

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Monday, 8 January 2007

PRESENT: Councillor Hadland (Chair); Councillor Palethorpe (Deputy Chair);
Councillors Caswell, Flavell, Larratt and Miah

1. APOLOGIES

None.

2. MINUTES

There were none to sign.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

RESOLVED: (1) That Mr C Grethe and Ms D Munday be granted leave to address the Cabinet in respect of Item 5 "Budget 2007/08 – 2009/10; Options for Public Consultation".

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. BUDGET 2007/08- 2009/10; OPTIONS FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Councillor Hadland submitted a report that identified the need to make savings of £3.5m (after £1.1m efficiency savings) in order to present a balanced budget for 2007/08 and later years. The report set out in an appendix options for public consultation on how these savings might be achieved. Councillor Hadland commented that some difficult choices would have to be made to arrive at a balanced budget but that this was set against a background of success over the previous two years. The organisation had been slimmed down by over fifty management posts, which produced an ongoing annual saving of almost £3m. The Revenues and Benefits service was improving and processing times for applications were reducing dramatically. Homelessness had reduced to an extent that it was not proposed to provide a budget for bed and breakfast accommodation in the future. Sickness absence had been reduced and the re-letting of empty Council properties was now being processed much quicker. However, the Council still faced a number of funding difficulties brought about, for example, by the greater than expected take-up of the statutory Concessionary Fare Scheme and lower than expected income in some areas.

Councillor Hadland commented that the options contained in the appendix to the report amounted to some £4m, with the Council needing to find £3.5m. These options would be put out for public consultation and then the Cabinet would make a decision at its meeting on 29 January 2007 and make a recommendation to Council on 13 February 2007. He noted that the public consultation had, in practice, started the previous summer when seeking public views of the Council's priorities.

The Director for Governance Resources and Improvement commented that the extent of the savings required would be dependant on the Cabinet's acceptance of the second recommendation of the report, whereby the cost of implementation of the Pay and Grading

Review for 2007/08 and later years be offset by efficiency savings in order that the overall budget impact was cost neutral. If this were accepted then the amount of savings required would be £3.1m.

Mr C Grethe commented that he found the report disappointing and was not happy about the proposals for Lings Forum, especially at a time when there was a national encouragement for people to adopt healthier lifestyles. He also sought a reassurance that the Dial-a-Ride Scheme would not be affected by these proposals.

Councillor Hadland thanked Mr Grethe for his comments and stated that the Dial-a-Ride Scheme would not be affected by these proposals.

Donna Munday, as Chief Executive for the Royal and Derngate Theatres, thanked the Council for its support and commented that the Council was part of a funding partnership of nine contributors. All the contributors agreed that the theatres formed part of the Town's growth agenda and the Trust needed ongoing and sustainable support from its funders. She understood that there was an option to reduce funding to the theatres by up to £200,000 per annum. This would have a catastrophic effect, as the grant that they received from the Arts Council would also reduce in proportion. She further commented that the theatres had just reopened following a £15m investment and three hundred and fifty thousand people visited them annually. Donna Munday also commented that the Arts Council was currently withholding £250,000 grant from the theatres until the Council's funding position was resolved. If support for the theatres was reduced then this money would be lost too. Donna Munday referred to the Council's policies to have a vibrant cultural quarter, which would be severely curtailed if the proposals took effect.

Councillor Hadland thanked Donna Munday for her comments.

Councillor Hadland commented that no decisions had yet been made on the options contained in the appendix to the report. The results of the consultation would be an important part of the consideration that the Cabinet would make on 29 January.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the Schedule of Options for Changes in Levels for Future Service Delivery be agreed as the basis for public consultation over the following two weeks.
 - (2) That the principle be established whereby the cost of implementation of the Pay and Grading Review for 2007/08 and later years be offset by efficiency savings in order that the overall budget impact is cost-neutral, the capacity to accommodate these costs to be based on a budget review by Cabinet no later than July 2007 before any specific commitments to the Pay and Grading Review are made.

The meeting concluded at 18.20 hours.