

# NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET

Monday, 3 September 2007

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

### 1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor B Hoare.

### 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 30 July were signed by the Chair.

### 3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

**RESOLVED:** (1) That Mr C Grethe and Councillor Palethorpe be granted leave to address the Cabinet in respect of Item 6 – the Notice of Motion, regarding the Northampton Door to Door Service and that Mr.Grethe also be granted leave to address on item 10 Parking Concessions.

(2) That Mr B Oliver, Mr T Care and Councillor Malpas be granted leave to address the Cabinet in respect of Item 7 – Allotment Strategy.

### 4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Beardsworth declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Item 7 as an allotment holder and also a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Item 11 due to the fact that she was the relative of a Northampton Borough Council employee. Councillor Crake declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Item 10 due to the fact that she was a Blue Badge holder.

### 5. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were none.

### 6. NOTICE OF MOTION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL MEETING 30TH JULY FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

Mr C Grethe, as Co-Chair of the Disabled Peoples Forum, addressed Cabinet stating that he had addressed on this Notice of Motion regarding the Northampton Door to Door Service at full Council and he reiterated his comments made at that meeting. He stated that this was a very important issue. Northampton Door to Door was a very worthy organisation which provided an important service to elderly and disabled people.. He stated that the service had been set up during Jas Bain's Mayoral year. He stated that he considered this to be an essential service for its users and that some twenty seven thousand people used it per year. He added that a further concern for the service was that the minibuses needed to be replaced at intervals due to the wear and tear on them. He urged Cabinet to support the motion and ensure the continuity of the service.

Councillor Palethorpe then addressed Cabinet stating that he and Councillor Davis had initially brought the Notice of Motion to Council in the interests of maintaining the Northampton Door to Door Service. He stated that he had subsequently received positive indication that the administration were actively looking for alternative accommodation for the service but he asked that Cabinet also look into the transport situation as the minibuses would need replacing. He stated that the vehicles were used for short journeys on a frequent basis and this exacerbated the wear and tear on the vehicles. He stated that maybe there was the possibility of vehicles being hired rather than purchased. He also asked Cabinet to look at a three year rollover service level agreement.

Councillor Mildren, as the Portfolio Holder, then gave an update on the current position. He stated that it was a worthy service, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in November but as highlighted in the Notice of Motion there were a number of problems, one being accommodation. He stated that he was actively pursuing this and it was hoped for a positive outcome in the very near future. He then touched upon the issue of three year agreements, stating that there had previously been three year agreements between Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council but that this year the arrangement had been rescinded and become a one year arrangement. He stated that funding was another issue that was being looked into in the budget round and that there would need to be liaison with Northamptonshire County Council. In terms of accommodation it was hoped to find something within the Town Centre so that the scheme could work with the Mobility Scheme. Councillor Mildren stated that he would continue to pursue the matter and report back to a future meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the Council continue to assist in the search for appropriate premises and would look at the funding issue in the next budget round and submit a report to a future meeting as appropriate.

## **7. ALLOTMENT STRATEGY**

NB Councillor Beardwoth declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following item as an allotment holder and left the meeting whilst the matter was under discussion.

Mr B Oliver, Chair of the Northampton Allotment Network, addressed the Cabinet stating that he had been involved in the preparation of the Strategy and explained why there was a need for an Allotment Strategy. He stated that they had taken best practice from every area in terms of compiling the Strategy. A commitment was needed from Northampton Borough Council and from the allotment fraternity so that this could be taken forward. He added that it was the most comprehensive document that had been put before Cabinet for a long time and that in fact the first document had been scrapped as it did not meet the needs.

Mr T Care, Treasurer of the Northampton Allotment Network, then addressed Cabinet stating that the document had been put together by Northampton Allotments Network in conjunction with Northampton Borough Council officers. There had been close liaison with allotment holders and the document contained some forty recommendations, which he considered were feasible and the allotment holders were prepared to assist in their implementation.

Councillor Malpas then addressed the Cabinet stating that he broadly agreed with the report but had concerns at paragraph 4.2, which referred to opportunities and the fact that Northampton Borough Council would rationalise all of the current sites which in turn would allow land to be made available for alternate use or for sale and that this could represent a large capital receipt for Northampton Borough Council. He asked for a guarantee that the land would not be sold off for development purposes.

Councillor Crake, as the Portfolio Holder, submitted the report together with the guidelines and requirements on allotments and the Strategy document. She stated that the Strategy had arisen as a result of an Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Group initially looking at water charges for allotments. The Strategy examined the current options available for supporting and strengthening allotments in the Borough taking into account current demand, the existing provision and looking at proposals to upgrade existing facilities and capacity. She stated that it was a living document and that the idea was for a steering group to be set up to move it forward. She thanked Mr Oliver and Mr Care for their hard work in driving this document forward.

Councillor Glynane echoed these thanks and to all those involved in producing the document.

Councillor Woods commented that the one thing missing from the document was the financial element and emphasised that there was the need to be prudent in allocating Council resources. Also, in response to Councillor Malpas, it could not be guaranteed that some land would not be released for alternate use or for sale. It was noted that there needed to be a sensible and secure financial approach to allotments but allotments did need to be improved in the wider sense of what allotments were for and how they were used. There was the need to further evaluate the financial implications as part of the medium term strategy.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That the Allotment Strategy as at Appendix A be adopted in principle.
- (2) That any of the recommendations within the Strategy with financial implications be not implemented immediately but be considered as part of the medium term planning.

## **8. CENTRAL AREA ACTION PLAN**

Councillor Church, as the Portfolio Holder, submitted a report which explained the purpose and background of the Central Area Action Plan Issues and Options Discussion Paper. The discussions paper was attached at Appendix 1 of the report and in addition the report also set out the next stages in the preparation of the Central Area Action Plan and sought agreement to commence public consultation. Councillor Church stated that the paper was not just about leisure and retail in the Town Centre but also housing and he drew particular attention to page 40, which dealt with the quality of housing in Spring Boroughs. Pages 17 and 18 of the paper referred to the vision in the central area and a number of strategic objectives upon which views were being invited.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That approval be given for consultation to take place on the Central Area Action Plan Issues and Options Paper as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (2) That approval be given to the outline of the consultation process for the Central Area Action Plan Strategy Issues and Options Discussion Paper as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.
- (3) That the detail of the consultation process be agreed with the Corporate Manager (Regeneration and Growth) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder (Regeneration).
- (4) That any modifications to the Central Area Action Plan Issues and Options Discussion Paper arising as the result of further information and

editing to be delegated to the Corporate Manager (Regeneration and Growth) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder (Regeneration).

## **9. PERFORMANCE**

### **(A) Budget Monitoring 2007/08 – Period 4**

Councillor Mildren, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, submitted a report which identified the projected outturn position for the current financial year. It was noted that Appendix 1 of the report provided further background information and that the report also referred to management action being taken in response to the forecast and to minimise the impact of the Council's general reserves at the end of the financial year. It was noted that Appendix 1 showed the identified variations from the approved budget that were giving rise to a forecast net overspend of £469,000. This would reduce down to £167k should an application to capitalise severance costs to the DCLG be agreed.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the report and the actions being taken to manage the forecast overspend be noted.

(2) That the following virements be approved:

- (i) £312k from the General Reserve Fund for concessionary fares.
- (ii) £42k from the Improvement Fund (earmarked reserve) for Human Resources.
- (iii) £40k from the Corporate Initiatives (LABGI) earmarked reserve for funding Delapre Abbey as agreed on 30 July 2007.

### **(B) Performance Monitoring**

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Woods presented the monthly performance indicators for July 2007. It was noted that there had been some examples of improvement but that there had been a significant downturn in July in terms of absence performance and a number of actions would be taken to improve upon this. In terms of processing benefit claims, there had been a slight step back but it was anticipated that this would be rectified as there would be eight new members of staff starting in September, which should make a significant contribution in bringing the numbers back down. Councillor Beardsworth then elaborated upon the actions being taken in terms of rent arrears, commenting that this was based on a three fold approach.

The Interim Chief Executive stated that back in February three areas had been highlighted as needing improvement namely Revenues & Benefits, Housing and Planning. He was pleased to advise that there had been some significant improvement in the planning process and this was now in the top quartile.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be received and noted.

## **10. PARKING CONCESSIONS**

NB Councillor Crake declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following item as a blue badge holder and left the meeting whilst the matter was under discussion.

Mr C Grethe addressed the Cabinet stating that he welcomed this report in the main and that free parking on a Sunday in the run up to Christmas seemed to be a very good idea but there did not appear to be any provision in the report to help disabled people. He went on to explain the various problems that disabled people had with parking in the Town Centre and wondered whether this could be taken into account.

Councillor Glynane, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, submitted a report which outlined a set of proposals in respect of amendments to parking concessions. These were essentially to improve the Sunday trading activity within the Town Centre to make Northampton a seven day trading centre in line with national trends, to improve the popularity of the Town Centre over the festive holiday period for the benefit of all stakeholders, to improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre to sectors other than retailing and to generally improve the economic activity levels within the Town Centre. Councillor Glynane stated that he believed this was a positive proposal and that it would kick start Sunday trading and fitted in with the policies to revitalise the Town Centre. Mr Grethe's comments were noted and the Council would work with the Disabled Peoples Forum in terms of parking and to ensure that the disabled bays were in the right locations, etc and also liaise with them in terms of the Christmas shopping.

Councillor Beardsworth suggested that maybe a small working group could be set up to help the disabled community to look at parking generally.

Particular reference was made to paragraph 4.2 of the report and the new "pay on foot" scheme, which meant that a ticket was obtained upon arrival at the car park and then the charge paid for upon arrival back at the car park instead of being restricted to a time limit. It was noted that in the recommendations, Recommendation 2 should read "2007/08".

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the introduction of revised parking arrangements to stimulate Sunday trading in the Town Centre be agreed.
  - (2) That a viement of £47k from corporate initiatives earmarked reserve for 2007/08 be agreed.
  - (3) That should all of the provision not be required that any underspend be returned to the Corporate Initiatives reserve.
  - (4) That the appropriate adjustment to reduce income from car parks be made for future budgets from 2007/08. That subject to the above the amendments to the Parking Place Order (by notice of variation) be advertised.

## **11. COUNCIL'S SEVERANCE POLICY**

NB Councillor Beardsworth declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following item as a relative of a Northampton Borough Council employee and left the meeting whilst the matter was under discussion.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Woods presented the report which sought direction from the Cabinet on the revision and content of the Council's Early Retirement and Severance Scheme (including Statement of Discretions) prior to a revised policy being brought for consideration to the October Cabinet. It was noted that this would also need to be put before the General Purposes Committee. Councillor Woods advised that there were four options for consideration set out under Paragraph 3.3.2 of the report. It was noted that one of the key consultees was the District Auditor.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That approval be given to a review being undertaken of the Early Retirement and Severance Scheme within the timescales detailed in the report.
- (2) That the recommended process for consultation be agreed with the Council's recognised Trade Unions and other stakeholders affected by a policy change and ensure the results of the consultation are considered at each stage.
- (3) That a steer be provided for Option 2 as the main option but that Option 4 be also looked at to see if it was now feasible.
- (4) That approval be given to extend the benefits in the current scheme to two staff who have not yet left under the budget/efficiency savings but who remain "at risk" unless any revised scheme is more favourable to them.

## **12. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

The Chair moved that the public and Press be excluded from the remainder of the business 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 was listed against such items of business by reference to the appropriate paragraph of Schedule 12A to such Act.

The Motion was Carried.

## **13. FORMER MORRIS MAN PUBLIC HOUSE SITE KINGS HEATH**

Councillor Mildren, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, submitted a report seeking approval to release restricted covenants in favour of the Council on land as shown on the plan attached to the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be received and the recommendations contained therein be adopted.

## **14. GARAGES DRYLEYS COURT LUMBERTUBS**

Councillor Mildren, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, submitted a report seeking approval to the disposal of disused former garages and land as shown on the plan accompanying the report. It was noted that it was hoped that a co-ordinated approach would be made in future in terms of disposing of such sites so that a piecemeal approach could be avoided.

**RESOLVED:** That approval be given to the disposal of the land shown on the plan at Appendix 1 of the report.

The meeting concluded at 7:05 pm.