

MINUTES OF CABINET MEETING HELD 25 NOVEMBER 2015

PRESENT:

Cabinet Members: Councillor Holdich (Chair), Councillor Coles, Councillor Elsey, Councillor Hiller, Councillor North, Councillor Seaton and Councillor Serluca.

Cabinet Advisors: Councillor Casey.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fitzgerald, Councillor Lamb and Councillor Maqbool.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2015 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. PETITIONS PRESENTED TO CABINET

There were no petitions presented to Cabinet.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS

5. RURAL VISION AND PARISH CHARTER

Cabinet received a report which followed a recommendation from a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities held on 7 September 2015. The purpose of the report was for Cabinet to consider approval of a Rural Vision and Parish Charter for all rural villages and all rural and urban Parish Councils in Peterborough.

The Cabinet Member for Growth, Planning, Housing and Economic Development introduced the report highlighting the main issues contained within. The Rural Vision and Parish Charter was comprehensive, easy to understand and it aimed to provide a framework for achieving sustainable and viable rural communities. It outlined how the Council would work in partnership with Parish Councils in order to deliver services effectively. The document had been subject to a 12 week consultation and Parish Councils had been involved in all aspects of its development.

The Council's Head of Housing and Health Improvement added further points of clarification.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised and responses to questions included:

- The Charter would be a living document and an action plan would be developed in conjunction with the Parish Council Liaison Forum, this would be reviewed annually in order to progress work forward;
- Other Councils with charters already in place had seen improvement in the relationships between the Parish Councils and themselves;
- It was envisaged that going forward, Parish Councils would play a larger role in service delivery;
- At the recent Parish Conference, there had been workshops held which focussed on issues such as budgeting, in order to develop knowledge and skills. Ongoing support would be provided to ensure Parishes felt supported in developing services in a confident manner; and
- Parish Councils could be called Community Councils. There were 38 rural community councils operating across the country. The one for Peterborough was Cambridgeshire Acre which supported parish councils in a wide range of areas.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to approve the Rural Vision and Parish Charter for adoption and implementation across the council services.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Demand for services was increasing and the way in which those services were delivered needed to change. Historically, councils (and other public sector services) had delivered a universal service to all of their residents. Whilst this approach was effective to meet some residents' needs, it could be expensive, inefficient and lack the flexibility to respond to the different requirements that diverse communities faced. If the Council was to meet the present and future needs of the city, then it must explore ways of doing things differently.

The Council had always worked with communities to understand their needs and jointly develop solutions. In many cases, individuals and communities played a vital role in helping to deliver local services.

The Council acknowledged the important role that parish councils played as the first tier of local government. It was further recognised that parish councils could be very effective by influencing and shaping the decisions that affected their communities as well as being a vehicle for devolving certain services and of revitalising local communities

The Vision and Charter were a reflection of the Council's commitment to strengthening the relationship with parish councils and the local communities they served.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

To do nothing, this was not an option if the Council wished to effectively strengthen the capacity and resilience within communities.

6. FUTURE OF WIND AND SOLAR PROJECTS – AMERICA FARM

Cabinet received a report which followed an internal review by officers and consideration by the Cabinet Member. The purpose of the report was for Cabinet to consider the cessation of the ground mounted solar PV project at America Farm and the withdrawal of the related planning application.

Cabinet had received a report on 23 February 2015 to consider the way forward in respect of the two wind and three ground mounted solar PV projects, namely Farms of Newborough (wind and solar), Morris Fen (wind and solar) and America Farm (solar only).

The report to Cabinet on 23 February advised members of potential issues relating to grid connections in the America Farm area. However this was now no longer relevant as the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) confirmed in August 2015 that the level of feed in tariff (FiTs) payments would significantly decrease over time, with the next reduction coming into force on the 1 January 2016, with a likely reduction of circa 80% of the tariff. DECC had also announced further reviews of the FiT and was likely to recommend further reductions in the rate over time. The reductions in FIT made the America Farm solar business model completely unviable.

The Cabinet Member for Digital, Waste and Street Scene introduced the report highlighting the main issues contained within.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to approve the cessation of the solar project at America Farm and that the planning application in respect of America Farm be withdrawn.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

That the America Farm solar scheme be ceased due to financial considerations as a result of lack of grid capacity and changes to government subsidies on FIT.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The announcement from DECC made alternative solar schemes similar to America Farm financially unviable at the present time.

7. SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN 2015-2020

Cabinet received a report the purpose of which was to update it on proposals to meet the statutory requirement for school places in Peterborough. The School Organisation Plan drew together the latest demographic data and the capital programme to identify the need for further school places. It also acted as a supplementary planning document to the Core Strategy document.

The Chairman introduced the report highlighting the main points contained within. The Chairman further wished for it to be noted that the Council's Assets and School Place Planning Officer was due to retire in December and thanks were expressed to her for her commitment to the role and all of the work she had undertaken.

The Council's Head of School Infrastructure and the Assets and School Place Planning Officer talked to the report and added further points of clarification, particularly relating to the challenges faced by the Council in allocating school places and the rationale behind the figures detailed within the report.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised and responses to questions included:

- There were 1500 out of catchment children in the city's schools and it was advised that when the unitary authority had been established, there had been an agreement made between Cambridgeshire that Yaxley, Facet and Elton would be remain within the Peterborough catchment area, as those villages had always sent their secondary children to Peterborough;
- The admission legislation did not distinguish by local authority area, once the catchment pupils had been accommodated, admission was done on the basis of distance. Transport costs were not picked up for out of catchment children;
- The costings for the schools over the forthcoming five years were outlined; and
- It was likely that the number of school places available would be exceeded by 2019.

The Chairman thanked the schools allocation team for the work they undertook in delivering the school places.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To ensure appropriate action was being undertaken to deliver the statutory requirement for school places.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The alternative option was not to adopt the strategy, however the impact of this would be a lack of co-ordination around new housing development and a lack of clarity for the public around the council's intentions around school place planning.

8. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016/17 TO 2025/26

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

The purpose of the report was to recommend that Cabinet approve the first phase of budget proposals for consultation to contribute towards closing the budget gap of £19.6m. Subject to Scrutiny feedback and comments from residents, partner organisations, businesses and other interested parties, Cabinet would recommend budget proposals to Council in December 2015 to implement at the earliest opportunity. The report further outlined the approach for the remaining budget process and the financial challenge the Council faced in setting a balanced budget for 2016/17.

Cabinet, at its meeting of 21 September 2015, considered a report, 'Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2025/26', and within this report considered the budget process timelines for setting a balanced budget for 2015/16 and options for allowing the maximum possible consultation period with the public.

On 14 October 2015, Council agreed to continue a two-phased approach to the consultation process. This would ensure that all residents, partner organisations, businesses and other interested parties understood the scale of the financial challenge and had the opportunity to feed back their views, commencing with the first tranche of budget proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Resources introduced the report highlighting the main issues contained within. The report provided an overview of the financial picture for the forthcoming year and beyond and the initial proposals for tackling the challenges faced, including a £10m reduction in government grant in 2016/17 and an additional £10m of pressures faced as a result of an increase in demand on services. The Council needed to move towards becoming more self-sufficient whilst also avoiding any reduction in services for residents. The consultation would be open until 15 December 2015 and resident's views were welcomed.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised and responses to questions included:

- The innovative ways in which ICT was being delivered across the Council was an example of how forward thinking the Council was and other organisations were looking to follow the Council's lead; and
- It was clarified that the Council could only borrow to fund assets on a certain term, funds could not be borrowed to fund day to day services. Future generations would therefore benefit from assets put in place by the Council.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to approve the Phase One Budget Proposals as the basis for consultation.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

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

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

No alternative option had been considered as the Cabinet was responsible under the Constitution for initiating Budget Proposals and the Council was statutorily obliged to set a lawful and balanced budget by 11 March annually.

9. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME CONSULTATION 2016/17

Cabinet received a report the purpose of which was to commence consultation for a localised council tax support scheme for the financial year 2016/17. There was a statutory requirement for the Council to set a localised council tax support scheme by 31 January 2016 and this formed part of the formal budget process under the Budget and Policy Framework.

The Cabinet Member for Resources introduced the report highlighting the main issues contained within. There were no changes proposed to the 30% existing scheme reduction, but there had been some technical changes implemented in order to align the scheme to housing benefit rules. This meant that the scheme reduction had stayed the same for the fourth consecutive year. It was further advised that in March 2014, the Council had signed up to the Citizen Advice Bureau's good practice protocol relating to Council Tax collection and the Council was now also looking to introduce a discretionary policy for those experiencing hardship.

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

1. Approve consultation on Peterborough's council tax support scheme 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017 that contained the following local components:
 - a) No change to the existing scheme reduction of 30% for all eligible working age claimants;
 - b) Align the council tax support scheme to Housing Benefit rules making it less complicated for claimants, namely to:
 - i. Limit backdating of council tax support to one month; and
 - ii. Remove family premiums from all new claimants, or existing claimants who would otherwise have had a new entitlement to the premium, with effect from 1 May 2016.
2. Approve consultation on introducing a council tax discretionary hardship policy with effect from 1 April 2016.
3. Note the possible impact on government tax credit changes on Peterborough's council tax support scheme from 1 April 2016.
4. Note further changes that will need to be considered for Peterborough's council tax support scheme from April 2017.

MONITORING ITEMS

10. OUTCOME OF PETITIONS

Cabinet received a report following the presentation of petitions to Full Council on 14 October 2015.

The purpose of the report was to update Cabinet on the progress being made in response to the petitions, these being:

- i) Petition relating to the closure of the footpath between Benyon Grove and Sellers Grange; and
- ii) Petition relating to saving Peterborough's libraries.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED:**

To note the actions taken in respect of the petition presented to Council.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

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

There were no alternative options considered.

Chairman
9.00am – 9.47am