

CABINET

Wednesday, 12th December, 2012

Present:- Cllr Snell – in the Chair

Councillors Mrs Bates, Mrs Beech, Boden, Kearon, Stubbs and Williams

13. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 14th November be agreed as a correct record.

16. ADOPTION OF THE EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

Cabinet received a report to enable Members to consider the Empty Homes Strategy. The report outlined the main aims and objectives of the strategy and highlighted ways in which the Council could seek to tackle empty homes in the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres mover the recommendation and highlighted to Members that the Strategy would not be fluid due to the many changes coming from Central Government but that a robust action plan was essential. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that an action plan had been produced that was flexible enough to deal with the upcoming changes and that this would be made available to Members.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet adopt the Empty Homes Strategy 2012-17

17. APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

A report was submitted requesting Cabinet to approve the granting of Discretionary Rate Relief in accordance with powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Discretionary Rate Relief enabled the Borough Council to provide financial assistance to charitable and not for profit organisations occupying business premises within the council area in accordance with regulations detailed in The Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Members queried the status of the organisation applying at number 12 on the report as it had changed its status from a charitable company to a Community Interest Company. The Portfolio confirmed that he had asked the Company to produce a revised strategy to reflect this.

RESOLVED: (a) That Officers draw up a framework for Community Interest Companies.

(b) 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 Appendix A of this report

18. LOCALISED COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME CONSULTATION

A report was submitted to inform Cabinet of the results of the consultation undertaken to consider the draft Localised Council Tax Support scheme approved at the Cabinet meeting on the 19 September 2012.

The Welfare Reform agenda would see the current Council Tax Benefit scheme replaced by Localised Council Tax Support with effect from 1 April 2013. Localised schemes needed to be approved by the 31 January before the start of the new financial year to which the scheme applied, following consultation with interested groups and individuals. Consultation had been undertaken between 21 September and 16 November 2012 and the results would be used in conjunction with the draft scheme to formulate a scheme for the 2013/14 financial year, to be approved by Council at an additional meeting on 23rd January 2012.

Members drew the Portfolio Holders attention to page 43 of the report which mentioned a response from the Royal British Legion who had identified a need to provide protection for recipients of War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments. Members requested that this protection be drawn into the final scheme.

RESOLVED: (a) That the consultation results be noted and used to help formulate the Localised Council Tax Support scheme for the borough area.

(b) That it be recommended that protection be drawn into the final scheme regarding protection for recipients of War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments

19. IMPLEMENTING STREET MARKET IMPROVEMENTS

Cabinet received a report to seek Members' approval for key actions to facilitate delivery of the town centre public realm and market refurbishment project, including removal and replacement of trees in High Street and Hassell Street taking account of the Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee's recommendations.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Town Centres stated that he hoped the plan would be completed in the next few months. Concerns had been raised regarding littering but plans were in place for stall holders to keep this under control.

The report had been discussed by the Economic and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Chair was in attendance at the meeting to provide feedback to Cabinet Members. The Chair highlighted the concerns of the Committee which were listed on page 48 of the report and requested that an update be brought back to the Committee in 12 months. Cabinet thanked the Scrutiny Committee for its work on the topic.

The Portfolio Holder for Stronger and Active Neighbourhoods stated that the project had taken too long to get underway and that it was essential to also encourage culture and the arts into the Town Centre in the form of street theatre and live music. Assurance was requested that space would be made available for this. It was agreed

that the project had taken longer than expected and assurance was given that space would be made available for the arts. The Portfolio Holder for Planning Regeneration and Town Centres agreed that a timetable would be provided for Members.

RESOLVED: (a) That approval be given for the removal and re-provision of trees to facilitate delivery of the Town Centre Market improvements.

(b) That Cabinet authorise officers to prepare and submit a planning application for the proposed new market stalls.

(c) That a timetable be provided regarding the plan.

20. **BUDGET PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2012 QUARTER 2**

A report was submitted to provide Cabinet with the Financial and Performance Review for the 2012/13 Second Quarter (July-September). The reports provided information about the corporate performance of individual council services, alongside financial information. This report had been presented to the Transformation & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 19 November 2012.

The Portfolio Holder for Budget and Finance Management stated that the variance appeared favourable for the first 6 months and thanked Members of the Wider Management Team for their work achieving this. The Capital side was also being well managed and any areas highlighted for concern were in hand. The Council Leader also thanked the Finance team for their work in achieving this.

Members queried whether the Portfolio Holder thought that the council tax collection levels could drop once the new scheme was introduced. The Portfolio Holder agreed that this would be a hard time but that the team collecting council tax would adapt to the new scheme and continue to carry out the job to the standard seen at the present time.

Members requested whether a breakdown could be provided regarding the average number of days lost through sickness per employee to indicate staff who were off on long term sickness. It was agreed that this information could be provided in the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities drew Members attention to page 63 of the Agenda here it was stated that anti-social behaviour results had increased by 3%. The Portfolio stated that this did not mean that the number of incidents was increasing but that the anti social behaviour team were putting a lot of work into this area thus resulting in an increase in incidents reported.

The Portfolio for Culture and Leisure highlighted the fact that Kidsgrove Sports Centre was now open again but that a publicity drive was required in the New Year to bring users back to the facility.

RESOLVED: (a) That Cabinet note the contents of the report and recommend that the Council continues to monitor and scrutinise performance alongside finances.

(b) That Cabinet note that the appendix is an interim performance report to be further developed as detailed in the Performance Management Framework Review. The intention is to report performance information in a new format as the work is progressed.

(c) That the comments raised at the Transformation & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee held 19 November 2012 be noted.

(d) That in the future, sickness monitoring be broken down into long and short term sickness.

21. BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT

A report was submitted to provide Cabinet with information relating to the outcomes of the budget consultation process. The six-week consultation process held been held during October and November and was the first major budget consultation for a number of years. The responses and comments from the public would help the borough council as it considered spending pressures and priorities over the next two financial years.

The report had been considered by the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10th December and the Chair of that Committee was in attendance at the meeting to provide feedback to Cabinet members. Members of the Scrutiny committee considered that in the future it would be beneficial to carry out the consultation exercise earlier in the year and that it could be done in two stages with an initial start in early summer and an in depth consultation on more detailed proposals in late autumn. The Committee considered that the whole process had given an opportunity for residents to express their opinions, allowed better engagement between officers, elected members and the general public and sent an overall positive message to residents in the Borough.

The Chair requested that Cabinet report back to the Committee following an in depth analysis of all the feedback received. Assurance was given that this feedback would be provided. Thanks were expressed to the Scrutiny Committee for its feedback.

Cabinet Members thanked the Communications Team for their work on the consultation process and the Ward Members who had taken time to attend public consultation meetings.

RESOLVED: (a) That Cabinet notes the outcomes of the budget consultation process.

(b) That Cabinet authorises the Portfolio holders for Communications, Transformation and Partnerships and Budget and Financial Management to review the consultation process with the Head of Communications and consider how budget consultations could be developed for the future.

(c) That in the future the consultation exercise be carried out in two stages as per the scrutiny committee recommendations with greater emphasis on the long term.

22. LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP - PLANNING CHARTER MARK

A report was submitted to give Cabinet the opportunity to decide whether or not the Council should sign up to aspire to achieve a Planning Charter Mark that had been developed by the Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The LEP was seeking commitment from local authorities to adopt the 'Red Carpet approach' to businesses by delivering against a set of five outcomes.

The outcomes identified by the LEP were desirable and would be considered to be the qualities of a good planning service. Additionally the said outcomes would be consistent with the Council's priority around promotion of a borough of opportunity.

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres declared that he was a Member of the LEP Board.

The Report had already been considered by the Planning Committee and feedback from the Committee had been used to inform some of the recommendations on the report. Members of the Planning Committee were present at this meeting to provide feedback. The majority of comments regarded concerns that decisions of the Planning Committee could be watered down and that the Council needed to continue to actively encourage developers and partners to come to Newcastle under Lyme in order to help strengthen our position in the County.

RESOLVED: (a) That the Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LEP be advised that the Council wishes to attain the Planning Charter Mark status and invites the LEP to satisfy itself that the Council's current practices and procedures are compliant with the spirit and intent of the said Charter Mark.

(b) That the LEP be informed of the council's decision and be invited to keep under review the council's current decision-making processes, procedures and performance in relation to planning applications for development relating to the safeguarding and/or growth of jobs with a view to achieving continuous improvement.

(c) That the Planning Committee be advised of this decision and asked to introduce specific monitoring of business-related planning applications into its current performance monitoring regime.

(d) That officers bring forward proposals to a future meeting of Cabinet on the steps that are likely to be required to achieve Planning Charter Mark status in 2013.

23. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

Chair