

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Tuesday, 5 June 2007

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

1. APOLOGIES

None.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 16 April 2007 were signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

RESOLVED: That Councillor Hadland be granted leave to address the Cabinet in respect of item 8 "Grosvenor/Greyfriars".

The Chair commented that Councillors did not need to pre-register to address Cabinet however following the constitutional changes agreed by Council on 24 May 2007 members of the public would need to register to speak by 12 noon of the day of the meeting by contacting the Meeting Services Team Leader, Mr F McGown on 01604 837101 or by e-mail to fmcgown@northampton.gov.uk.

The Chair commented that this was the first meeting of the new Cabinet following the recent local elections and commented that he would taking the Partnership and Improvement Portfolio; Councillor Glynane as Deputy Leader of the Council would take the Community Engagement and Safety Portfolio; Councillor Crake Environment; Councillor Beardsworth Housing; Councillor Church Regeneration; Councillor B Hoare Performance; and Councillor Mildren Finance.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Beardsworth declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 7 "Kingsthorpe Hall Community Centre – Options for Reconfiguration" as a member of the Kingsthorpe Hall Management Board and left the meeting during discussion of it.

5. AUDIT COMMISSION PROGRESS ASSESSMENT- FEBRUARY 2007

Councillor Woods submitted a report that had been circulated with the agenda and which enclosed a copy of the Audit Commission's progress assessment that had been carried out during February 2007. A requirement of the assessment was that it should be brought to a public meeting of the Council. He further commented that the report and its recommendations were accepted and formed a baseline from which to move the Council forward. There would be a further report to the meeting on 11 June on the Annual Audit and Inspection letter which would give an updated view. The Chair briefly referred to the recommendations set out on page 8 of the Progress Assessment and briefly referred to the changes in political structures that had already been agreed; a further report on the agenda concerned the appointment of a Chief Executive; the appointment of a Director of Finance; the Council's main priority to stop being poor and to focus upon improvement particularly in respect of Housing, Planning, Benefits and the Finance function.

Councillor Beardsworth referred to the need for the Council to be customer focussed and Councillor Church referred to some early indications of improvement within the Planning Section. Councillor Mildren commented upon improved staffing capacity within Finance and the introduction of new financial systems that would be key to delivering improvement overall.

Councillor B Hoare referred to the Strategic Improvement Plan and its six themes which Portfolio Holders would be monitoring progress upon.

Councillor Woods referred to the fact that there would a further inspection by the Audit Commission during June and in November there would be a direction of travel report. He commented that progress on meeting the Audit Commission's recommendations would form part of his report to the Council meeting on 23 July.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Commission's Progress Assessment be accepted and the recommendations contained within the report be acknowledged and that the Cabinet undertakes to give the highest priority to delivering improvement for the people of Northampton.

6. APPOINTMENT OF A CHIEF EXECUTIVE (HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

Councillor Woods submitted a report that set out a process for the appointment of a Chief Executive. He referred to comments that had been made in respect of the estimated cost of £50,000 for advertising, assessment, interview and other expenses. He commented that in order to make the right appointment for the Council to this initial position, this expenditure was necessary.

RESOLVED: That the appointment process set out in the report for the appointment of a Chief Executive (and Head of Paid Service) be approved.

7. KINGSTHORPE HALL COMMUNITY CENTRE- OPTIONS FOR RE-CONFIGURATION

Councillor Mildren submitted a report that sought agreement to capital expenditure of £3,000 to remedy defects in the new community centre building so that it could be opened and used by the local community and which also suggested further capital expenditure up to £45,000 for further alterations to the internal layout of the building in order to make it more flexible to users. He further commented that as the Council had not yet agreed a Capital Programme it was difficult to agree this suggested additional expenditure without being able to prioritise this scheme against others.

Councillor Church commented that in addition to the situation vis a vis an agreed capital programme the aspirations of the local community and the Management Board of the Community Centre were unknown.

RESOLVED: (1) That the report be received and approval be given to capital expenditure of up to £3,000 to remedy the defects in the new community centre building so as to make it immediately usable.
(2) That consultations take place with the local community and the community centre management committee and that a capital project appraisal be brought to Cabinet as part of the 2008/2009 capital budget process and consideration be given to other funding opportunities.

8. GROSVENOR/ GREYFRIARS

Councillor Woods commented that there was no accompanying report to this item which was being withdrawn from the meeting.

Councillor Church made a brief statement commenting that negotiations with Legal and General were continuing and there was no change in terms of priority; this being a key development opportunity for the regeneration of the town centre. Discussions were also taking place with the Council's partners and in particular EMDA, WNDC and NCC. A written report would be available for the 2 July meeting of the Cabinet.

Councillor Hadland commented that as the former Leader of the Council he had been keen to generate a momentum for this project and he was pleased that the new administration was equally committed to it and urged that the momentum generated should not be lost.

Councillor Woods commented that he intended that reports should be presented to Cabinet in a timely manner and concurred that the momentum that had been generated should not be lost and thanked Councillor Hadland for the private briefing that he and Councillor Church had had before the Election in anticipation of minimising the risk of delay.

RESOLVED: That the position be noted.

9. MASTERPLANNING OF THE ST.JOHN'S CULTURAL QUARTER

Councillor Church submitted a report that set out the need to carry out a master planning exercise of the St Johns Cultural Quarter which comprised in part the former Blueberry Diner site. He noted that the master plan needed to be carried out in order to comply with the funding requirements from the East Midlands Development Agency which would otherwise result in the loss of grant monies totalling £2m.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted and that approval be given to the appointment of an external consultant for the initial master planning of the St Johns Cultural Quarter.
- (2) That the identification of funding from within available capital resources or via prudential borrowing as outlined in the project appraisal set out annex A of the report be delegated to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

10. 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.

11. RENT INCOME PROPOSALS

Councillor Beardsworth submitted a report that sought approval to the negotiation of a Contract to provide additional resources to improve the rent income service

RESOLVED: That the report be received and noted

The meeting concluded at 6.40pm