

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Wednesday, 7 September 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Markham (Chair); Councillor Nunn (Deputy Chair); Councillors Bottwood, Eldred, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert and King

APOLOGIES:

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13th July 2016 were agreed and signed by the Leader.

3. INTENTION TO HOLD PART OF THE MEETING IN PRIVATE

There were no items to be heard in private

4. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bottwood declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest as a Board Member on Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH).

6. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

6.A RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - MUSEUM TRUST

Councillor Birch acknowledged the work of the Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel and officers for providing full informative meetings. She felt the Hybrid Trust was the best option for the museum service but voiced concerns about the length of time it would take the museum to regain its accreditation from the Arts Council England.

In submitting the report Councillor Lane stated that whilst they had decided to close the report they had recommended a 3 month review. Councillor Beardsworth added that following the success of the Leisure Trust this was a good thing to take forward.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

6.B RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - NBC OWNED STREET LIGHTING

Councillor Ashraf referred to some of the most vulnerable tenants stating the Labour Group was opposed to any cuts. She felt NBC lighting did need modernisation and asked if the comment in the report that stated the corporate asset list was incomplete meant that NBC was unsure of its assets.

In response Councillor Markham stated it was a large piece of work that had been at times difficult because NBC and Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) were still discovering which lights belonged to them. She reassured Councillor Ashraf that any health and safety concerns would be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

In proposing the report Councillor Lane thanked Councillor Larratt for his chairmanship of this working group.

Councillor Markham acknowledged Councillor Larratt's background in this area which had been very useful to him whilst chairing the working group.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet noted the report.

7. NORTHAMPTON LOCAL PLAN (PART 2) OPTIONS CONSULTATION

Councillor Stone stated she felt there was a need to embed sufficient strategies to ensure quality, green, safe housing. She referred to 2 families whose children had been taken away that week because of poor housing stating this was a real issue. She asked if there would be a stage in the process at which road shows would be taken out to consult with residents.

Councillor Beardsworth referred to one of the most responded to questions regarding the Northern Orbital Route which she felt they needed to ensure was in place. She noted many children in the Kingsthorpe area suffered with asthma and there was a need to ensure the best infrastructure to assist people to leave their homes. She also felt there was a need to keep liaising with NCC on this issue. Shopping habits had changed and there was a need to make town centres more attractive either in the shops provided or by providing leisure activities. She then went on to refer to a need to build more bungalows particularly in light of the ageing population and larger number of people living in their own home for longer.

In presenting his report, Councillor Hadland stated this was a vital plan for Northampton. The next stage was for officers to review all of the consultation responses and start to work on writing the local plan. A new consultation would begin shortly and last until 2 November 2016. The report included initial ideas to set out the vision for Northampton through to 2029. Whilst much of it was technical later parts of the report included subjects for consideration and was quite comprehensive. The Council would do all it could to improve consultation and engagement wherever possible and would also consider good ideas of best practice from across the country.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the responses received to the issues in the consultation be noted.
- 2) That the documents and timetable as set out in the report for an Options stage public consultation on the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2) be agreed.
- 3) That the outcome of the Options consultation would inform further consideration and preparation of a Draft Local Plan which would be presented to Cabinet in due course be noted.

8. EMERGENCY FUNDING FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE'S REFUGES

Councillor Beardsworth made a plea for 3-5 year funding for refuges. She felt those

accessing them had already been through a lot. She also noted that NCC paid the same level of grant as NBC and suggested NCC should pay more. She felt a 3-5 year funding stream would ensure there was somewhere for people to go when needing this type of assistance.

Councillor Cali referred to the Council's good history of supporting refuges and voiced concerns about the lack of criteria for assessing who would receive funding from Central Government.

In submitting the report Councillor Hibbert stated that whilst details of how the £40million would be distributed had not yet been released, the sum of money in this area had been confirmed. NBC, the Northamptonshire Police & Crime Commissioner and NCC were committed to providing the bridging sums and intended to reclaim these sums from the Central Government funding once it had been awarded.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the action that had been taken by the Borough and District Councils, the County Council and the Police & Crime Commissioner to sustain Northamptonshire's refuges in 2016/17 be noted and supported;
- 2) Cabinet approved the Council's contribution of £39,362 (28% of the total) to the bridge funding arrangements and agreed that if this money was not reimbursed through the VAWG funding it would need to be funded from the Council's Revenue Budget 2016/17 or reserves be approved
- 3) That the Chief Executive make written representations to the DCLG and the Home Office, highlighting the financial difficulties facing Northamptonshire's refuges and urging Ministers to make an early decision on when, how and to whom the £40million funding for domestic abuse would be awarded to provide an assurance that when funding is awarded it would take into account expenditure that the refuges had already incurred in 2016/17.

9. REVIEW OF OLDER PERSONS' HOUSING

Councillor Beardsworth praised the report stating this area needed a complete overhaul. People's needs had changed in the past 20-30 years with many leading a more active life. There was still a need for more bungalows, perhaps in clusters and open spaces.

Councillor Ashraf stated she considered this to be a sensible way forward. Many people required sheltered housing and she would welcome any answers NPH might have to address any issues that arose from this strategy. She hoped that stock was not sold off under the right to buy scheme because this type of accommodation was desperately needed.

In submitting the report Councillor Hibbert thanked representatives from all parties for their support. It had begun some time ago with key objectives of enabling older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible, improving the quality of older person's housing to enable people to live happy and healthy lives in an enriched community, offer housing choices to meet the needs of current and future generations of older people and to ensure that specialist housing and support was targeted to those most in need. All Councils generally required bungalows and many would be re-classified as sheltered housing as well as possibly up to 600 flats. A new standard for designated sheltered housing was also included in the report.

Councillor Markham thanked officers at NBC and NPH noting that whilst the report had

taken some time, this was required in order to ensure the best possible options. She noted residents and tenants had also been involved in it.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the findings of Northampton Partnership Homes' review of the Council's older persons' housing (as set out in its Older Persons' Housing Strategy in appendices 1 and 2 of the report) be noted;
- 2) That the rebranding of the Council's sheltered housing as 'older persons' housing' be approved and authorised changes to the housing allocations policy (as set out in paragraphs 3.2.5 – 3.2.7 of the report) in order to define these properties as being suitable for people aged 55 or over and determine the circumstances in which they may be let to people with disabilities who are under the age of 55 years;
- 3) That the reclassification of its 'general needs' bungalows to 'older persons' housing' when they become vacant and are assessed as suitable for older people, in order that all future lettings are made to people who are either aged 55 years or over or have a disability, required accessible housing and are under the age of 55 years be approve.
- 4) That the reclassification (to 'general needs housing') or up to 600 flats and bungalows that are currently designated as 'sheltered housing' but are assessed as being unsuitable for older people, be approved in principal, and authorised Northampton Partnership Homes to consult with the affected residents, in three phases, in order to establish their housing preferences and their current and future needs, and to recommend to the Council which schemes should be reclassified and when;
- 5) That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing and the Section 151 Officer, to approve the reclassification of the older persons' housing schemes to 'general needs housing' after Northampton Partnership Homes has consulted with the affected residents and following consideration of Northampton Partnership Homes' recommendations; and
- 6) That it be noted that Cabinet would receive further reports on the implementation of Northampton Partnership Homes' Older Persons' Strategy and the Council's development of a Multi-Agency Older Persons' Housing Strategy that takes into account the views of a wider range of stakeholders, including registered providers, private sector developers and housing providers, health and social care and the voluntary and community sector.

10. GREYFRIARS: SELECTION OF A DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

Councillor Beardsworth stated disappointment in the plans as she felt it should be a more exciting, active place to visit. She referred to 2 cinemas in the town centre which had not been viable and the fact that the town centre already had a cinema. She felt a skating rink or climbing facilities might have been better. She also felt there was no need for new restaurants as these would drive away the existing ones. She also felt student lifestyle was so different that no-one would want to live close to them.

Councillor Stone stated she had expected something more radical. She asked about young families and suggested something that better complemented what was already in the areas should have been designed rather than something that would be in competition. She also suggested retaining the land and developing it themselves.

In submitting the report Councillor Hadland stated this was the next stage in the

development of the north side of Northampton town centre. He felt providing an exciting development was all well and good when you had the finances to back it. There had been originally 3 schemes but 1 of these had backed out. General feedback on the other 2 schemes during consultation had been supportive. Advisers were employed to consider the proposals and professional advice was sought across the scheme. When scoring the 2 schemes, 50% was weighted to the scheme, 40% to finance and 10% to legal requirements. Developer A had scored slightly higher than developer B and the report explained reasons for this in paragraph 3.2.5. Viability was quite high as was attractiveness with links to the existing town centre which it was felt would provide an integration. It included improvements to the public realm and private housing. It was also felt students would not disturb others living in the area.

A planning decision would be expected in the Autumn of 2017 with workmen on site from January 2018. Palace Capital who owned Sol Central had expressed concerns in the viability of the cinema but professional advice was that the town could sustain 2 cinemas. Palace Capital had also put in an application to improve the Sol Central site and NBC were convinced that the 2 developments would not have an adverse affect on each other. Should Cabinet approve the recommendations, Developer A could be named and more information about them released.

Councillor Markham reminded Cabinet that there would be further recommendations that would come to them for approval during the process.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the progress that had been made to date and the further negotiations to be undertaken with the preferred Bidder following a Cabinet approval be noted.
- 2) That a recommendation for the preferred developer of the Greyfriars site be approved: Developer A.
- 3) That authority be delegated to the Director of Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning and the Chief Finance Officer to conclude negotiations on Head of Terms/Agreement to lease with the preferred bidder in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning.
- 4) That authority be delegated to the Borough Secretary the approval and conclusion of relevant and appropriate legal documentation;
- 5) That the continuation of the Cabinet Advisory Group to work alongside the selected developer throughout the development process be approved.
- 6) That the Director of Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning would submit a report to Cabinet to approve the proposed Heads of Terms/Agreement to Lease, whichever document(s) are appropriate.

11. FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT FOR ENFORCEMENT AGENTS FOR THE RECOVERY OF VARIOUS TYPES OF DEBT

Councillor Gowen stated she felt it made sense to have more than one 1 option but felt it would have been nice to have had more detail in the criteria for each of the options. She also voiced concern regarding the fees that would be charged.

In response, Councillor Eldred stated there was an Act from 2014 which provided for a fair scheme for every agency.

In submitting the report Councillor Eldred stated he already knew of some of the agencies chosen as reputable.

RESOLVED:

That the implementation of Revenues and Benefits Enforcement Agency Framework Agreement to address future recovery requirements and enter into a Framework Agreement with Bristow & Sutor, Dukes, JBW and Rossendales be approved.

12. FINANCE REPORT TO 31ST JULY 2016

Councillor Gowen in noting that the overspend related mainly to temporary staff asked how much that sum was and stated it would be nice to see that as 'under control'.

In response, Councillor Eldred stated they were reviewing the number of agency staff employed by the Council.

In submitting the report Councillor Eldred stated some great schemes had come forward during the year with a considerable investment in the Eastern area of Northampton. NBC only received 30% from the sale of properties and on average were selling 90 houses each year. In the current year they were building 91. The underspend from repairs would be reinvested in building new houses.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the changes to the 2016-17 General Fund Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be noted.
- 2) That the virement of £2.3million of HRA revenue repairs and maintenance budget of the Capital Programme to support the investment in new stock partly funded by the use of 141 Right to Buy receipts be approved.

13. TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT

In submitting the report Councillor Eldred stated they had continued to make use of underspends to fund capital projects. The Loan to the University of Northampton was enabling them to bring more people into Northampton by more than 100% of what had been expected. The borrowing position had reduced by £225,000.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet recommended to Council that they note the Council's treasury management performance for 2015-16 (outturn), and treasury management data for quarter 1 of 2016-17.

14. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE OUTTURN REPORT 2015/16

Councillor Stone referred to new start-ups and the new jobs created by them but asked that given that 8 out of 10 new businesses failed, how many would stay and what could the Council do to assist them? She also expressed concerns that performance in terms of houses of multiple occupancy had fallen and asked if this was because the Council was under-staffed. She noted that she had made many requests in terms of clearing items fly-tipped on the Bouverie Court estate and suggested more could be done to deter fly-tippers. She noted that 99.74% of invoices were paid within 30 days and that there had been a big reduction in staff sickness. She asked if the Council had a high turnover of staff and whether there was a fundamental error that caused people to look elsewhere for employment.

Councillor Birch voiced concerns that affordable housing appeared to fall off many housing applications because it was not viable. She therefore wondered how the Council could manage the need to supply 35% affordable housing. It left people without homes which was an issue she felt the Council should be addressing.

In reply Councillor Markham stated Northampton was second only to London in terms of new businesses, many of which were quite large. The Council had various programmes to assist such as the Business Incentive Scheme and Rate Relief. She herself had attended a company that had relocated to Northampton from Cambridge and had a business breakfast that day with various people who all felt Northampton was progressive. She had also discussed that day how to assist the homeless with gaining employment. The Council also employed people to look at how to support new and existing businesses.

The Council continued to work hard to deter fly-tippers but it was a duty of everyone to be more responsible in this area.

The Council had gone through a real culture change in the past 12 months and staff were consulted. During the latest consultation employees had stated a grievance at the Council's policy not to pay the first 3 days of any sickness period. That day she and the Chief Executive had written to all employees to state this would reduce to the first day of sickness and this would be reviewed.

She concluded by stating she was pleased with the report but the Council was not complacent. There were a number of areas for the Council to work on improving, waste being one of them.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Performance Outturn 2015-16 Report be approved.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified