

MINUTES OF CABINET MEETING HELD 24 NOVEMBER 2014

PRESENT

Cabinet Members: Councillor Cereste (Chairman), Councillor Holdich, Councillor Elsey, Councillor Fitzgerald, Councillor Hiller, Councillor North, Councillor Seaton and Councillor Serluca.

Cabinet Advisers: Councillor Casey and Councillor Lamb.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Scott.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cereste declared an interest in item 6, Reviewing Peterborough Library Services and Community Centres, in that he was the Chairman of the Italian Community Association.

3. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETINGS HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2014 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS

4. THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2014 AND STRATEGY 2013-2018

Cabinet received a report which requested it to note and comment on the activity of the Housing Needs Service over the previous year and to review and comment on the information contained within the Homelessness Review. The report further sought Cabinet's comments and agreement on the broad strategic aims of the Homelessness Strategy and to recommend the Strategy be adopted by Council.

Councillor Hiller introduced the item and provided an overview of the background to the issue, advising that the document had originally been presented to the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee in June 2013 where there had been a number of comments made regarding the relevance of some of the comparative data and other references being out of date. A subsequent re-write of the Review had been undertaken to ensure it was current and relevant to the issues faced in the city. The draft Strategy had also been revised to incorporate an overview of the work of the whole of the Strategic Housing Team.

Further key points were highlighted by Councillor Hiller including the re-submission and subsequent approval of the report by the Strong and Supportive Scrutiny Committee; the Strategy taking the form of an action plan, which was to be reviewed on a quarterly basis; the four strategic aims contained within the action plan; the new Housing Allocations Policy which had been adopted two years ago and the resulting changes for applicants; the number of apparent live applications which had been on the housing register in January 2013, being in the region of 10,000, there now being only 3,000; the

number of times that the service had been contacted during 2013/14, this being in the region of 25,000 times; the numbers of individuals who had gone on to have face to face interviews, this being around 5,500; from April 2013 to March 2014 nearly 1,000 new applications had been registered 1,200 properties had been allocated through the Choice Based Letting Scheme; the Council having a statutory responsibility for genuinely homeless people and the dramatic reduction in the numbers of homelessness applications in the city; the continued support offered to rough sleepers and the improved situation in this arena with the numbers of known rough sleepers having reduced by 85% in the last five years and the good work undertaken by not just the Council, but also the One Service resettlement staff at the prison.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised, along with responses to questions provided by Councillor Hiller and the Council's Housing Needs Manager, included:

- Councillor Seaton positively commended the work of the service, particularly in relation to the work undertaken to reduce homelessness;
- Concern was expressed that individuals were being made homeless due to rent increases by landlords and subsequently being advised by the Council's Housing Needs Team that they were deliberately making themselves homeless due to incurring rent arrears. It was confirmed that each case was addressed on its own merits, and the changes which had been made to the Allocations Policy had made changes to the entry criteria with regards to evictions. Exploration had to be undertaken as to why particular individuals were in arrears and whether they had control over that situation or not. Members were requested to contact the Council's Housing Needs Manager directly if there were any particular cases of concern within their wards;
- A holistic approach was being taken to the situation and the Council supported the work of Partners, including private landlords and the construction of houses by the Housing Associations; and
- There had been a significant improvement made in relation to the empty homes situation over the last three years and this could be attributed to the work of the Empty Homes Officer, utilising the valued resource in the city through effective working with landlords and bringing properties up to standard.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED**:

1. To note and comment on the activity of the Housing Needs Service over the last year;
2. To comment on the Homelessness Review; and
3. To agree on the broad strategic aims of the Homelessness Strategy and to recommend that the Strategy be adopted by Council.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The Homelessness review and Strategy had been written to meet the requirements of Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

To not conduct the homelessness review and formulate a strategy. Section 1(4) required housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within the period of five years beginning with the day on, which their last homelessness strategy was published.

5. PETERBOROUGH CITY CENTRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (VERSION FOR ADOPTION)

Cabinet received a report which followed the decision of Council on 4 December 2013 to approve the Peterborough City Centre Development Plan Document (DPD) (Proposed Submission Version) for the purpose of public consultation and submission to the Secretary of State. Such consultation had taken place and the document had been submitted on 1 April 2014. Subsequently an independent Planning Inspector, appointed by the Secretary of State, had carried out a public examination into the document.

The report set out the recommendations made by Independent Inspector and sought Cabinet's approval to recommend the City Centre Plan to Council for adoption.

Councillor Hiller introduced the item and provided an overview of the background to the issue, advising that the Plan had been found to be sound by the Planning Inspector, subject to minor changes as detailed with the report to Cabinet. This meant that the Council could now formally adopt the document and if the document was approved, it would become part of the Council's Statutory Plan and would be used in determining planning applications in the heart of the authority's area. The adoption of the Plan would mean that the city had a full and up to date Local Plan, very few councils were in such a position. The Council would also have a clear plan and cohesive vision for delivering future growth in the city centre, this would help to strengthen the city centre as an attractive investment opportunity.

Councillor Holdich wished it to be noted that schools had played a large part in the development of the Plan, and over the years, engagement with young people had been sought with varying levels of success. This year, led by Jack Hunt School, the School's Council had visited the Council for a day and engaged had also taken the issues back to their Annual School's Council, for all schools, for further discussion. This was highlighted as being a successful formula which could be taken forward in order to engage young people in the future of the city.

The Chairman commended the work of officers and thanked all those involved. The document set out clear ambitions for the city centre and would enable delivery.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the conclusions of the Independent Inspector who was appointed to examine the Council's submitted Peterborough City Centre Development Plan document; and
2. To recommend to Council the adoption of the Peterborough City Centre Development Plan Document, incorporating modifications as recommended by the Inspector (Main Modifications) and other minor editorial modifications (Additional Modifications).

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Council only had two options available to it; either adopt the document with the modifications or not adopt the document. The former was recommended, as it was a statutory duty to prepare a City Centre DPD, and, in adopting it, Peterborough would have a clear and robust policy document setting out its vision, objectives and for the city centre.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The option of not adopting the DPD was not recommended, because in doing so the Council:

- Would not have sufficient sites available to deliver the planned growth of the city set out in the adopted Core Strategy; and
- Reduce potential investment in Peterborough, including fewer new jobs and homes.

6. REVIEWING PETERBOROUGH LIBRARY SERVICES AND COMMUNITY CENTRES

Cabinet received a report which requested it to review and approve the results from the public consultation on the use of libraries and community centres and to consider how the responses informed the Council's spending plans for 2015-2016. The report further sought Cabinet's approval for the approach outlined to supporting community centres in the future in order to secure a sustainable network of effective and efficient centres through a new model for community centres.

Councillor Serluca introduced the item and advised that a fact finding consultation had been undertaken over an eight week period and over 5,000 responses had been received. The top three findings for libraries, each achieving over 50% were 'the books on the shelves'; 'the location' and 'the access to information'. People had also stated that they would use their libraries more if they could be used outside normal hours. These principles would be utilised in formulating new models for delivering the libraries, with recommendations due to be presented back to Cabinet on 19 January 2014.

It was further advised that community centres had not presented a strong message but the responses had shown the strong social value that many community centres had, with a wide range of activities. Findings included 'most people used their centres at least once a week'; 'the highest usage was for health and wellbeing, slimming and fitness'; 'the centres were used mostly by people who were over the age of 65'; and 'most people did not travel more than a mile to their community centres'. Cabinet was requested to review and agree the new module for centres and task the Communities Directorate with carrying out the recommendation. It was proposed to undertake a comprehensive survey of all the community centres in order to understand their current state and further maintenance needs. This information would be paired with ward profiles and current community needs. The timeline for community centres was set to run from November 2014 to March 2016. Thanks were extended to the lead officers for all the work undertaken.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised, along with responses to questions provided by the Council's Culture and Leisure Partnership Manager, included:

- The mobile library was a valued asset, particularly in the rural areas and it was confirmed that this service had not formed part of the review;
- There were no planned changes for the mobile library service due to its importance for those individuals who could not access libraries in buildings and also those individuals who were housebound;
- A number of libraries were utilised by school children as well as by the general public and consultation had been undertaken with those schools having a library building attached to them. Their recommendations had been taken on board and all the schools had offered their support in relation to the library service going forward;
- There were 52 community centres in Peterborough, 33 of which were supported by the Council. All centres had been mapped against ward profiles and the need for the different wards, this provided a sound overview of the centres not supported by the Council and how they were providing services for the people of Peterborough;
- There had been a good understanding gained of occupancy levels and how people were using their community centres and what activities were held at the centres;

- The next piece of work would be to ascertain whether any of the community centres could support themselves by offering assistance through the Communities Team and helping them to build their skills and capacity in order to help them to become self-sufficient;
- A programme had been recently launched through the Literacy Trust to encourage young people to read, literacy being a key aspect of education. More community centres could offer the facility of informal book lending;
- Could schools or centres utilised frequently by numbers of people provide a static library facility instead of the mobile provision?
- Utilities and insurance payments appeared inconstant across community centres, this may be a historical issue dependent on past agreements signed when the community centres were set up;
- Some of the community centres could operate independently and an exercise to map occupancy in the centres should be undertaken;
- The data from the 20,000 library card holders had been obtained, including a breakdown of the different ethnic groups and how they used their cards, the internal library data would be utilised to inform the new models for future delivery real time as well as consultation data;
- More dual use was required and the most successful libraries were linked to schools; and
- There was a system up and running for an electronic library; audio books were downloadable and eBooks were also downloadable, further promotion around this service needed to be undertaken. The Chairman advised that this information should be included on the Council's website.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED:**

1. To review and approve the results from the public consultation on the use of libraries and community centres and to consider how the responses informed the Council's spending plans for 2015-16; and
2. To approve the proposed approach to supporting community centres in the future, to secure a sustainable network of effective and efficient centres through a new model for community centres.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To review and approve the results from the public consultation on the use of libraries and community centres and to consider how the responses inform the Council's spending plans for 2015 – 2016.

To approve the proposed approach to supporting community centres in the future, to secure a sustainable network of effective and efficient centres through a new model for community centres.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

A 'do nothing' approach had been considered but discounted on the grounds that the consultation undertaken suggested there was a strong case to bring greater coherence to the Council's approach in delivering library and community centre services in the future.

7. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2015/16 TO 2014/25

Cabinet received a report as part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework that required it to initiate and propose budget proposals to set a balanced budget for the forthcoming financial year.

The purpose of the report was for Cabinet to approve the first phase of budget proposals for consultation to contribute towards closing the budget gap of £25m. Subject to Scrutiny feedback and comments from all residents, partner organisations, businesses and other interested parties, Cabinet would recommend budget proposals to Council in December 2014 to implement at the earliest opportunity; to approve and outline the approach for the remaining budget process; and to outline the financial challenge the council faces in the current financial year and in setting a balanced budget for 2015/16.

Councillor Seaton introduced the item and advised that the Council was committed to ensuring a bright future for the city and all its people and that would mean maintaining focus on education, jobs creation, economic prosperity and the quality of life for residents.

Further key points highlighted by Councillor Seaton included the substantial amount lost in grant funding equating to £44m; the government grant reductions of £12.3m in 2015/16, and the additional financial pressures faced as a result of an increasing demand for services and legal changes; the total of £25m of savings and efficiencies which needed to be found in order to balance the books, whilst also allowing the Council to continue to invest in the city for future generations; an overview of why the gap had increased by £3m from the report presented to Cabinet in September 2014; the close work being undertaken with officers and the cross party working budget group; the budget proposals being shared as early as possible and the proposals being released in two phases to achieve this; the first set of budget proposals looking to save £16.8m and the second set, to close the remaining £8m gap to be published in the new year; the budget conversation that was on the website and which had featured in local media; the conversation being kept open until 11 December and all feedback to be considered at Cabinet on December 15, with recommendations to Council on 17 December; the early responses received and the value put on services such as meals on wheels, flytipping, graffiti, work around ASB, domestic abuse, drink, drugs and mental health, street cleansing, parks and open spaces.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised, along with responses to questions provided by Councillor Seaton included:

- The Cabinet had spent many days looking into the budget proposals and there had been a number of all party budget meetings held;
- A number of false facts had appeared in the press. It was misleading to say that the opposition groups had made suggestions that had subsequently been ignored;
- Suggestions that were not practical, or implementable, could not be considered;
- The public's views were taken seriously, as had been demonstrated by the library consultation, and the public were requested to take part in the consultation in order to inform the decisions made; and
- There had been a number of good suggestions from other groups however there was a level of prioritisation which needed to be implemented to ensure the protection of front line services.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the context for the amended budget process in light of the unprecedented financial challenge the Council faced in setting a balanced budget for 2015/16;
2. To take a two phased approach to consultation on formulation of the 2015/16 Budget, publishing the Phase 1 proposals immediately as the basis to seek feedback from Scrutiny and views from all residents, partner organisations, businesses and other interested parties; and

3. To convene on 15 December 2014 to consider feedback in order to seek the endorsement of the Council meeting of 17 December 2014 to the Cabinet's approach to consultation, savings proposals and plan to implement those proposals at the earliest opportunity.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The Council must set a lawful and balanced budget. The approach outlined within the report worked towards setting a lawful and balanced budget.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Cabinet considered releasing all budget proposals in the New Year after the provisional finance settlement announcement as Cabinet had done so over previous financial years. The cross party Budget Working Group expressed a desire to release budget proposals earlier than in previous years. Cabinet considered the cross party Budget Working Group's view and recognised that as work was continuing to identify and propose further budget proposals, and given the unprecedented scale of the savings to find, Cabinet agreed to publish their budget proposals in two stages.

MONITORING ITEMS

8. OUTCOME OF PETITIONS

Cabinet received a report which updated Cabinet on the progress being made in response to petitions submitted to Full Council on 8 October 2014.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED:**

To note the action taken in respect of petitions presented to Full Council.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Standing Orders required that Council received a report about the action taken on petitions. As the petitions presented in the report had been dealt with by Cabinet Members or officers, it was appropriate that the action taken was reported to Cabinet, prior to it being included within the Executive's report to full Council.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Any alternative options would require an amendment to the Council's Constitution to remove the requirement to report to Cabinet.

Chairman
9.30am - 10.22am

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