

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Monday, 11 June 2007

PRESENT: Councillor Woods (Chair); Councillor Glynane (Deputy Chair); Councillors Beardsworth, Church, Crake, B.Hoare and Mildren

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. MINUTES

There were none.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

RESOLVED: That Councillor Palethorpe be granted leave to address the Cabinet in respect of Item 5, Corporate Plan and Item 6, Best Value Performance Plan.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

At this juncture Item 7 was brought forward to be considered as the first item.

7 ANNUAL AUDIT MANAGEMENT LETTER

Councillor Woods submitted the report advising that the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and Audit and Inspection Plan, both of which were appended to the report, were before Cabinet for noting and commenting on as appropriate.

The Audit and Inspection Letter was the statutory Annual Report of the Council's external auditors that summarised the conclusions and significant issues arising from recent audit and inspections of Northampton Borough Council and provided useful information about the governance arrangements of the Council, including financial aspects of governance and its overall performance.

The Audit and Inspection Plan which had been developed by KPMG, the Council's appointed auditor, and set out the audit and inspection work that the Audit Commission proposed to undertake for the 2007/08 financial year and was based on the Audit Commission's risk based approach to audit planning and the requirements of comprehensive performance assessment.

Mary Perry, from the Audit Commission, together with a colleague from KPMG then presented the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the Audit & Inspection Plan in turn. She reiterated that both the letter and the plan had been produced jointly with KPMG. She stated that the letter summarised the work done mainly in 2006 and comprised work that had been completed since the last letter and was mainly performance related. The letter summarised the action needed by the Council; how the Council was performing, including improvement since last year in the Direction of Travel Report; service inspections; and financial management and value for money. She drew particular attention to page 5 of the report, which summarised the action needed by the Council and to page 4, which provided

an overall summary of opinions given through the year and to instances where the Council had achieved an overall score of one, which required actions to be put in place to improve this. It was noted that the Council were aware of the issue and were looking to put into place actions to improve on this.

Councillor Woods commented that the content of the letter was something that the new Administration would have to take on board and that the top priority for the new Administration was to drive forward improvement as soon as possible. Improvements that the Council would wish to achieve in the short, medium and long term were recognised and the problems would be addressed.

The Director of Finance commented that she would now wish to give the Audit Commission evidence of the improvements made by the Borough Council, as she believed that the Commission had not received substantial evidence on previous inspections. In conclusion the Cabinet accepted the letter and its contents and would make every effort to make the improvements needed.

With regard to the Audit and Inspection Plan it was noted that this document reflected the audit and inspection work specified by the Audit Commission for 2007/08, the current national risks relevant to Northampton Borough Council's local circumstances and Northampton Borough Council's local risks and improvement priorities. Mention was made to the audit fee, which was within the Audit Commission's guidelines. Councillor Woods commented that the Council needed time to improve and welcomed the action to delay the expected Community Safety Audit. In terms of use of resources, he acknowledged that there were problems and welcomed any advice and help that the Audit Commission could give with regard to that process. The Interim Chief Executive commented that one area where the Council were starting to make progress was with regard to value for money.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet note and accept the findings of the Annual Audit & Inspection Letter and the Audit & Inspection Plan.

5. CORPORATE PLAN

Councillor Palethorpe addressed Cabinet with regard to the Corporate Plan and the draft Best Value Performance Plan, commenting that there was a lot in the Corporate Plan that was to be commended. He questioned the process for this year, commenting that last year both the Corporate Plan and the Best value Performance Plan had been considered by Overview & Scrutiny prior to submission to full Council. He asked whether a similar process could be followed this year, bearing in the mind that there was no planned meeting of the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee prior to the meeting of full Council on 28 June. This being the case he asked whether an extra Overview & Scrutiny Committee could be organised for the purpose of considering these two issues. He added that this would also give the public the opportunity to speak to Overview & Scrutiny to put their views and comments. Councillor Woods commented that he would welcome Overview & Scrutiny Committee having the opportunity to look at the plans and that it would be up to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny chairs to decide whether they wished to meet earlier to do this.

Councillor B Hoare, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, then submitted a report together the draft Corporate Plan for 2007-11 for consideration. It was noted that the Council's Corporate Plan was published in draft at the end of April 2007 and brought together the Council's vision, corporate objectives and annual priorities accordingly.

In considering the draft Corporate Plan reference was made to a typing error on page 12, which should read St Johns area and to the fact that paragraph 1 on page 8 needed to be

modified slightly. Also with regard to page 17, in terms of planning guidelines for the predicted Council revenue position for 2007/08 it was noted that this needed some adjustment. Attention was also drawn to four minor amendments as follows. Page 24 referred to quarterly performance reviews and it had now been agreed that these would be carried out bi-monthly. Page 26 section 4C referred to benefit claims being paid in twenty nine days and this would be changed to twenty five days to reflect the revised target in the BVPP. Page 30 section 6E referred to the development of an Asset Management Strategy by March 2007, which would need to be altered to March 2008 in line with all other financial targets in the plan. Page 31 section 8A referred to increasing opportunities to shape and influence service delivery through focus groups, systemic surveys and other sampling by March 2007 and this would need to be altered to March 2008.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet recommends to full Council the adoption of the Corporate Plan for 2007-11 subject to any detailed amendments that may be agreed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader prior to the Council meeting.

6. DRAFT BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

Councillor B Hoare, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, submitted the draft Best Value Performance Plan for 2007/08 for approval. It was noted that production and publication of the Annual Best Value Performance Plan by the 30 June was a statutory requirement for all local authorities and that this year the BVPP formed an appendix to the Council's Corporate Plan, providing a single strategic plan for the Council.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet recommend for approval by Council the draft Best Value Performance Plan for 2007/08 subject to any detailed amendments that may be agreed by the Interim Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader prior to the Council meeting.

8. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Chair moved that the public and Press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that there was likely to be disclosure to them of such categories of exempt information as defined by Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 as listed against such items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12A to such Act.

The Motion was Carried.

9. APSE- DSO VALUE FOR MONEY HIGH LEVEL REVIEW

Councillor Crane, as the relevant Portfolio Holder submitted a report in respect of a high level review of the DSO. In presenting the report, Councillor Crane amended the first recommendation contained in the report to insert the words "and to let a commercial contract".

RESOLVED: That the report be received and the recommendations contained therein be approved with Recommendation 1 being duly amended.

The meeting concluded at 6.50pm

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified