

CABINET

Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 19th October, 2017 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Cheryl Butler in the Chair;

Councillors Tim Brown, Don Davis,
Jackie James, Keir Morrison and
Nicolle Ndiweni.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Amanda Brown.

Officers Present: Craig Bonar, Ruth Dennis, Katherine Green,
Mike Joy, Sharon Lynch, Alan Maher and
Paul Parkinson.

In Attendance: Councillor Helen Hollis and Councillor
Paul Roberts.

CA.26 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Personal Interests and Non-Disclosable Pecuniary / Other Interests

No Declarations of Interest were received.

CA.27 Minutes

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 21 September 2017 were approved as a true record.

CA.28 Scrutiny Consideration of Homelessness - Interim Report

Members were reminded that Scrutiny Panel 'B' had carried out a review into homelessness. As part of this, the Panel had looked at the work of the Housing Options Team, which had been set up as a shared service with Mansfield District Council in 2015, to provide advice and assistance to those who were, or at risk, of becoming homeless.

The report to Cabinet set out the main findings and recommendations from the review. Cabinet discussed these with the Chair of the Panel, Cllr Helen Hollis. One of the key points to emerge from this discussion was that the Housing Options Team is working well and is playing an important role in preventing homelessness. This had helped to reduce significantly costs for both Councils.

Cabinet was told that homelessness in the District could increase as a result of changes to the benefits system, such as the introduction of Universal Credit; especially if these changes lead to people falling into rent arrears. The Council was seeking to meet this challenge by working in more flexible ways, such as offering support and advice outside of office hours. It was also working in partnership with the third sector, or voluntary organisations, to provide advice and support to those at risk.

The Panel welcomed moves to develop a more flexible Housing Options service and the focus on partnership working. In this context Members heard that one of the review's main recommendations was for new ways of working with late night establishments to be explored, so as to better help those who are homeless or in imminent danger of becoming homeless. Cabinet supported this.

Members were informed that the Panel's findings were still 'Interim' at this stage and that it intended to carry out further work on the likely impact of the new Homelessness Reduction Act on the Council. The Act had placed new duties on local authorities in England to prevent a broader range of homelessness than at present. It was explained that the impact of the Act on the Council was still being assessed.

Cabinet thanked Cllr Helen Hollis for her contribution. There was a consensus that the Panel had carried out an important review and had made valuable recommendations, which should be supported. Members felt it important that the right action is taken to prevent homelessness in the District from rising.

RESOLVED

- a) That Cabinet recognises the importance of developing effective initiatives to prevent homelessness in the District, in line with the new duties placed on the Council by the Homelessness Reduction Act, to facilitate early intervention with households and persons at risk of homelessness and to provide more advice, support and guidance in order to prevent homelessness, wherever possible;
- b) That Cabinet supports the recommendations of Scrutiny Panel 'B' that relationships with third sector (voluntary) organisations continue to be strengthened to facilitate the pooling of resources for tackling homelessness or the threat of homelessness within the District;
- c) That Cabinet agrees that all Members of the Council be provided with a copy of the 'How to contact the Housing Options Team' leaflet;
- d) That Cabinet authorises officers to investigate ways of working with late night establishments and community initiatives to raise awareness and facilitate the necessary signposting, should persons present themselves as homeless or are believed to be under threat of homelessness;
- e) That Cabinet endorses continued work with local services and communities to ensure that the new outreach service is as effective as possible;

- f) That Cabinet agrees that Members of Scrutiny Panel 'B' be kept informed of progress with the Homelessness Reduction Act so that the Panel can revisit the homelessness issue as part of its work programme.

Reasons

Homelessness was agreed as a Scrutiny Work Plan topic in 2016. The Homelessness Reduction Act achieved Royal Assent in April 2017, placing a number of additional requirements on the Council.

CA.29 Scrutiny Review of Pest Control

Members were reminded that Scrutiny Panel 'B' had undertaken a review of pest control in the District. The Panel wanted to find out if reports of street vermin had increased locally and how the Council's Pest Control Service had responded to this.

The report to Cabinet set out the main findings and recommendations from the review. Cabinet discussed these with the Chair of Scrutiny Panel 'B', Cllr Helen Hollis. She explained that as part of the review she had attended service calls with one of the Council's Pest Control Officers. The officer had been highly professional and provided an excellent service. This experience, she explained, mirrored the high levels of satisfaction which had been expressed by customers of the Pest Control Service. Cabinet welcomed this.

One of the key points to emerge from the discussion was that many things could be done to prevent pest infestations from occurring. In particular, the Panel had heard that waste takeaway food dropped in the street or rubbish left in gardens can attract vermin. The Panel thought that elected Members could play an important role, especially in explaining how people can avoid infestations and in promoting the Council's quality Pest Control Service to their residents when they do occur.

The Panel thought that more should be done to promote the Pest Control Service and highlighted some possible ways of doing this. These included adverts on rubbish bins and the greater use of social media. Cabinet supported these ideas and especially the greater use of social media.

The Panel felt that the Service, which is provided on a commercial basis to customers, could be offered outside of the District, particularly to those local authorities who no longer directly offer this service themselves. Cabinet agreed that this was a good idea, which should be explored further.

Cabinet thanked Cllr Helen Hollis for her contribution. It was generally felt that the Panel had carried out an important review and had made valuable recommendations, which should be supported.

RESOLVED

- a) That officers explore ways of promoting the Pest Control Service, via notice boards and advertising on refuse bins, to highlight the importance of pest control and the sensible disposal of waste;

- b) That Cabinet authorises the development of an Education Programme (within existing resources) to encourage schools, community groups and local residents to understand the importance of pest control issues;
- c) That Members of the Council be requested to be more focused on pest control issues within their wards;
- d) That officers explore ways of using social media as a communications channel to promote and advertise the Pest Control Service;
- e) That Cabinet agrees as part of the expansion of commercialisation to explore ways of enabling the Pest Control Service to be offered to neighbouring authorities who do not currently provide this service in-house.

Reasons

This topic was placed onto the Scrutiny Workplan to gain a more detailed understanding of the service provided by Pest Control, consideration of whether there is an increase in reporting of street vermin and whether there are any improvements that could be made.

CA.30 Strategic Direction: 2017-2022

The meeting was reminded that the Local Government Association (LGA) peer challenge review had recommended that the Council should set out a clear statement of how it sees itself and how it is likely to change in the coming years. Members had agreed to comply with this recommendation.

The report asked Cabinet to now do this by agreeing the proposed Strategic Direction for the Council over the next five years – from 2017 to 2022. The document would, it was explained, help to shape and deliver the Council's Corporate Plan, as well as its key financial, people, commercial, technology and transformational strategies.

Cabinet discussed the Strategic Direction. Members accepted that based on current forecasts of reduced funding from Central Government, the Council's budget would continue to fall. This meant that it would not be able to directly provide as many services to local people and communities or employ as many staff. Cabinet made it clear that it regretted this greatly.

Members recognised that the Council is working to offset budget reductions through more effective co-operation and joint working with its external partners and by a greater focus on generating additional income through commercial services. Cabinet felt that the Council was already seen as a good partner to do business with. Members hoped that closer relationships with partners could be developed further.

Cabinet welcomed the proposed Strategic Direction and agreed to endorse it.

RESOLVED

- a) That Cabinet adopts the Ashfield Strategic Direction: 2017-22;
- b) That the Director of Resources and Business Transformation be authorised to make minor formatting changes prior to the final production of this document.

Reasons

The Strategic Direction outlines the Council's principles and statements providing a vision and strategic vision and statement of how the Council will operate by 2022

CA.31 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to August 2017

Cabinet was next asked to consider a budget monitoring report for the financial year to August 2017. Members were told that the General Fund as a whole was underspent. The reasons for this were explained in the report. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) income was better than budget. The reasons for this were also explained in the report.

The report to Cabinet made it clear that several new projects have had to be included in the General Fund. These projects were funded by either reallocating existing budget or through earmarked reserve set up for this purpose. The report recommended that a further earmarked reserve be established, assembled by using savings identified in the report, to meet any further pressures.

In addition, Cabinet was asked to endorse a change to the Housing Revenue Account to meet the cost of employing sub-contractors to carry out repair and maintenance work. Members were told that sub-contractors were being used to carry out this work because the Council had been unable to recruit sufficient staff with the appropriate skills to do it in-house. The report recommended that £150k be moved from the underspent 'Employee Expenses' heading to the 'Supplies and Services' budget heading, to reflect this.

Cabinet supported the change as a sensible rationalisation of the budget, which did not involve additional funding, and agreed to recommend it to Council.

RESOLVED

- a) That Cabinet notes the budget monitoring position to August 2017;
- b) That Cabinet approves the movements from earmarked reserves to fund specific projects, as set out in Section 2.3 of the report;
- c) That Cabinet approves the virement required within the Housing Revenue Account and that this virement be recommended to Council in accordance with Financial Regulations.

Reasons

To report to those charged with governance the financial position to August 2017 and comply with the Council's Financial Regulations.

CA.32 Telephony Upgrade

Members learned that the Council's current telephony system would have to be replaced by a new, more up-to-date system in the near future. Cabinet was asked to authorise a procurement exercise for a replacement system.

Cabinet discussed the proposal. Members recognised that the system needed to be replaced for operational reasons. They also recognised that the change would provide opportunities to develop new, more agile, ways of working; for example by enabling end users to have a Council phone number while away from the Council offices.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet authorises the Director of Resources and Business Transformation to commence a procurement process and to appoint a supplier to provide an upgraded telephony system.

Reasons

The current contract for telephony support with Virgin Media has ended. A temporary contract has been taken out with a third party. An upgraded telephony system will promote agile working.

The meeting closed at 7.00 pm

Chair.