

MINUTES OF CABINET MEETING HELD 25 MARCH 2013

PRESENT

Cabinet Members: Councillor Cereste (chair), Councillor Dalton, Councillor Fitzgerald, Councillor Hiller, Councillor Holdich, Councillor Lee, Councillor Scott and Councillor Walsh.

Cabinet Advisers: Councillor Elsey, Councillor Goodwin and Councillor North

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Seaton.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 25 FEBRUARY 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2013 were agreed as an accurate record.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS

4. CITIZENS POWER PROGRAMME

Cabinet received a report informing it of the outcome of work undertaken by the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee in its review of the Citizen Power Peterborough Programme. Cabinet was asked to consider the report and agree the recommendations of the Committee.

Councillor Hiller introduced the report, thanking the members of the scrutiny task and finish group for their work. Councillors Todd and Casey were in attendance as members of the task and finish group and further advised Cabinet of the details of the report and its background.

During debate it was highlighted that the absence of a project manager for the first six months of the programme was detrimental to the initial set up and continued performance monitoring and also that the Royal Society for the Arts was still to make its own report on the programme.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

Endorse the final report of the review of the Citizen Power Peterborough programme conducted by the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee and to approve the recommendation in the report as below:

Should future programmes of any similarity be considered within the city that the appointment of a project manager at the earliest stage is essential. The role of that project manager should incorporate business and financial planning and the communication of the key messages of the programme to Councillors to avoid

unnecessary delays or misunderstanding over the outcomes and objectives of the initiative.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

This report had come to Cabinet following a request from the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Option 1. Not to agree to the recommendations. The Committee did not recommend this as they considered that the Council should use the learning from the Citizen Power programme before entering into any future programme of work of a similar nature.

Option 2. Develop alternative recommendations. The Committee did not recommend this as they considered that the Task and Finish Group had conducted an in depth and objective review and therefore the recommendations put forward had been fully accepted by the committee.

5. AFFORDABLE HOUSING CAPITAL FUNDING POLICY

Cabinet received a report recommending the suspension of any further grant allocations from the council's Affordable Housing corporate resources part of the Capital Programme until a thorough review of the council's policy as to how such funds should be spent was undertaken. Such a review was considered necessary to ensure the council gained maximum benefit and value from the use of such funds. Secondly, the report recommended that Cabinet agreed that schemes that discharge obligations to provide affordable housing in accordance with individual Section 106 agreements would still be considered and Section 106 receipts would continue to be applied to fund such schemes in accordance with the 2011 Policy framework.

Councillor Hiller introduced the report further advising Cabinet that the take up of the available funding was often low.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Agree to suspend any new allocations from the council's Affordable Housing corporate resources part of the Capital Programme until a review of the council's Affordable Housing Capital Funding Policy (Feb 2011) is agreed by Cabinet (scheduled for September 2013);
2. Agree that the scope of the policy review should cover an investigation of the options listed in paragraph 4.4 of the report; and
3. Agree that schemes that discharge obligations to provide affordable housing in accordance with individual Section 106 agreements will still be considered and Section 106 receipts will continue to be applied to fund such schemes in accordance with the 2011 Policy framework.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Suspending new allocations from the Affordable Housing corporate resources part of the Capital Programme and undertaking a review of the Policy would ensure the council was achieving best value for the funds.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

To not suspend new allocations from the Affordable Housing corporate resources part of the Capital Programme: This option was rejected because it may be the case that the funds could be used in the next 6 months on schemes which met the current adopted Policy but which did not necessarily achieve best value for the council.

6. LIBRARY SERVICES

Cabinet received a report to consider and determine what revisions, if any, should be made to the city's library service as a result of the feedback received from the recent public library consultation and consultation on the Council's budget proposals.

Councillor Lee introduced the report highlighting the need to save £200,000 from the Vivacity budget. By reducing the book fund by £50,000 per annum and reducing the weekly opening hours of some libraries, unlike many other Authorities none of the city's libraries would need to be closed, it would be possible to make the necessary contribution to the total financial savings amount. The reduction in opening hours would come into effect from 1 July 2013 and would see three of the larger libraries in the city (Orton, Werrington and Bretton) reducing their hours to 29 per week with the largest library, Central Library, reducing its opening hours to 40 per week.

Cabinet debated the report commenting on the importance of retaining the mobile library and its current opening hours and service routes, the need for more community groups to use the libraries and greater use of the library buildings, increased use of electronic book use and the need to see a rise in the lending of books overall.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Revise the opening hours for Bretton, Central, Orton and Werrington libraries as set out under the columns headed 'revised proposal based on user feedback' in paragraph 7.11 to the report;
2. Reduce the book fund by £50,000 per annum as referred to in paragraph 10.4 of the report;
3. Note the savings to be made in respect of Vivacity's own internal management and overhead costs as referred to in paragraph 10.5 of the report; and
4. Retain (and not revise) the current frequencies and stopping times for the mobile library service as set out in Annex B to the report for the reasons set out in the report.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The Council's budget proposals for 2013/14 were considered by Council at its meeting on 6 March 2013. Due to the challenges being faced, the Council had been forced to review a whole range of services in order to secure a balanced budget, as well as maintaining effective public services.

The Council currently spends £10,465 on library services for every 1,000 people. According to CIPFA in 2012, the average expenditure for an authority of a similar size to Peterborough was approximately £16,000 per 1,000 people. However, Peterborough's library service's performance remained high compared to the level of investment and was an effective low cost model.

Vivacity, which operated the city's libraries on behalf of the Council, also worked collaboratively with other Authorities and the consortium through which books were purchased was an example of this. The consortium arrangement in place offered excellent discounts on book spending.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

During the budget discussions, various other options for making savings from Vivacity were considered, including potentially closing premises, including libraries. The Council wished to continue to provide a comprehensive range of services across arts, culture, heritage and sports and wished to have a full range of facilities available to its customers. The view was that the recommendations set out in this report still enabled that to be achieved. As a consequence, other proposals were rejected.

7. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH BRITISH GAS

Cabinet received a report seeking its approval to enter into a Strategic Partnering Agreement with British Gas.

Councillor Cereste introduced the report highlighting that the partnership was one of the first of its types in the country and would see investment from British Gas into the city for the benefit of residents and the job market.

During a brief debate it was highlighted that domestic improvement work was intended to be aimed at low income families but further details of the partnership work would be determined at a workshop with British Gas in April.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Approve entering into a strategic partnering agreement with British Gas in respect of energy, green deal, ECO and fuel efficiency projects; and
2. Agree that the delivery of future work streams be delegated to the Executive Director of Strategic Resources in consultation with the Leader.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The investment in the city sought to further enhance the policy around the home of the environment capital. It would also generate new jobs.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The council does not enter into such an agreement. This would mean that there would not be investment in the city of up to £20million and the creation of up to 600 new jobs.

8. RISK BASED VERIFICATION POLICY

Cabinet received a report to approve the implementation of the Risk Based Verification Policy. The Solicitor to the Council advised Cabinet that it did not have to exclude the public and press and move into exempt session unless it intended to discuss and debate the information contained within the exempt annex to the report. Cabinet agreed that the public need not be excluded from the meeting.

In Councillor Seaton's absence Councillor Hiller introduced the report highlighting that the final policy proposal followed a pilot scheme earlier in the year which had had positive results.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

Approve the Risk Based Verification (RBV) Policy.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Implementing an on-line claim form was part of Serco's business case for delivering the Revenues & Benefits Service and achieving efficiencies. The RBV software was considered an integral part of ensuring the on-line form delivered the efficiencies anticipated.

An Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out in December 2012 and did not identify any major barriers. Work has already commenced with various groups such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK, MIND and members of the Council's Welfare Reform Group and relevant stakeholders of the service to remove any barriers as part of the plan to move customers from a paper form to an on-line form (widely referred to as channel shifting).

A major piece of work had been undertaken to identify places within the city where customers could get access to the internet and help with filling in the on-line form. The form was recently demonstrated to over 90 people from advice agencies and voluntary organisations across the city to enable them to help their customers complete the form. In addition, Bayard Place would be equipped with computer terminals for customers to use and a dedicated floorwalker would be on hand to help customers complete their forms on-line. A Questions & Answers leaflet had been developed and would be distributed across the city to be handed out to anyone wanting to make a new claim.

The on-line form with integrated RBV was expected to deliver the following benefits:

- "smart" on-line form which adapts itself to customer's circumstances, therefore making the claim process easier and quicker;
- Up to 50% of customers will not need to provide duplicate evidence to validate their claim as we already hold that information and will use this to process their application;
- Will help prepare customers for Universal Credit which will be an on-line application;
- Landlords will be able to help their tenants complete their claims;
- Only complete claims can be submitted which reduces the level of chase up work to the customer and they will be clear about what evidence they need to supply; and
- On-line forms can be submitted 24 hours a day instead of being restricted to service opening hours.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The alternative was to maintain the status quo. The disadvantages of the current situation were:

- All customers have to complete 30+ pages paper application forms which is time consuming for customers and often difficult;
- Customers often submit incomplete claim forms and have to be written to for further information which leads to delays in processing;
- Paper claim forms have to be scanned and indexed before they can be processed which is resource intensive;
- All customers have to provide the same level of evidence irrespective of their circumstances;
- Customers are asked to provide information that we already hold; and
- Current new claim processing times are approximately 45 days (January 2013) and are reviewed up to 5 times before they are put into payment because of the lack of correct information or documentation.