

Cabinet Report from the Leader of the Council

Submitted by: Leader of the Council on behalf of the Cabinet

Portfolios: All

Ward(s) affected: All

Background

The Cabinet has met twice since the change of administration, on the 23rd May 2012 and 20th June 2012. This report seeks to set out key decisions made as well as inform the Council about other activities being undertaken by Cabinet members on behalf of the Council.

Meeting Format

The Cabinet resolved that, in order to make meetings more accessible to the general public and Councillors, they would be moved to 7pm. This has proved to be a great success and at the last meeting ten members of the public attended as well as backbench Councillors from all three political parties.

Attendance of both opposition Group Leaders and Chairs of the 4 scrutiny committees has been encouraged and new processes have been put in place to allow for greater discussion and debate leading to better decisions.

Review of Community Centres

The Cabinet has approved the strategic review of Community Centres which, as an item on the Forward Plan was inherited by the incoming Labour administration. Cabinet has however, set out a robust action plan to ensure that confidence is retained in the review by making the process open, honest and transparent.

Cabinet have requested that a scrutiny task and finish group consisting of Councillors from across the political groups be set up to visit the centres, liaise with management committees and look at how the Council can best make use of the £200,000 spent on Community facilities before making recommendations to Cabinet.

Cabinet has also requested that the Officer Group report back with a proposed consultation programme to a future Cabinet meeting so that Cabinet can be certain that the process is open, honest and transparent. Cabinet made it very clear that, in a break with our predecessors, this review would be done with Community Centre users and management committees rather than done to them.

No decisions on any centres have been made and it would be both disingenuous and factually wrong for any councillor to suggest otherwise.

Public Sector Commissioning in Partnership

Cabinet has agreed in principle to closer collaborative working with Staffordshire County Council to deliver services in the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme. However, to ensure that the residents of Newcastle are protected and to consider the points raised by the Active and Cohesive Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet has requested additional information in order for it to be sure that services paid for by Newcastle residents are delivered for and are available to Newcastle residents.

Strategic Review of ICT

Cabinet was pleased to pass the Strategic Review of ICT which gives a freer hand to the ICT department to look at the software and hardware we use and how efficiencies can be garnered. The report sets an ambitious target of £100,000 to be saved over the next five years.

Local Enterprise Partnership

Discussions are taking place between the Leaders of the Northern Boroughs over the future representation of District Councils on the Local Enterprise Partnership. Sadly, the last act of the previous Leader was to sell Newcastle's place at the table to the highest bidding Tory neighbour and so Newcastle is now relegated to 'observer' status. Clearly, it was more important to the Tories to cement the position of their political allies than it is to stand up for Newcastle's interests.

Budget 2013/14

Work has started on the 2013/14 Budget. As a break from the previous way of doing things, this year will see consultation on all the options available as well as a much earlier start with Councillors, stake holders and the public able to help shape the entire budget rather than simply pass comment on the final Cabinet proposals. This is, again, part of the commitment from the new administration to ensure that as many people as possible are involved in determining the way we work in the Council.

ADBG Industry Award

The Borough Council claimed the ADBG Industry Award for Best Local Authority for the second year. Newcastle beat off strong competition from the Oxford waste partnership and others to take the title. The Cabinet would like to thank all the 54,000 homes and 60 schools in the Borough who participate in the Food Waste recycling. However, this award has only been possible because of the continued dedication of staff and contractor Lower Reule Bioenergy. The Cabinet will however, not be resting on its laurels and while it recognises the success of the current disposal arrangements, work will continue to make the collection and sorting as user-friendly as possible.

Future Cabinet Meetings

The next Cabinet meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 18th July and will formally sign-off on 4 of the Labour manifesto pledges. In a little over two months, the Labour-run Council will have delivered on promises made and endorsed by the electorate. A full report from that, and any other Cabinet meeting, will be tabled at the next Full Council meeting. Cabinet is considering taking future Cabinet meetings to other places in the Borough to further cement its commitment to being an open and accountable body and allow the public to see how the Council is run.

Forward Plan

The forward plan can be accessed by following this link:

<http://moderngov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/mgListPlans.aspx?RPIId=118&RD=0>