

CABINET

7.00 pm, Wednesday, 6 February 2013

Present:- Councillor Gareth Snell – in the Chair

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

In attendance:- John Sellgren (Chief Executive), Kelvin Turner (Executive Director, Resources and Support Services, Neale Clifton (Executive Director, Regeneration and Development), Dave Adams (Executive Director, Operational Services), Paul Clisby (Head of Central Services), Nick Lamper (Senior Member Services Officer), Louise Stevenson (Scrutiny Officer), Janet Baddeley (Communications Team Leader) and Robin Wiles (Partnerships Officer (Community Development))

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January were approved as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING

Councillor Williams, portfolio holder for Stronger and Active Neighbourhoods, introduced a report outlining opportunities the council had to promote and develop an Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) scheme whilst recognising the opportunities the council already provided and supported. The report set out a planned pilot to explore these opportunities in the first instance in order to ascertain whether an ESV scheme would be workable for the council and its staff.

Councillor Boden noted that many employees already did some voluntary work outside working hours and the Leader thanked the officers who had undertaken work on proposal.

The Chief Executive advised that the North Staffordshire Volunteer Centre had confirmed at a meeting earlier in the week that they would be able to mobilise quickly.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That support be given to the establishment of an ESV pilot scheme for the council, following consultation with staff, followed by an initial open forum with employees and other interested parties on the concept of volunteering to gauge the level of interest in the organisation;
- (3) That, in the event of a pilot being set up, a review of this pilot be supported in order to ascertain whether a permanent ESV scheme should be set up in the council; and

- (4) That the proposal from North Staffordshire Volunteer Centre (NSVC) be endorsed, this being designed to support the development of an ESV pilot for the Borough Council.

4. PUBLIC SERVICES (SOCIAL VALUE) ACT 2012

Councillor Stubbs, portfolio holder for Finance and Budget Management, introduced a report outlining the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, and what Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council needed to do in order to comply with the legislation.

The act required public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public service contracts, and for connected purposes. An action plan was appended to the report setting out the steps required to ensure compliance.

The Leader noted that the proposals would link in with the authority's aim to become a co-operative council.

Resolved: That the steps set out in the Action Plan submitted at Appendix B be approved.

5. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS AND COUNCIL TAX 2013-14

Councillor Stubbs, portfolio holder for Finance and Budget Management, introduced a report to enable Cabinet to recommend the 2013/14 General Fund Revenue Budget and the 2013/14 Capital Programme to the full council, meeting on 27 February 2013, following consideration of comments received from the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 24 January 2013 and the Scrutiny Café held on 17 January 2013.

Councillor Shenton, Chair of the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, reported on the success of the scrutiny meeting and café and noted that answers had been received to all questions raised by members. The Leader thanked those members who had been involved and engaged with the process.

Resolved:

- (1) That it be recommended to full council that the revised minimum balances requirement be £1,300,000, with the excess of £200,000 above the current levels being transferred to the Insurance Fund (£150,000) and the Renewals and Repairs Fund (£50,000);
- (2) That it be recommended to full council that £80,000 be transferred out of the Standards Fund into the MMI Provision;
- (3) That the 2013/14 General Fund Revenue Budget and the Capital Programme 2013/14 as detailed in the report to Cabinet dated 16 January 2013 be recommended to full council for approval; and
- (4) That the charges in respect of waiver permits be approved and added to the Scale of Fees and Charges.

6. PROCUREMENT OF CORPORATE MAIL SERVICES

The Leader and Councillor Stubbs, portfolio holder for Finance and Budget Management, jointly introduced a report to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the tendering process for the provision of corporate mail services and to obtain approval

for the appointment of the successful contractor, subject to the satisfactory outcome of a pilot exercise.

Councillor Kearon enquired as to whether a move from Royal Mail would impact on employment at the company's local offices and was advised that the ultimate delivery responsibilities would still remain with the company.

Resolved: That a contract be issued to UK Mail (the successful provider) for a period of two years with the option to extend to August 2016, subject to the completion of the pilot exercise of up to six months duration, for the delivery of corporate mail services.

7. JOINT HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY - MINOR AMENDMENT

Councillor Boden, portfolio holder for Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres, introduced a report highlighting a request for an amendment to the Joint Housing Allocations Policy from Aspire Housing prior to the Policy launch in the New Year. The request had been made following recent investigations into the housing association's void performance, which had revealed that refusal rates were high and refusal reasons suggested that customers appeared to be bidding on properties without giving full consideration to whether they would actually be prepared to accept a tenancy for the property.

A range of options had been considered and these were set out in detail in the report.

It was proposed that the Joint Housing Allocations Policy be amended to permit applicants to place an unlimited number of bids on properties advertised each week under the NHA Options CBL scheme; however if an applicant made an unreasonable refusal of an offer or did not respond to an offer within the timescale on the offer notification, that their application would be suspended for six months.

It was noted that Councillors Mrs Beech and Williams had been appointed to the board of Aspire Housing as representatives of the council, and it was therefore unnecessary for them to declare interests in that regard.

Resolved: That the proposed amendment to the Joint Housing Allocations Policy as set out above be approved.

8. NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME CO-OPERATIVE STRATEGY 2013-2015

The Leader introduced a report providing the Cabinet with a draft of the Co-operative Strategy 2013-2015.

The Strategy had been developed in line with the other key council strategies on Economic Development, Health and Wellbeing, and Stronger and Safer Communities. It set out the details around the stated aim of the council to become a Co-operative Council, an ambition which was also reflected in the key priority on becoming a Co-operative Council within the Council Plan.

In addition to the recommendations set out in the report, the Leader proposed that the strategy be placed before the relevant scrutiny committee for its consideration and comment.

Resolved:

- (1) That the content of the strategy be noted;
- (2) That the content as submitted be endorsed;
- (3) That the strategy be circulated to partners and communities and further updates on its development be submitted at future Cabinet meetings; and
- (4) That the strategy be placed before the relevant scrutiny committee for its consideration and comment.

9. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT TO END OF QUARTER 3 (DECEMBER 2012)

Councillor Stubbs, portfolio holder for Finance and Budget Management, introduced the Financial and Performance Management Report for the third quarter of 2012/13.

The other Cabinet members provided information in relation to the performance within their respective portfolios, with particular reference to areas of particularly strong performance or concern.

Resolved:

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted the monitoring and scrutiny of performance alongside finances be continued;
- (2) That the new style of the performance report be developed further for 2013-14 as detailed, in line with the Performance Management Framework Review and the Council Plan 2013-14 to 2015-16, the intention being to report performance information in a new format as the work is progressed;
- (3) That the comments raised at the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24 January 2013 be noted.

10. SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT FOR COUNCIL TELEPHONY

The Leader introduced a report seeking Cabinet approval for the renewal of the council's telephony support and maintenance contract directly with Mitel Networks; the manufacturer of the council's existing telephony system.

The report set out how Mitel had submitted the most economically advantageous quotation for the work, and noted that the council had built an excellent relationship with the company over a period of ten years. Details were provided of the evaluation of the three quotes submitted. The recommended course of action to award the contract to Mitel was in accordance with the council's constitution and the European Procurement Rules and UK Regulations.

Councillor Stubbs observed that the procurement process had been a robust one.

Resolved:

- (1) That Standing Orders relating to Contracts be waived on the grounds of 2b(v) which states 'goods and services are obtainable only from a limit numbers of persons or bodies'; and
- (2) That the support and maintenance contract be awarded to Mitel Networks (Mitel) with effect from 1 April 2013 for a period of three years.

11. CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING ADVICE

Councillor Boden, portfolio holder for Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres, introduced a report giving Cabinet the opportunity to decide whether or not the council should agree to introduce charging for planning advice, and the means by which this could be done.

The introduction of charges for pre-application advice was permitted under Section 93 of Local Government Act and a number of local authorities had already introduced charges for this purpose. Introduction of charges for pre-application planning advice would present an opportunity to recoup some of the costs associated with undertaking pre-application discussions with potential applicants for planning permission, and to offset some of the costs of the planning process. The report has been prepared in the context of a significant reduction in planning fee income, and a study, financed by the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Project, commissioned from the accountancy firm Deloitte, comparing the council's fees and charges with those made by a range of other local authorities. This work had identified some activities where no charge was currently made but could be, and the report to Cabinet on 16 January 2013 on the Scale of Fees and Charges had identified charging for pre-application advice as feasible for implementation in 2013/14, and advised that a report on this would be submitted to this meeting.

The introduction of charges had been supported by the Planning Committee at its meeting the previous evening.

A discussion ensued on the merits of the introduction of a charge in respect of householder development, as it was considered that a complete absence of advice without charge could potentially be detrimental to customers.

Resolved:

- (1) That, subject to (3) below, the provision of "free" informal written advice as to whether or not planning permission is required for development proposals, be discontinued;
- (2) That, subject to (3) below, the introduction of charging of fees for pre-application advice, as set out in the report be approved;
- (3) That, solely in relation to householder development, the provision of one half-hour meeting per case be allowed without charge, but a charge be levied in the event of any further meeting or if written confirmation of the advice given is sought; and
- (4) That the Head of Planning and Development be requested to report back after six months on the implementation of these changes, the feedback received and the impact of them.

12. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR GARETH SNELL
Chair

The meeting concluded at 7.55 pm.