

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES**

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Lee Mason, at his meeting held on Thursday, 21 January 2016 at 12.00 pm at the The Executive Meeting Room - Third Floor, The Guildhall

### **Present**

Councillor Lee Mason (Cabinet Member for Resources)

Councillor Hugh Mason,(Liberal Democrat Opposition Spokesperson)

### **Officers Present**

Louise Wilders, Director of Customer and Communication

Matt Willis, Local Taxation Manager

Nick May, IT Manager

Sue Page, Finance Manager,

Lorraine Porter, Superintendent Registrar

#### **1. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **2. Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 2)**

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

#### **3. Revenues and Benefits - Council Tax Penalties (AI 3)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Local Taxation Manager, Matt Willis, presented the report and explained that its purpose was to seek approval to implement a policy of 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 an increase in their chargeable Council Tax.

He said that the Council has a responsibility to deliver value for money and a duty to protect taxpayers' money. Evidence from other Local Authorities who have introduced these schemes demonstrates that a penalty scheme encourages customers to notify the Council of changes more quickly and that this saves money through the administration of overpayment recovery.

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 agreed**

- 1. that the implementation of fixed penalties from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 as permitted under the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 whereby anyone who fails to notify the Council of any change affecting Council Tax Liability or the Local Council Tax Support Scheme may be liable to a fixed penalty fine.**
  - 2. that where an application is made to waive the penalty on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, the Local Taxation Manager or Director of Community and Communications be given delegated responsibility to use their discretion.**
- 4. Public Access Wifi and High Speed Broadband (Super connected cities) (AI 4)**

(TAKE IN INFORMATION ONLY REPORT)

Mr Nick May introduced the report which provided information on the current status of High Speed Broadband and Public Access Wifi availability across the city and potential future direction.

Background information was set out in section 3 of the report and analysis shows that wifi in public buildings is being extensively used.

Section 4 of the report provides information about the current status and future direction of public access wifi including MyCityWifi, Wireless Concession and the Internet of Things. Mr May said that the Wireless Concession is seen as a potential opportunity to generate a revenue stream from advertising making it vitally important that the contract is drawn up to benefit the city of Portsmouth. If we own the infrastructure, we can benefit from potential income streams. Mr May undertook to bring a report to a future meeting of this portfolio about income streams as soon as there is enough information to warrant it.

Mr May said that schemes were being produced so that if any funding became available it would be a relatively quick process to apply for it. The Cabinet Member for Resources thanked Mr May for his report and supported the initiatives that were underway.

- 5. Data Centre Accommodation Update - Information report (AI 5)**

(TAKE IN INFORMATION ONLY REPORT)

Nick May introduced the report which was to inform the Cabinet Member about the current status of the accommodation project on the ground floor of the Civic Offices next to the Data Centre.

He explained that the original plan had been altered because the investigation into the basic infrastructure during the design process had shown that the area was never designed to accommodate staff. This had caused some delay because a new specification had to be completed, additional funding sought and a procurement exercise undertaken. The plan of the layout is attached to

the report as Appendix A and the build is scheduled to start at the end of February/early March. The new Data Centre is intended to provide the working area for the computer operators and a separate area for the large corporate printers, a storage area for new equipment and maintenance stock, a workshop / build area for Technicians and an additional hot-desking area for Infrastructure Engineers to work in close proximity to the servers / switchgear etc.

Mr May said he would be happy to arrange a tour of the area for members after the meeting.

The Cabinet Member thanked Mr May for his report and said he was pleased that this was being progressed.

## **6. Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Coroners Update - Information report (AI 6)**

(TAKE IN REPORT FOR INFORMATION)

Lorraine Porter, Superintendent Registrar, introduced the report which updates the Cabinet Member for Resources on the service improvements undertaken to address the recommendations agreed in the Cabinet report of 6 November 2014 and on further developments planned for the coroners service enabled by the relocation to the civic offices.

Ms Porter explained that the service successfully transferred from a jointly managed service of Hampshire Constabulary and Hampshire County Council to PCC management on 1 April 2015 and that the Coroner's staff were successfully TUPE'd from their respective organisations to PCC employment. The next stage will be to harmonise all staff under PCC terms and conditions and this will inform a future review of the service.

She said that the Coroners Service is to relocate from the Guildhall to a suite on the Brunel Wing in the Civic Offices on 1 February 2016. The new accommodation will provide a more welcoming, professional and modern environment for a more responsive and user-friendly service to the public at a deeply traumatic and emotional time in their lives. She explained additional benefits as outlined in the report.

The initial actions outlined in the Cabinet report of 6 November 2014 have been achieved and the service will continue to review service provision and service structure to better manage costs, improve service delivery and ensure that Portsmouth City Council and the public, are receiving the best value.

In response to queries, the following matters were clarified:-

- The superintendent registrar would look at the current split in charges 70 % PCC and 30% HCC to see whether the costs in relation to the move were fairly apportioned.
- The superintendent registrar confirmed that her role was to oversee staff as the coroner was not employed by PCC and did not line manage staff.

- The superintendent registrar confirmed that further integration would be looked at but there were many regulations and laws that had to be complied with.

Louise Wilders, Director of Customer and Communications (whose directorate the Coroner's service was part of until relatively recently) wanted to give credit to Ms Porter and her staff for all the hard work they had put in.

The Cabinet Member for Resources said he was pleased with the progress made and thought that the move into the Civic Offices was a good one. He was particularly pleased that there is now an improved environment for the bereaved attending inquests.

The Coroner's Service is to relocate from the Guildhall to a suite on the Brunel Wing Civic Offices on 1 February 2016 and once the move had happened, arrangements would be made for the Cabinet Members and Opposition spokespersons to have a tour of the new facility.

**7. Monitoring of the Second Quarter 2015/16 Revenue Cash Limits and Capital Programmes - information only (AI 7)**

(TAKE IN REPORT FOR INFORMATION ONLY)

Sue Page introduced the report which compares the forecast revenue outturn 2015/16 with the cash limited budget for that year and the forecast capital expenditure with the approved capital programme and provides information to enable an understanding of the reason for variances. It also lists the action to be taken to mitigate the effect of forecast overspends.

With regard to the Revenue programme, Ms Page explained that to date there is an uncommitted balance on the reserve of £738,400. Any non- windfall underspend achieved by the portfolio at the end of the current year will be added to the reserve and conversely any overspend will need to be met from it.

With regard to the Capital Programme, this has been updated to reflect the impact of new schemes, further approved amendments, re-phasing of expenditure and the removal of completed schemes.

In response to a query about the overspend of £234,600 in line 8 of Appendix B, Ms Page said this will be met by the underspend in line 10 - Landlords Maintenance Budget. Ms Page said that the overspend falls within Owen Buckwell's area and that the explanation given was that work would pick up again so there was no advantage in reducing staff levels. Ms Page said that the situation was being monitored for appropriate remedial action to be taken.

The meeting concluded at 1.15pm.

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Councillor Lee Mason  
Cabinet Member for Resources