

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Hugh Mason at his meeting held on Thursday 24 March 2011 at 8.45 am in Conference Room A, Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

Present

Councillor Hugh Mason
Councillor Donna Jones
Councillor David Horne

5. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

6. Declarations of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

7. Twinning Report

The Local Democracy Manager introduced the report and said that twinning was the subject of a Scrutiny review which reported its findings in November 2009. Due to changes within the service responsible for overseeing the key elements of twinning at that time, the officer's response in February 2010 recommended that a further report be written concerning twinning arrangements generally once the service had been reviewed and this is the report before the Cabinet Member for Resources for decision today. Suggestions in the report included reinvigorating the Cabinet Member for Resources' powers in accordance with the constitution, introducing a more sophisticated and structured way of considering grants for the committees and suggesting that formal administrative support currently given by the city council be withdrawn from the new municipal year.

Deputations were received from Mr Alex Bentley and from Councillor Steve Wemyss. After the deputations had been made, a general discussion took place during which the following points were considered:

- Clarification was given that one of the reasons for having a deadline for applications for the grant money was so that all committees can bid simultaneously.
- The report is aimed at providing a focus for the committees but without Customer, Community & Democratic Services being involved in their day to day administration.
- Clarification was given that the Resources portfolio was the correct place for twinning matters to be considered.

- Discussion took place about whether at the end of each year money not allocated to an ongoing project should be returned to the corporate balance.
- Secretarial provision was discussed.

Following discussion the Cabinet Member decided

- (1) to remind the chairs of the Duisburg and Haifa twinning committees of the role the Resources portfolio has with regard to twinning and associated arrangements and to physically include the responsibilities listed in 4.3 of the report.
- (2) that with more limited resources the Cabinet Member for Resources will seek applications for funding via the attached application form to be supported by and based on the committees' plans for the year, a Resources Portfolio meeting will then consider in June/July 2011, applications received by a deadline to be determined.
- (3) that unspent balances from the Duisburg and Haifa committees will ordinarily be returned to the corporate balance at the end of each financial year, the only exception being in respect of the requisite funding for previously approved specific projects, which overrun into the next financial year, such sum must be clearly identified and agreed by the Cabinet Member for Resources prior to the applicable year end.
- (4) that option 1 outlined in 5.1 of the report be adopted pending an improved financial position when funding can be provided to consider option 2.
- (5) that for the time being the Resources portfolio continue to perform the overarching committee role for the twinning function and that the effectiveness of this arrangement be reviewed in due course at which time the need for developing the decision making supporting structure, (for example the possible establishment of sub committees), having regard to the future level of involvement in twinning and friendship associations, will be assessed with a recommendation to Cabinet and Council if required.
- (6) that following the decision to select option 1 and the ceasing of officer support at the end of this current municipal year, the grant process shall allow for the consideration of bids to help fund any external administrative support sought for the twinning committees, subject to any request being submitted through the prescribed application form and on the understanding that any funds that may be released for this purpose are drawn from the existing available twinning budget (currently £8,000).

8. Customer, Community & Democratic Services (CCDS) Business Plan (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Mr David Adams presented the report and explained that the purpose was to seek approval for the key objectives as set out in the report and on the plan. He explained that current priorities included the election and the referendum, the opening of Southsea library and the City Helpdesk function, work on transition from LINK to HealthWatch and budget considerations. Mr Adams explained that the Localism Bill was going through parliament at the moment and that there may well be implications flowing from this for Customer, Community & Democratic Services. He said that key things in connection with this included the political management structure, the range of local referenda, probity and watchdog facilities (for example following the abolition of Standards for England), resources and ITC issues. In response to questions Mr Adams said that there was no particular strategic reason for CCDS to have management of the civic coffee shop but that it did not fit particularly well with any service and this was a result of a Cabinet decision. Mr Adams said that in the longer term the coffee shop may not stay with CCDS.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- Concern was expressed about the running of the forthcoming election and it was hoped that lessons had been learned from the last election.
- Concern was expressed that services were not all using the Communications Department in CCDS and perhaps more could be done to ensure that this happened.
- With regard to Scrutiny Management Panel, the question was raised about its overall output and whether or not it represented a good use of taxpayers' money.

Mr David Adams said that the transformation programme should ensure that the service was much more robust. The various services in PCC were encouraged to use the design team in CCDS but there was a limit on how much time could be spent to ensure that this happened. With regard to Scrutiny Management Panel, CCDS is aware of this issue in relation to providing value for money but that as the Localism Bill was likely to precipitate a change in structure, it was felt that it would be better to wait until matters became clearer before taking much action at the moment to avoid wasting effort.

The Local Democracy Manager said that the Health Scrutiny Panel was governed by different legislation and even following the Localism Bill, councils would still be obliged to carry out health scrutiny.

DECISION:

That the Cabinet Member for Resources approved the plan and the key objectives for the service, as set out in the report.

9. Information Service Business Plan (AI 8)
(Verbal Report)

The Cabinet Member for Resources agreed to take this item earlier in the agenda as the Head of Information Services had another meeting to attend.

The Head of Information Services provided a verbal report on the major restructure that had taken place in her service. She explained that the vision was to be a customer-focused service providing value for money with a focus on delivering innovative and efficient solutions. She explained that the transformation programme meant that Information Services would have much to do as the programme involved a great deal of technology. The Head of Information Services said that her service was focusing on providing fit for purpose solutions.

During discussion various terms used in the report were explained:

- With regard to procurement and efficiency, it was explained that this was part of the transformation programme. It was agreed that Councillor Mason would have early sight of this in the Resources Committee when the matter was ready to come before members ie before it went to Cabinet or Council.
- With regard to resource planning the Head of Information Services explained that she had a fairly good idea of what would be required from the transformation programme and has focused on core business which meant that there were no “nice to have” projects, but only essentials. The Head of Information Services said that there was still inconsistency in the teams and that her aim was to ensure that behaviours and competencies were both equally important in each individual’s personal development plan. Basically the Head of Information Services felt that she had identified weaknesses and was in the process of addressing these. She said that her long term plan was to look at income regeneration and making savings through efficiencies. Her aim was to provide services for Portsmouth first and to make sure that the systems in place were very good. Once information technology was excellent in Portsmouth, she would hope to capitalise on this and provide services outside the city.

DECISION:

That the Cabinet Member received the verbal report and approved the objectives in the business plan.

10. Update on Voluntary and Community Sector (AI 5)

The Third Sector Partnerships and Commissioning Manager apologised that there was no written report at this stage. She explained that the transformation programme, the move towards transparency and the Localism Bill as well as the Big Society agenda were all affecting the voluntary sector. This meant that things were changing very rapidly. She said that the team of two within the Portsmouth City Council were working with external partners. The Third Sector Partnerships and Commissioning Manager drew the Cabinet

Member's attention to the following:

- There had been a jointly funded project to provide a community legal advice centre to provide services in the locality. This was jointly funded with the Legal Services Commission. Owing to changes in the Ministry of Justice, funding for the project could no longer be made after 31 March 2011. Although PCC can fund the Portsmouth Advice Centre for a further year, there had been no bidders for the legal aid part of the operation. The Third Sector Partnerships and Commissioning Manager explained that from Portsmouth City Council's point of view, the good news was that funding was not being cut.

The Third Sector Partnerships and Commissioning Manager explained that as part of the budget setting process, members had asked for a review of counselling services. Once the information had been gathered, this would be brought back to Resources portfolio. Currently the review of counselling services had not yet been scoped but it was likely that it would look at how data was collected, and also how commissioning and procurement within the sector had been carried out. The Third Sector Partnerships and Commissioning Manager explained that for the last few years Portsmouth City Council had benefited from Take Part funding but that this was coming to an end. In addition volunteer management posts in the services had been lost.

Mr John Palmer, Chief Executive of Community First explained that there had been a very successful fair in the Guildhall concerning volunteering. More than 670 people had attended. Mr Palmer said that ten requests for help had been received by the new helpline. He explained that he would expect a steady stream of people to seek advice. The Portsmouth City Council transition fund was due to open on 25 March and this provided interim help to those voluntary sector initiatives that had had their funding cut.

Mr Palmer explained that the new Victory Consortium was to be launched in May. The Chief Executive, Mr David Williams would be a keynote speaker and a prospectus would be issued with an invitation to join. Mr Palmer said that he would ensure that briefings were available to the Resources portfolio holder.

Mr Palmer also said that Community First were having to reposition and refocus what they actually provided and that a draft would be out for consultation soon. He agreed to provide a summary of the business plan for the Resources Committee.

There followed a general discussion about the provision of services now that the Legal Services Commission had pulled out of the advice centre. Ms Lindley said that alternative funding streams were being explored but said she was confident that there would be something suitable in place in spite of the Legal Services Commission having pulled out of the advice centre. She said that it was important that people realised that the centre was not closing.

11. Support for the Voluntary & Community Sector 2011/12 – Voluntary Sector Annual Report (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Members heard that the report made recommendations on the allocation of funding for the voluntary and community sector for the grant year 2011/2012. The Third Sector Partnerships and Commissioning Manager explained that the grant pot was much reduced owing to budget savings that had taken place over the last two years. More organisations receiving grant funding from PCC were asked to complete an impact assessment explaining the effect a reduction in services would have upon their services and these were taken into account when decisions regarding allocation of funding were made. In addition, a transition fund totalling £100,000 has been established to help organisations affected by cuts to their funding.

DECISIONS:

That the Cabinet Member for Resources

- (1) Agrees the allocation of funding for 2011/2012 in appendices 1-6**
- (2) Suggests that Directorates who have reduced levels of funding to Voluntary & Community Organisations should meet with them to discuss other funding sources and monitor the impact of reduction in services.**

12. Audit and Performance Improvement Business Plan (AI 7)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Head of Audit & Performance Improvement introduced his business plan. He outlined the vision for the service as set out in 3.3 of the report and mentioned the significant factors affecting the service as outlined in 3.4 of the report. In particular he drew the Cabinet Member's attention to the ongoing reductions in government funding which presented considerable challenges for the council as a whole and for all services within it. He explained that for the API service this placed an increased emphasis on the efficiencies and transformation agenda and made it even more important to achieve good value for money through effective procurement.

In response to a question from the Cabinet Member for Resources, concerning improved governance of the council, the Head of Audit & Performance Improvement explained that much centralised regulation had been abolished for example the CAA, the national indicator set and the abolition of the Audit Commission. Although the District Auditor post would stay, currently the scope of his remit was not yet known. The LGA was looking at what self-regulation could mean and has produced a paper on this subject. With regard to objective 5 improving governance, his service is working to manage compliance with regard to financial rules and the code of conduct. In addition much work has been done in procurement.

DECISION:

The Cabinet Member for Resources approved the objectives contained within the Audit & Performance Improvement Service Business Plan, as

stated in section 3.5 of the report.

13. Exclusion of Press and Public (AI 9)

The Cabinet Member for Resources resolved that under the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act, 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985, the press and public be excluded for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that the report contain information defined as exempt in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972.

14. Merefield House Relocation of Service and Customer Access Improvements to Civic Offices - Capital Scheme Approval (AI 10)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Ms Sue Page explained that the purpose of the report was to seek the approval of Cabinet Member for Resources to release the capital budget of £616,000 from the approved capital programme to enable the Head of Asset Management to proceed with the implementation of the scheme to relocate the Children's Services staff from Merefield House to the Civic Offices and the reconfiguration of the ground floor reception to meet the requirements of both social services and customer services departments. She explained that the city council at its meeting on 8 February 2011 approved a revised capital estimate of £616,000 in order to fund the implementation of the scheme. Ms Page said that the investment would improve standards of service provision to users of Children's Social Services and assist in the co-ordination of work within social services. Other departments in the city council, would avoid costs associated with the refurbishment of Merefield House and would realise an ongoing saving in revenue running costs.

The Cabinet Member and opposition spokespersons asked for more information from the Head of Asset Management Service on the funding estimates outlined in the exempt report and to include details of the design proposals. Not all of the information requested could be answered at this meeting.

DECISION:

That the Cabinet Member deferred a decision for further information.

15. Date of Next Meeting (AI 11)

The date of the next scheduled meeting was scheduled for 7 July 2011 at 8.45 am. It was agreed that a special meeting to consider the deferred item from today's meeting would be held on Friday 1 April 2011 at 9.30 am.