a lease has been reached with Staffordshire County Council (who are in occupation) and that negotiations are ongoing with Staffordshire Police Authority in respect of relocating to the Town Hall from the existing Police Station.

25. JUBILEE 2 UPDATE

A report was submitted providing Members with information about progress relating to the capital build of the Jubilee 2 centre since the last update report considered at the meeting in December.

RESOLVED: (a) That the information contained within the report be received.

(b) That Cabinet convey its thanks to all partners involved in delivering this project, particularly those who contributed funding. Members specifically wished to thank North Staffs NHS Trust, Sport England, the Amateur Swimming Association, The Contractors, Robert Foster and Andy Arnott.

26. CHESTERTON VISION

A report was submitted informing Members about a partnership opportunity with Staffordshire County Council at Chesterton Vision. This opportunity would enable the Council to raise its profile through association with the £4.4M new centre, which was in one of the most deprived wards in the Borough. The Centre was available for children across the entire Borough and not just those resident in Chesterton.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet authorise officers, in consultation with the Portfolio Member for Culture and Active Communities, to enter into a Service Level Agreement with Staffordshire Young People's Service for the Council's Leisure and Cultural Services to provide the operational management at Chesterton Vision, for an initial 12 months.

27. IRRECOVERABLE ITEMS

A report was submitted informing Members of items deemed to be irrecoverable. For a variety of reasons, from time to time, it was considered that certain items were unable to be recovered from debtors. When this occurred, it was necessary to write off these balances from the appropriate Council account records.

The Council currently has the responsibility to collect business rates on behalf of Central Government; council tax on behalf of its precepting authorities i.e. Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police Authority and Staffordshire Fire Authority as well as itself; and sundry debt in respect of services provided. The combined total of this is currently around £90m per annum.

The total being recommended for write off was £298,000 which represented only 0.3% of the total amount due for collection. This was comprised of business rates (£275,000); council tax (£15,000) and sundry debts (£8,000).

The overall impact of these write offs to the Borough Council was minimal as the write off of business rates was pooled nationally by central government and the writing off of council tax was shared between the precepting authorities – 12% of which was the Borough Council's share. The Council had made provision for unrecoverable sums and the amounts recommended for write-off were within the current budgeted bad debt provision.

RESOLVED:

That the items detailed in the Appendix be considered irrecoverable for the reasons stated and be written off.

COUNCILLOR STEPHEN SWEENEY
Chair