

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE

CABINET

HELD ON THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER, 2011 AT 5.45 P.M.

IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Adamson, G.	Leader of the Council
Toth, J.	Deputy Leader of the Council and Environment Portfolio Leader
Dixon, D.I	Corporate Improvement Portfolio Leader
Alcott, G.	Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader
Davis, Mrs. M.A.	Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Leader
Allen, F.W.C.	Housing Portfolio Leader
Todd, Mrs. D.M.	Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader

100. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs. C. Mitchell, Culture and Sport Portfolio Leader.

101. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No declarations were made in addition to, or restated in respect of, those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

102. Updates from Portfolio Leaders

Leader of the Council

Shared Services Working Group

The Leader advised that the Shared Services Working Group had met on two occasions to date and had a third meeting scheduled for the following day. His perception was that the group was working positively together.

Economic Development and Planning

Upgrading of Chase Line Rail Service

The Portfolio Leader reminded Members of the good news that had been received and reported earlier that week in respect of a Government commitment to future upgrading of the Chase Line.

Benchmarking Process in Preparation for Setting Planning Application Fees at an Individual Local Authority Level

The Portfolio Leader asked Members to note the hard work and commitment of Planning Services Officers and Members. The Council had participated in a benchmarking project over the Summer / Autumn organised jointly by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and the Chartered Institute of Public Sector Accountants (CIPFA) to identify the costs of dealing with planning applications in preparation for the Government's proposals to devolve fee setting to a local level.

Part of the project involved a postal customer satisfaction questionnaire survey of applicants / agents designed and analysed by PAS. Within the Council's benchmarking group of 16 Districts from across Staffordshire, other parts of the Midlands and North West, Cannock Chase scored the highest satisfaction levels in response to 5 out of the 6 questions at between 80 and 90%. The questions covered help with making a good application to achieve a successful outcome, responding well to questions, being kept informed of progress, enforcing policy fairly, helping with the whole process from start to finish and overall satisfaction/value for money.

The Chief Executive also advised that, unfortunately, indications were subsequently being received that the Treasury was concerned that devolution of the planning fee process might hinder development, and the Treasury might, therefore, attempt to block progress.

Housing

Homelessness

The Portfolio Leader advised that Councils in Staffordshire had been awarded a total of £60,000 by the Department for Communities and Local Government to provide homelessness prevention information in schools. The money had been divided equally between nine authorities and Cannock Chase had received £6,666. The money would be used to facilitate a schools homelessness prevention project either by linking with existing staff who already have links with local schools or, alternatively, working with a partner agency who would receive funding to facilitate the project on the Council's behalf.

The Government considered it to be good practice to make young people aware of homelessness issues from both a national and local perspective, and to provide accurate realistic information on the housing options available to young people generally and, more importantly, the steps they could take to avoid finding themselves in such a situation in the future. Work on the project would begin in the new year.

103. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed.

104. Forward Plan

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan of Decisions for the period December, 2011 – February, 2012 (Enclosure 5.1 – 5.2 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Plan of Decisions for the period December, 2011 – February, 2012 be noted.

105. Minutes of Policy Development Committees and Other Committees

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the following Policy Development Committees and other Committees be received for information:

- (i) Health and Wellbeing– 24 October, 2011
- (ii) Town Centre Regeneration – 1 November, 2011
- (iii) Culture and Sport – 4 November, 2011
- (iv) Pay Adjustment and Staff Structure Review Cabinet Committee – 31 October, 2011

106. Extension to Fenced Grazing Area on Hednesford Hills Common

Consideration was given to the Report of Head of Environmental Services (Enclosure 7.1 – 7.8, of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That the proposals outlined in section 5 of the report be noted and endorsed.

Reason(s) for the Decision

The proposed additional grazing area would allow appropriate management of the heathland in accordance with the approved management regime encompassed within the HLSA with NE. The grazing management would assist the Council in meeting its legal duty to manage the SSSI in an effective and appropriate manner. Grazing was the most beneficial and effective way of managing the heathland whilst improving the ecological diversity of the site.

The proposal was the most cost effective way of managing the land especially given that the cost of the fencing works is funded via the HLSA and that annual payments are then made for grazing the land. Inclusion of gates and stiles would maintain access to the land and unrestricted access will be maintained within the fenced paddocks.

Confirmation of support from the Council for the proposed fencing application would add weight to the fencing application.

107. Community Infrastructure Levy Detailed Proposals and Draft Regulations for Reform - Consultation

Consideration was given to the Report of Head of Planning and Regeneration (Enclosure 8.1 – 8.10 of the Official minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That the responses to the Community Infrastructure Levy consultation set out in section 4 of the report be agreed and that the Head of Planning and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Leader for Economic Development and Planning, be authorised to respond to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Reason(s) for the Decision

The Government had set out proposed reforms to the Community Infrastructure Levy and was consulting on proposals to implement neighbourhood funds and allow receipts to be used to provide affordable housing.

The broad direction of proposed changes was considered helpful in allowing greater local flexibility for determining provision of essential infrastructure and, subject to the comments detailed in section 4 of the report, the proposed changes could be supported.

108. Staffordshire Local Transport Plan, 2011-2026, Draft Cannock Chase District Integrated Transport Strategy, November, 2011

Consideration was given to the Report of Head of Planning and Regeneration (Enclosure 9.1 – 9.10 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) Staffordshire County Council be informed that Cannock Chase Council welcomes the preparation of an Integrated Transport Strategy for the District and the opportunity to work with the County Council to agree a transport investment plan.
- (B) Staffordshire County Council be advised of the District Council's detailed comments in section 4.1 - 4.15 of the report and in particular the local priority given to:-
 - (i) securing early investment in the Chase Line improvements;
 - (ii) assessing the case for the Winchester Road Extension;
 - (iii) improving public transport provision to employment areas and training opportunities;
 - (v) ensuring good access to quality public transport services for the district's residential areas.
- (C) Staffordshire County Council be requested to present their draft proposals for the Cannock Chase Integrated Transport Strategy to the District's relevant Policy Development Committee.

Reason(s) for the Decision

The Council was being given the opportunity to put forward its views on the draft Cannock Chase District Integrated Transport Strategy 2011-2026, that would guide investment in Local Transport policy affects all aspects of the community, in terms of travelling to work, leisure, shopping, leisure, education, access to health services and recreation. As well as being important for the economy, it also had an important impact on climate change considerations. It

was important that the Council is proactive on transport issues.

109. Cannock Chase Local Development Framework Design Supplementary Planning Document: Informal Consultation on characterization Study of District

Consideration was given to the Report of Head of Planning and Regeneration (Enclosure 10.1 – 10.7 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The 'Summary of Consultation' be adopted as an appropriate account of the consultation process undertaken for the pre-draft stage of the Design SPD.
- (B) The amended Characterisation Study 2011 be adopted as part of the Core Strategy Evidence Base and used to inform the preparation of the draft Design SPD.
- (C) The suggestions of buildings and structures to include on a 'Local List' received during consultation be added to previous suggestions and that support be given to preparation of a draft 'Local List'.
- (D) The draft Design SPD and draft Local List be presented to a future Cabinet meeting to seek approval for public consultation.

Reason(s) for the Decision

The Council had carried out an informal pre-draft consultation on a Characterisation Study of the District upon which useful responses had been received allowing refinement of the work and a valuable contribution to the Core Strategy Evidence Base. The refined Study would be used to inform preparation of the Design SPD and the suggestions of Local List buildings and structures would be added to existing suggestions to assist preparation of a draft Local List for the District..

110. QR Codes in Communications Activity

Consideration was given to the Report of Head of Policy (Enclosure 11.1 – 11.5 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The introduction of QR codes within corporate publications, literature and material be approved for a trial period of six months commencing January 2012.
- (B) During the 6 month trial, resultant access to the Council's website be monitored and evaluated.
- (C) A report on the outcome of the trial and if successful, potential options for usage in service delivery be provided to Cabinet in August 2012.

Reason(s) for the Decision

The six month trial would provide a cost effective means of establishing the actual usage of smartphones and QR codes in accessing Council information. The outcome of the trial would be indicative of the whether providing QR codes as an alternative means for residents, stakeholders, businesses and visitors would be likely to be successful.

111. Self Financing – Draft Determinations

Consideration was given to the Joint Report of Head of Housing and Head of Financial Management (Enclosure 12.1 – 12.9 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The Council's following draft self-financing determinations be noted:
 - (i) Settlement payment - £59.762 million.
 - (ii) Limit on Indebtedness (borrowing cap) - £85.546 million
- (B) If required the Head of Financial Management be authorised to request the External Auditor to submit proposed amendments in respect of the draft settlement payment and borrowing cap to the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- (C) The Head of Financial Management, following consultation with the Housing Portfolio Leader be authorised to submit the Council's response to the Department for Communities and Local Government in relation to the following draft determinations:
 - (i) 2011-12 HRA Subsidy Amendment.
 - (ii) The 2011-12 Item 8 Credit and Debt Amendment.
 - (iii) The Item 8 Credit and Debt Amendment for April 2012 onwards.
- (D) Cabinet receive further reports on:
 - (i) The Government's revised Housing Strategy for England.
 - (ii) The forthcoming Government consultation paper on changes to the Right to Buy.
- (E) A draft Housing Revenue Account Business Plan is formulated for consideration by Cabinet on 19 January 2012.

Reason(s) for the Decision

The Government had issued for consultation five draft determinations which are required to implement self-financing.

The draft determinations included the Council's draft settlement payment (£59.762 million and

draft HRA borrowing cap (£85.546 million). Consultation on these was restricted to the accuracy of the calculations, and an initial verification exercise suggests they were correct. However, further work was being undertaken and it was proposed that the Head of Financial Management be authorised to request the External Auditor to submit any proposed amendments to the DCLG.

The remaining three draft determinations were “technical in nature” and primarily related to accounting practice. It was therefore proposed that the Head of Financial Management following consultation with the Housing Portfolio leader be authorised to submit any comments to the DCLG.

It was originally programmed to submit a draft HRA Business Plan to Cabinet on 15 December 2011. This work had however, been delayed by the Government’s delay in issuing the draft determinations in order that they could be accompanied by a revised Housing Strategy for England.

This revised Housing Strategy would be the subject of a future report to the Housing Policy Development Committee and Cabinet, and stated the Government’s intention to “double” the current average discount for RTB sales. This action would increase the number of RTB sales and have a fundamental impact on HRA Business Plan projections.

There was further uncertainty regarding the use of the additional capital receipts from these additional RTB sales and matters would not be clarified until the Government issued the RTB consultation paper later this year.

The interest rate which would be applied to the new borrowing to meet the Council’s settlement payments was also uncertain but would be lower than the standard Public Works Loan Board variable interest rate. Whilst it would be necessary to prepare the draft HRA Business Plan in accordance with a range of interest rate scenarios, it was nevertheless considered that interest rate forecasts may become clearer in the New Year.

Consideration of a draft HRA Business Plan had therefore been reprogrammed for consideration by Cabinet on 19 January 2012.

112. Draft General Fund Revenue Budget, 2011-12 to 2014-15

Consideration was given to the Report of Head of Financial Management (Enclosure 12A.1 – 12A.12, plus attachments), and the three year standstill budget for the Council.

RESOLVED (including Reasons for the Decision):

That:

- (A) The three year budget be accepted but noted that a high level of uncertainty existed in relation to forward projections for 2013-14 and 2014-15.

In particular the review of Local Government Finance and Localisation of Council Tax Support had not concluded yet; the details of further material reductions in Government Support in 2014-15 and its impact on District Councils would not be known until next year at the earliest; and combined with the ongoing impact of the recession and the introduction of Universal Credits requires a very cautious approach in setting a three

year budget.

- (B) In determining the Budget for 2012-13 Cabinet had considered the Government's offer to provide support to enable Council Tax to be maintained at its current level with no increase from 2011-12 to 2012-13.

The offer was substantially different from the 2011-12 Council Tax Freeze proposal whereby the impact in future years was protected by the Government by a Government Grant covering the period 2011-12 to 2014-15. The grant this year, however, was purely a one off and in order to mitigate the loss in future year the Council would have to increase future years Council Tax above its own forecasts or make service reductions.

- (C) Having given due consideration to the above and to minimise the impact on Cannock Chase Council, the Cabinet proposed that:

- (i) No cuts to services are made in 2012-13;
- (ii) Service enhancements were kept to a minimum;
- (iii) Council Tax be maintained at its current level for 2012-13.

Details of the limited service enhancements were attached as Annex A to the report, with Annex B highlighting service enhancements to be funded from the Council's capital resources.

- (D) In all other aspects the Report of the Head of Financial Management be noted and, following the outcome of the consultation exercise, further reports on the General Fund Revenue Budget and Reserves and Balances be presented to Cabinet at its meeting in February in order that the actual budget for 2012-13 could be determined.

Annex A

Financial Plan 2012-13 to 2014-15

Growth Options Subject to Consultation

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
Option	£	£	£
Local Enterprise Partnership - Support Officer	35,000	35,000	
Pest Control	24,000	24,000	24,000
Street Nameplates	7,000	7,000	7,000
Chase Advice Centre	10,000	10,000	10,000
Customer Insight	5,000	5,000	5,000
Maintenance of Cemeteries Fees and Charges	5,590	12,420	12,420
Inflation		1,860	2,820
Total	86,590	95,280	61,240

Annex B

Financial Plan 2011-12 to 2013-14

Capital Growth Options Subject to Consultation

Option	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
	£	£	£
Disabled Facility Grants	200,000		
Style Cop Cemetery Phase 1	45,000		
Total	<u>245,000</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

Reason(s) for the Decision

The reasons were as detailed in the Resolution, above.

113. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED:

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph(s) 3, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

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HELD ON THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER, 2011 AT 5.45 P.M.

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PART 2

114. Sheltered Housing – Supporting People Contract Extension

Consideration was given to the Not for Publication Report of Head of Housing (Enclosure 14.1 – 14.9 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The extension of the Council's Sheltered Housing Supporting People contract to 30 September, 2012 with a reduced level of funding with effect from 1 April, 2012 be noted.
- (B) Replacement Scheme Managers for the Grace Moore Court and Longford Court Sheltered Housing schemes be recruited on the basis of a 30 hour working week.
- (C) The Head of Housing be authorised to enter into an extended contract with Staffordshire County Council to provide sheltered housing support services.
- (D) Cabinet receive further reports on:-
 - (i) The County Council's commissioning plan and procurement strategy for accommodation based services.
 - (ii) The future funding for Communal Alarms following the completion of the County Council's review.

Reason(s) for the Decision

The report considered a 12 month extension to the Council's Sheltered Housing Supporting People contract with Staffordshire County Council to 30 September, 2012. A reduced level of funding would, however, be provided for the last 6 months of the contract extension, which would reduce HRA income by £7,390 during the first half of 2012-13. Authorisation was sought to enter into a contract extension with Staffordshire County Council.

During the contract extension period the County Council would undertake an options appraisal and develop a commissioning plan and procurement strategy for future accommodation based housing support services. The outcomes arising from these actions was currently unclear and would therefore, be the subject of a further Cabinet report, when further information was

available.

As part of the actions arising from the 2011 Sheltered Housing Support Contract Compliance Assessment, the Council had been requested to address the high “staffing to dwelling ratio” at the Grace Moore Court and Longford Court schemes. The scheme manager posts at both these schemes were currently vacant and it was proposed to recruit replacement managers on a reduced 30 hour working week.

The County Council were also reviewing Supporting People Funding for Communal Alarms which could significantly reduce the amount of funding received by the Council. A further report would, therefore, be submitted to Cabinet when the outcome of the County Council’s review was known.

115. Former Tenants’ Arrears Recommended for Write-Off

Consideration was given to the Not for Publication Report of Head of Housing (Enclosure 15.1 – 15.5 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

RESOLVED:

That the former tenants’ arrears detailed in Annex 1 to the report be approved for write off.

Reason(s) for the Decision

There was no reasonable prospect of the Council recovering the debts and so writing them off was the best course of action

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm.

LEADER