

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES**

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Lee Mason, at his meeting held on Thursday, 22 October 2015 at 10.00 am in The Executive Meeting Room - Third Floor, The Guildhall

### **Present**

Councillor Lee Mason (in the chair)

Councillor Colin Galloway  
Councillor Hugh Mason

### **Officers Present**

Louise Wilders, Director of Community and Communication  
Matt Willis, Local Taxation Manager  
Mark Tutton, Building Services and Support Manager  
Nick May,  
Sue Page, Finance Manager

#### **15. Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 1)**

The Cabinet Member for Resources welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that Councillor Steve Hastings was attending this meeting as an observer.

There were no declarations of members' interests.

#### **16. Apologies for Absence (AI 2)**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **17. Revenues and Benefits Penalties (AI 3)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Director of Customer and Communications, Louise Wilders and Matt Willis, Local Taxation Manager presented the report and explained that its purpose was to seek approval to undertake consultation on imposing fixed penalties on residents who fail to notify Portsmouth City Council within a prescribed timescale of a relevant change in their circumstances which may result in a reduction to their benefit or an increase in their chargeable Council Tax.

The matters proposed to be consulted on are as set out in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6 of the report.

During discussion, the following matters were clarified

- After the initial fine of £70, there would then be negotiation on how the debt would be repaid and this would not be shown as non- payment of Council Tax. (check)
- Individual circumstances of each case would be looked at and the consultation results should indicate whether the proposals would disproportionately affect the poorest in society.
- Many local authorities already have similar schemes in place and most of them are not experiencing difficulty in collecting the fines. Essentially, this will serve as an encouragement to report changes, but will also produce income.
- With regard to a query on how it would be decided that someone "intentionally and knowingly" failed to communicate changes in circumstances, it was confirmed that all council tax bills and correspondence would clearly state that changes have to be communicated and what the consequences of not advising these would be if the proposals were introduced. Whether a person was living alone in a property or with others was a clear concept.
- It was confirmed that cases would be looked on according to their merits - so account would be taken of matters such as bereavement, English not being the person's first language, illiteracy etc.
- Late reporting of changes that affect housing benefit often results in overpayments being made and it is in those circumstances that consultation on introducing a penalty is being sought.
- It was confirmed that consultation would be undertaken using a wide variety of methods including through the post and on the website. If fines were to be introduced following consultation, there would be a communication strategy to ensure maximum publicity.
- There would be a report back to Resources Cabinet after the consultation as a decision would be needed before this can be implemented.

The Cabinet Member thanked officers for their report and said he would approve the recommendations in the report and would receive a further report once the consultation results were available.

**DECISION:**

**That the Cabinet Member for Resources agrees that consultation takes place on the implementation of fixed penalties as permitted under the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Social Security Administration Act 1992, whereby anyone who intentionally or knowingly fails to notify the Council of any change affecting Council Tax Liability or the Local Council Tax Support Scheme or Housing Benefit may be liable to a fixed penalty.**

**18. Utilities Management Capital Project (INFORMATION ONLY) (AI 4)**

(TAKE IN INFORMATION ONLY REPORT)

Mark Tutton, Building Services and Support Manager, introduced the report which was to update the Cabinet Member on the revisions to the proposed project list for the Utilities Management Capital Programme.

He advised that in view of recent changes in Government policy to cut the feed-in tariff rates for photovoltaic solar systems from January 2016, the Utilities Management capital programme has been restructured to accelerate spend on PV to maximise returns..

As a result, he advised that the Mountbatten Centre CHP project had been delayed and was now included in the Capital bids for 2016/17.

The report listed the current status of projects funded from the revised Utilities Management Capital Programme that are in the process of being prepared or that are underway.

The report also listed additional projects that had been added owing to favourable tenders received for projects already approved.

During discussion, the following matters were clarified

- the photovoltaic solar systems are expected to produce a return of around 20% and this is likely to increase as the feed in tariff increases in line with inflation and is guaranteed for 25 years. After around 20 years, the system may become less effective but the drop in efficiency is likely to be small.
- the installation costs would be paid for from the return from the tariffs
- the system worked on cloudy days and even generated power at night if there was a full moon.
- it was confirmed that there was still some work to do before the tariff rates reduced.in January

Mr Tutton agreed to bring a report back to the Resources portfolio once the system was up and running but said that experience gained in the housing department showed there would be efficiencies.. He would keep the Cabinet Member, Councillor Lee Mason informed of progress.

## **19. Super Connected Cities (INFORMATION ONLY) (AI 5)**

(TAKE IN INFORMATION REPORT)

Nick May introduced the report which updated the Cabinet Member on the Super Connected Cities Programme and the potential opportunities offered by the new WiFi infrastructure deployed in the City.

He said that there were three main goals for the Super Connected City programme as follows

- To support economic growth innovation and enterprise in Portsmouth
- To enhance the competitiveness of our city
- To aid digital inclusion

He provided a summary of progress to date and then outlined future plans.

He said that there were opportunities to use the technology to benefit residents, businesses and visitors and there were also opportunities to provide income streams to the Authority. The Wireless Concession had originally been dropped from the programme because of lack of market

demand. However, things have changed and there is now a surge of interest and the market has picked up.

Information gathered at a workshop in August organized by the University is being used to draft a business case for use in future funding applications.

During discussion the following matters were clarified

- It was not usual for a supplier to wish to be the sole concession holder
- A consultant was advising on matters such as ensuring consistency of connectivity and how anything new would fit with the existing My City WiFi

Nick May said that he would bring a further report back to this portfolio on progress and to provide a business case on how to take this forward.

The Cabinet Member thanked Mr May for his report and said he was pleased with progress so far but that there was a need to accelerate progress as the City was not as far advanced as it could be.

## **20. Monitoring of the First Quarter 2015/16 Revenue Cash Limits and Capital Programme (INFORMATION ONLY) (AI 6)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Sue Page, Finance Manager, introduced the report and apologised that the dates in paragraph 4 on the original report were incorrect and should have referred to 2015/16. The correct report had been uploaded on to the website.

She explained that paragraph 5 Revenue Expenditure draws attention to particular areas set out in Appendix A and paragraph 7 Capital Programme draws attention to particular areas set out in Appendix B.

During discussion the following matters were clarified

- With regard to the forecast overspend in HR, Legal and Performance in item 2, Appendix A, Ms Page said that sometimes the figures showed a worse position than was actually the case owing to timing issues. She confirmed that this was being closely monitored and that the figures in the next quarterly report are expected to show a lower forecast overspend.
- With regard to item 22, Appendix A, Ms Page said that the target had not been met as the savings had not yet been realised. The next quarterly report was expected to show that this had changed.

The Cabinet Member for Resources thanked everyone for their reports and for attending the meeting.

The meeting ended at 10.50am.

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Councillor Lee Mason  
Cabinet Member for Resources