

MINUTES of the meeting of Cabinet held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday 15 November 2012 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor JG Jarvis (Chairman)

Councillors: RB Hamilton, AW Johnson, PM Morgan, RJ Phillips, GJ Powell and PD Price

In attendance: Councillors AM Atkinson, NP Nenadich, P Rone, EPJ Harvey, MAF Hubbard, RI Matthews and A Seldon

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Major Contracts.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

46. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meetings held on 18 and 31 October 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47. INTEGRATED CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services presented the report of the Assistant Director People, Policy and Partnerships and made the following points to Cabinet:

- Agreed changes to corporate performance arrangements were approved by Cabinet in July of this year.
- Appendix A to the report provides an overview and refers to progress being made on projects that were agreed to be done in order to achieve the six high level themes in the Joint Corporate Plan.
- Also included is performance against key indicators for operational areas of the Council – customers, employees, finance and directorate service areas. Appendices B to F of the report cover the areas in more detail.
- Satisfaction with the Council through the quality of life survey has increased from 33 to 55%.
- Good progress has been made on the accommodation strategy, which includes the civic hub and Plough Lane refurbishment.
- There has been an unqualified opinion by the auditors on the Council's accounts.
- There has been some difficulty in recruiting commercial and procurement staff. A range of other resourcing options are being used to ensure that the important complex projects do not slip.

- Customer services performance has dipped due to an increased number of calls and staffing absenteeism. Overall this is against an improving picture, which includes avoidable contact being kept at a low 17%.

Cabinet made the following comments:

- It was noted that incidents of domestic violence was still higher than the set target and represented 19.4% of all domestic crime. This was a serious issue particularly for the children involved and how it affected them. Agencies would continue to address the issues and work together.
- Across both directorates there was interest in getting people on bicycles and walking and consultation on the transport plan concluded on 15 November.
- With regard to GCSE results schools had not performed as well as expected, although this was a national issue. Schools would be appealing against exam results as would schools across the country.
- In referring to empty homes, which was raised at the last Council meeting. The Cabinet Member stated the Council had a good record for bringing empty homes back into use. In addition referring to the number of families in temporary accommodation, it was added that officers were working hard to rectify the situation.
- The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing stated that under safeguarding of older people, the delayed discharge of older patients from hospital was low.
- In health and wellbeing it was noted that the take up of personal budgets by those qualifying was now at 50%, which was an increase on the previous year. Being responsible for your own budget allowed people to decide themselves how they used their funding.
- In referring to the recent Ofsted inspection the Cabinet Member stated there would be a report to cabinet as soon as feed back had been received. It was noted that the new chair of the Children's Trust had been appointed.
- In referring to page 21 of the report, delivery plan project exceptions, the Leader stated he did not believe it had been written clearly and advised that the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) referred to could be done under regeneration powers. It was hoped that it could be progressed with the use of a CPO.
- A question was raised on the number of staff with less than 1 years service in the People's Services directorate. The director confirmed the number of posts were reducing, but there was also a recruitment campaign in social care as the authority was not always able to retrain and retain staff. Recruitment retention in social care was difficult not only in Hereford but in the whole of the West Midlands and authorities were competing with one another to retain social workers.
- It was noted that the number of fixed term staff in the authority had gone down in number significantly and the number of permanent staff had not decreased that much. In response to a question on staffing costs it was stated that agency staff did not always cost more.
- Reference was made to the number of vacant shops in high town and how the new retail development would affect this.
- Under corporate service it was noted that there would be a reprioritisation of work plans.
- The Leader thanked everyone for their comments and the points made on language and style were noted.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted performance for the period to end of September 2012.

48. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME AND COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services presented the report of the Chief Officer Finance and Commercial and made the following points:

- The report sought agreement for a Council Tax Support Scheme in the light of the requirements set by the Government and the outcome of local consultation and to determine the level of Council Tax Discount for vacant properties and second homes.
- The Council must provide for a local tax support scheme or it would revert to a default scheme which would cost in excess of the money the authority would now receive in grant funding.
- Cabinet was informed that the government announced a transitional grant scheme after the authority had consulted on its proposals. The authority has opted to take the grant, which means that only two principles consulted on would be used.
- It is proposed to have a scheme for one year and to review the position during that year and to assess whether the grant would continue.
- In order to meet the £1.4m funding reduction it is proposed to use changes to council tax discounts to mitigate the loss of funding from central government. As a result the report also includes proposed changes to discretionary discounts.
- The government has prescribed a number of elements that must be included in the scheme including full protection for pensioners so that their council tax support remains at the same level as their current council tax benefit. This means that additional pressure falls on claimants of working age. It is also expected that the scheme would protect vulnerable claimants and provide incentives for work.
- The council consulted on proposed changes from 30 August to 26 October, this included consultation with the Police and Fire and Rescue Authorities, which showed broad agreement for all except two of the factors.

The following comments were made in discussion:

- It was noted that the response rate to the consultation was disappointing.
- In response to a question it was noted that around 15,000 claimants were of working age.
- It was noted that claims could now be made for second homes.
- It was noted that in order to receive the grant all tax payers were now expected to pay something in the way of council tax.
- In response to a question on the increased number of potential defaults with the new requirements, the Chief Officer Finance and Commercial stated there was currently 5,000 people who did not pay council tax. It was added that the collection rates were likely to reduce, currently the authority has a good collection rate.
- The Leader emphasised this was a one year grant scheme only
- In response to a question Cabinet was advised that 44% of respondents were recipients of council tax benefit.

RESOLVED

THAT:

- a) The Council Tax Transitional Grant be accepted;**
- b) Subject to the above, it be recommended to Council to adopt a new council Tax Support Scheme for 2013/14 based on the adoption of two of the principles that were consulted upon as indicated in paragraph 31 of the report, so that we meet the requirements of the grant; and**

- c) **The changes to Council Tax discounts outlined in the report be implemented from 1 April 2013.**

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm

CHAIRMAN