

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive of Bolsover District Council held in Chamber Suites 1 & 2, The Arc, High Street, Clowne on Monday 2 September 2013.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor A.F. Tomlinson – In the Chair

Councillors R. Bowler, D. Kelly, B.R. Murray-Carr, K. Reid and A.M. Syrett

Officers:-

W. Lumley (Chief Executive Officer), S. Tomlinson (Director of Neighbourhoods), K. Hopkinson (Director of Development), B. Mason (Director of Corporate Resources), A. Wylie (Principal Solicitor), M. Kane (Governance Manager) and L. Hickin (Assistant Director – Leisure) (For minute number 0365)

0359. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor E. Watts.

0360. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business to be considered at the meeting.

0361. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared at the meeting.

0362. MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE HELD 7 AUGUST 2013

Moved by Councillor D. Kelly and seconded by Councillor A.M. Syrett

RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Executive held on 7 August 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

0363. RECOMMENDED ITEMS FROM OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

There were no recommended items from other standing committees.

EXECUTIVE

0364. JOINT BOARD DECISIONS

Moved by Councillor D. Kelly and seconded by Councillor B.R. Murray-Carr
RESOLVED that the decisions of the Bolsover, Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Joint Board arising from their meeting of 15 July 2013 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To advise Executive of the decisions taken by the Joint Board.
(Chief Executive)

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED: None.

0365. CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN FOR HERITAGE HIGH SCHOOL

Executive considered a report which sought consideration of a request from Heritage High School to continue using The Arc as a reserve location within their critical incident plan.

Executive was advised that prior to the Council's move to The Arc, Heritage High School had an agreement in place with Chesterfield College to use the building as a reserve location during a serious incident should the school need evacuating for a prolonged period.

This arrangement was to use The Arc as a reserve location where pupils could be held in a safe location until transport could be arranged to collect the pupils. All schools within Derbyshire had a critical incident plan, of which a reserve location was a crucial part

The Council had been approached by Heritage High School to request continuation of this arrangement.

Moved by Councillor B.R. Murray-Carr and seconded by Councillor A. Syrett
RESOLVED that Heritage High School's request to use The Arc as their reserve location within their critical incident plan, within the boundaries of the protocol, be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide a temporary safe and secure location for pupils of Heritage High School in the event of an emergency.
(Director of Health and Well Being)

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED: None.

EXECUTIVE

0366. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Executive considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which set out an update in respect of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. The report served to commence the budget setting process in respect of 2014/15 although it was noted that further work would be necessary to arrive at a final position.

The Council had again secured a balanced budget in respect of 2012/13 whilst delivering a small improvement in the level of general balances. However, it would need to continue to operate against a background of significant reductions in central Government funding. The report set out an indication of the issues that the Council was facing including the financial shortfall over the next few years.

Executive was advised of a number of Government consultations around the New Homes Bonus, Revenue Support Grant and National Non Domestic Rate (NNDR) proposals for the use of Capital Receipts from asset sales to invest in reforming services. The implications of these consultations were set out in the report.

It was reported that since the localisation of NNDR, further work indicated that an additional £100,000 of funding could be assumed in respect of this year with a similar increase being factored into future financial years. A further uplift of £50,000 in respect of 2014/15 and 2015/16 was also envisaged. It was noted that a number of appeals against current rating valuations had been received which could adversely impact on the Council's financial position. To assist the Council in analysing the valuation list, improve forecasting and identify opportunities to increase NNDR revenue, a service and software offered by IRRV had been identified. Acquisition of this software would help the Council to access improved information on which to base the assumptions concerning the level of business rate income. It was recommended that purchase of this software be funded from the efficiency grant.

With respect to the current financial year the Council was seeking to find savings of £0.884m. Of this figure some £0.615m of savings opportunities had been agreed with a further £0.269m remaining to be identified. The report set out the progress made in addressing the shortfall. Steps taken were around vacancy management, reducing leisure services subsidy, green bins and garage reorganisation, Strategic Alliance secondments, property rationalisation, income reviews and one off director secondments.

In terms of addressing the shortfall in the Medium Term Financial Plan, it was anticipated that the budget in respect of 2013/14 would be balanced by the end of the financial year with the full savings target secured. However, in respect of both 2014/15 and 2015/16 a projected cumulative shortfall of £1.6m was currently forecast.

EXECUTIVE

Due to the scale of the financial issues which faced the Council in future financial years there was an agreed strategy of implementing the necessary measures to balance the 2013/14 budget by the end of the 2013 calendar year.

This required a programme of implementing measures over the next few months which included a review of all budgets, completion of a stock condition survey of the Council's non-housing assets and other savings to be brought by the Chief Executive to the Strategic Alliance Joint Committee. These savings when taken together would make a contribution towards addressing the £1.6m shortfall and accordingly it was proposed that they be pursued at this stage with further measures to be considered as appropriate.

Having considered the report, Members asked a range of questions and raised a number of issues. The following points were noted:

- Executive was advised of the reasons why it was considered unlikely that the consultation paper in respect of capitalisation of restructuring costs would provide significant benefits for Bolsover District Council. These factors included the limited resource available nationally and the fact that the Council retained a level of funding which could be used to cover such costs.
- In response to a question around the Efficiency Grant it was stated that the receipt of this grant was conditional upon the Council being able to evidence that it had secured underlying savings in its revenue budget.
- Options for use of Council reserves would be brought back for consideration at a future meeting.
- The Council currently had acceptable levels of reserves but it needed to be recognised that if the reserves fell below £1m there would be a significant impact on the Authority's financial stability.

Moved by Councillor D. Kelly and seconded by B R Murray-Carr

RESOLVED that (1) Executive note the position as set out within the report and refer the report to the Audit Committee for its consideration.

(2) Executive note that the Director of Corporate Resources would, following consultation with Strategic Alliance Management Team (SAMT), reduce management budgets to reflect vacancy delays and other employee savings with such reductions to be reported to Executive as part of the budget monitoring process.

EXECUTIVE

(3) The Chief Executive be given delegated authority to respond to the Government consultation papers in respect of the Local Government Finance Settlement 2014/15 and 2015/16 and New Homes Bonus following consultation with the Leader of the Council.

(4) The Council acquires the IRRV / Inform "Analyse Local" package at a cost of £5,000 plus 10% of the additional income arising from the analysis undertaken of the valuation list within the District, with the fixed element of the costs to be met from Efficiency Grant.

(5) Executive agree to amend the forecast shortfall in respect of both 2014/15 and 2015/16 to reflect the position as set out within the report.

(6) Executive endorse the approaches set out in section 6 of the report as appropriate measures to secure financial savings to address the identified budget shortfall in respect of 2014/15 and 2015/16.

(7) Officers be asked to explore opportunities arising from the growth agenda as part of its approach to addressing the Council's identified financial shortfall.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To ensure that the Council is in a position to operate its services effectively within the context of approved budgets.
(Director of Corporate Resources)

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

None.

0367. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Moved by Councillor A. Tomlinson and seconded by Councillor D. Kelly

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the stated Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and it is not in the public interest for that to be revealed.

EXECUTIVE

0368. TENDER FOR FLAT ROOFING REPAIRS AND REPLACEMENTS

Executive considered a report which sought approval to appoint a single contractor to carry out flat roofing repairs and replacements on all Council owned properties in the District.

An open invitation to tender had been advertised through Source Derbyshire which sought all relevant information. Subsequently each contractor was assessed on their ability to deliver the contract effectively.

Over 20 contractors requested copies of the tender pack and four returned submissions. All of the contractors were provided with a detailed specification of the Council's requirements. Bidders were invited to submit a price against a schedule of rates detailing various types of flat roofing repairs and replacements.

The four tender bids were received on Monday 22 July and assessed by the Assistant Property and Estates Manager and the Emergency and Responsive Repairs Manager.

Tenders were assessed on cost and quality. Dobson's scored the most points for the price section. They were assessed joint best on quality.

Moved by Councillor A. Syrett and seconded by Councillor D. Kelly

RESOLVED that Dobson's be appointed as a single supplier to provide flat roofing repairs and replacements where required on Council owned properties throughout the District for two years, with the option to extend for a period of up to two further years on a one plus one basis.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To develop vibrant town centres and rural communities
(Director of Development)

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

The scoring matrix appended to the report set out the other options available.

0369. UPGRADING OF BUSINESS PROCESSES

Executive considered a report which sought approval to acquire or develop some key systems in order to secure improvement in services and efficiency gains which would generate cashable savings in future financial years.

EXECUTIVE

With regard to the Planning Service, Executive was advised that a project involving the Council and its Strategic Alliance partner, North East Derbyshire, had been undertaken involving an independent assessment of the systems and processes within the service. While the work concerned had been largely completed it now needed to be developed into a project plan.

This project plan and implementation would comprise the following:

- A Project Manager shared between the two Authorities for a period of six to nine months. This would ensure that both councils fully utilise the functionality of the Uniform planning system. It was currently envisaged that this role would be undertaken by an existing member of staff.
- An external specialist ICT support will be required. It was envisaged this would be a combination of “bought in” local planning authority expertise and consultancy from the company which provided the current Planning software with regard to technical support and specialist training. This would facilitate the adoption of best practice from other local authorities.
- The migration of a range of IT records into the Uniform system which would enable the planning process to be based upon directly accessible electronic records, including the purchase of the necessary software and hardware.
- A training programme to improve awareness amongst staff concerning the functionality of the system and how to fully utilise the system as the basis of the planning process.
- Arrangements for an ICT Development Officer role to drive ongoing development of ICT and maximise the benefit derived from the Uniform system. This was the joint post shared between the two authorities.
- Provision of additional temporary technician resourcing to support the ICT Development Officer during the project implementation phase.

In order to progress the scheme at the earliest opportunity it was recommended that delegated powers to agree the project plan and to authorise the project to proceed be granted to the Chief Executive following consultation with the Chair of Planning.

In Customer Services, Executive was advised that the Council’s Customer Service Team were reliant for the delivery of services upon the use of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This system was a key element in the effective management of the Council’s relationship with local residents both when they visited the contact centres and when they phoned the Council.

EXECUTIVE

In conjunction with North East Derbyshire District Council, officers had been looking for the past few months at the options which were available to replace the existing system. A number of local authorities had been visited but in the majority of cases officers were of the view that the systems that were on offer were not as functional as the system currently operated by the Council.

The outcome of the visits was that only one system had been identified which met the requirements of the two councils. The system that had been identified following discussions with suppliers and visits to other local authorities operating this software was called Firmstep and was currently utilised by approximately 100 other local authorities.

Firmstep had a number of advantages relating to its functionality, business applications and the ability to transfer over scripts. Therefore it was recommended that delegated power be granted to the Chief Executive following consultation with the Leader of the Council to enter into contractual commitments in respect of the Firmstep solution, it having been subject to due diligence and procurement processes.

Executive was then advised that the Council had seen significant increases in the level of demands from rising numbers of residents visiting the contact centres and from increasing demands in respect of telephone enquiries. In the first quarter of 2013/14 there was an increase of 12% in face to face contacts with an 8% increase in payments.

The result of this increase in demand had been that waiting times had increased, contact centres had become very crowded and workload on staff had significantly increased. A number of measures had been put in place to address the position including the appointment of an additional four part time cashiers (two FTEs), training and support for staff and addressing levels of sickness absence. While there had been some indications that work levels may have peaked in the first quarter there was clearly a significant rise in demand from last year and workloads may again increase into winter.

It was therefore proposed that Executive consider the following three recommendations:

- That the contracts for the four temporary cashier posts be extended until 31 March 2014, with funding to be provided by the specific grant provided to local authorities to cover the costs of administration in respect of the changes associated with welfare reform.

EXECUTIVE

- That the contact centre phone lines open at 9:00 am rather than 8:00 am. Given the relatively low number of calls received at this time the resource would be better utilised at the more busy times of the day. This proposal would be subject to detailed consultation with Central Control.
- Establish an appointment system for benefit enquiries which would help move some of these queries to the less busy periods of the day and would avoid customers having to spend a long period of time waiting for a specialist advisor.

Officers advised that concerns expressed by members in respect of staffing the IT to support the new planning system would be addressed. Members were also advised that contingencies were in place to mitigate against any unlikely service failure of the new system.

Executive was informed that the introduction of the Firmstep system would ultimately result in efficiency savings. Details of the new system would be provided to Members via a presentation at the Saltergate Site on 11 September 2013.

Moved by Councillor A. Tomlinson and seconded by Councillor D. Kelly

RESOLVED that (1) Delegated powers be granted to the Chief Executive following consultation with the Chair of Planning Committee to agree the proposed upgrade of the planning system as set out in section 3 of the report at a cost of up to £50,000 with the expenditure to be funded from the Efficiency Grant available to the Council in 2013/14 plus existing approved budgets.

(2) Delegated powers be granted to the Chief Executive following consultation with the Leader or Deputy Leader to agree to purchase the Firmstep software package subject to satisfactory resolution of any outstanding issues with the proposed solution.

(3) The costs of implementing the system in year 1 of £95,000 be charged against the Council's Efficiency Grant.

(4) Executive agree to extend the contracts for the four temporary cashier posts until 31 March 2014 at an overall cost of £30,000, with funding to be provided by the specific grant to local authorities to cover the costs of administration in respect of the changes associated with welfare reform.

(5) The contact centre phone lines open at 9:00 am rather than 8:00 am with effect from 1 November 2013 in order to better align our resources with the requirements of local residents.

EXECUTIVE

REASON FOR DECISION:

To improve the service that the Council offers to local residents while securing the financial efficiencies necessary to operate effectively against a background of ongoing reductions in the level of central government financial support for local authorities.
(Director of Corporate Resources)

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

As set out in the report.

The meeting concluded at 1100.