

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES**

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Jeanette Smith, at his meeting held on Tuesday, 22 January 2019 at 10.00 am at the The Executive Meeting Room - Third Floor, The Guildhall

### **Present**

Councillor Jeanette Smith (in the chair)

Yahiya Chowdhury  
Councillor Scott Payter-Harris

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

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of members' interests.

#### **3. Equality & diversity strategy 2019-22 (AI 3)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Gina Perryman, Equalities and Diversity Officer, introduced the report explaining that Portsmouth City Council's Equality & Diversity Strategy needed to be refreshed to update the equality objectives. Although there is no statutory duty to provide a strategy document PCC still needs to demonstrate how it will comply with the Equality Act 2010 legislation and the strategy provides a framework on how this will be achieved. Paragraph 4.2 of the report sets out the content of the refreshed strategy for 2019-22.

In response to questions

#### **Blue Badge**

- Kevin McKee, Parking Manager, gave a brief overview of the new legislation explaining that central government were in the process of introducing a revised set of criteria for being eligible to receive a Blue Badge. Currently it is based on mobility whereas the eligibility criteria will be changed to include people with no physical disabilities but will include for example those with conditions such as autism. The guidance - that will have to be adopted by the Council - is not yet finalised but the changes will mean an increase in the number of Blue Badges being awarded and the expectation is that the opportunity for fraud will increase also.

- Kevin McKee confirmed that there is a specialist team that works specifically on discouraging Blue Badge fraud and its success has led to other local authorities in the area seeking training from PCC.

### **Workforce Data**

- With regard to page 47 of the Strategy, in response to a query raised about how to improve the collection of workforce data, Helen Kane, Assistant Director of HR, said there was a need to remind staff to declare and disclose data through the EBS system. HR's intention was to send a communication to all staff about this matter. It was important to first establish a baseline to understand the starting point and communicate that to staff advising what will be done with any data collected. A corporate approach is needed - perhaps by way of a range of focus groups to enable conversations to take place about fears people have. It was likely there would then be a six month monitoring period to look at the results of action taken.  
The Equalities and Diversity Officer advised that the staff opinion survey may include questions around disability in future. She also said it may be useful to be able to declare disabilities anonymously as this would probably result in more accurate data.
- The Cabinet Member for Resources expressed concern about ownership of workforce data saying this should be owned by officers in HR as well as being monitored by members. Helen Kane said HR will own the data. The Cabinet Member said she looked forward to receiving an update in 6 months' time.
- The Cabinet Member reiterated that Equalities is central to everything and should not be considered as just an add on.

### **Taxis**

- With regard to page 48 of the strategy - in relation to the issue relating to accessible taxis, the Licensing Manager, Nickii Humphrey said she was not aware of any major issues. Occasionally complaints are made that taxi drivers have refused to take a passenger in a wheelchair and in those cases robust action has been taken - such as through giving penalty points. Licensing have a structure and policy to deal with this. Before the Equality Act, they had had to rely on old legislation dating from 1847 but the Equality Act had added more strength to existing legislation.
- Drivers can be exempted from having to take wheelchair users such as if they have a pre-existing medical condition making it difficult for the driver to comply. There is a need to achieve a balance but not many complaints are received.
- The Equalities and Diversity Officer said that an issue in the evenings is that a driver can collect several fares in the time taken to take one wheelchair user.
- The Licensing Manager also suggested that members of the public can help in various ways when they see drivers refusing to take wheelchair

users - such as by noting registration numbers where people are visually impaired.

- The Cabinet Member said an awareness campaign is not a strong enough response.
- The Licensing Manager said that there are prescribed fines for drivers laid down in legislation, but ultimately drivers can be told to come before the Licensing Committee and could have their licence revoked.
- The Equalities and Diversity Officer said that disabled people find it difficult to get taxis during the day where there is a school run, but the Licensing Manager said there is nothing that can be done about that other than to licence more vehicles.

In summary, the Cabinet Member for Resources said that Equality Impact Assessments have been seen as a bolt-on exercise and not something that is viewed as an integral part of each report. She said a cultural change was required. All reports should include EIA wording and completed forms when needed.

The Equalities and Diversity Officer said that since 2016, all reports include EIA wording and where necessary, EIAs are attached. However there is still an issue around the quality of the EIA forms and also around ensuring members have the right amount of training to enable them to challenge the content of the EIA.

It was suggested that the Equalities and Diversity Officer could meet with the Cabinet Member to consider how this can be achieved.

**DECISION:**

**The Cabinet Member for Resources**

**(1) adopted the Equality & diversity strategy 2019-22, (Appendix 3)**

**(2) noted the update from the Equality & diversity strategy 2014-17 (Appendix 1)**

**4. Provision of Community Funerals (AI 4)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Richard Lee presented the report which provides clarity in respect of Portsmouth City Council's Community Funeral procedural framework.

He explained that Section 3 sets out what a community funeral is and explains the procedure adopted by PCC. Section 4 sets out the legislation that applies and what it means for the local authority. He also advised that the maximum award is up to £700 and that figure has not changed since 2003. Demand in Portsmouth has increased dramatically as shown in Table 1 in section 7 and a further increase is expected by the end of this financial year.

Section 8 sets out the costs of delivering a community funeral and section 8.2 explains the circumstances where PCC can claim back costs from the deceased's estate.

PCC's practice is to provide burials for the deceased, but will cremate if that is requested in a Will.

Mr Lee advised that there is no statutory duty to seek relatives through a probate researcher or genealogical researcher and PCC's assessment is that use of these is problematic as set out in section 11.3.

However, the Council is mindful that a community funeral should be looked at as a last resort and reasonable enquiries of remaining relatives and families must be made.

Finally Mr Lee referred to the Director's comments in section 18 of the report which refers to an increase in demand of 268% in the last 4 years and that the current growth trend and the ability of the Regulatory Services to process funerals and recover costs are unsustainable.

During discussion it was confirmed

- That the reason for only arranging burials is that a family member may make contact later and make other arrangements such as to re-bury in another part of the country so it provides some flexibility.
- That the administration charge for cost recovery is around £35 per hour and would involve between 4 and 6 hour work. However many people have no estate.
- The shortfall in recovery rate is met by the Resources portfolio.

#### **DECISION:**

##### **The Cabinet Member**

**(1) Approved the manner in which community funerals are delivered, as outlined in Section 13 of the report.**

**(2) Noted the financial pressures placed upon the community funerals service, as set out in Section 17 of the report.**

## **5. Monitoring of the Second Quarter 2018/19 Revenue Cash Limits and Capital Programme (AI 5)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Sue Page introduced the report which informs the Cabinet Member and Opposition Spokespersons of the forecast revenue expenditure for the year compared with the cash limited budget and the forecast capital expenditure against the revised capital programme for the Resources portfolio.

She advised that the key reasons for the 440k underspend are set out in section 4 of the report. Less significant under and overspending is shown in Appendix A. At the year end, underspends are retained in a portfolio specific earmarked reserve.

Details of the Capital programme are set out in section 6 with the additions to the capital programme since the start of the financial year being listed in section 6.4

Appendix B lists the situation on all capital schemes.

During discussion,

- Reference was made to the increased overspend in software licences. The Cabinet Member said that she would like to see a cross-group review of the IT service to be undertaken but not as a Resources item.
- Members were advised that "miscellaneous expenses" covers items such as subscription payments to organisations such as PUSH, feasibility studies etc. Ms Page said she would email a complete breakdown of miscellaneous expenses to members.

The Cabinet Member for Resources was pleased to note the success of Portsmouth Hive and said this was an example of where cross group co-operation had led to a very good outcome.

The Cabinet Member noted the report.

The meeting concluded at 11.20 am.

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Councillor Jeanette Smith  
Cabinet Member for Resources