

CABINET

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday, 21 March 2023 at 12.30 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE (in the Chair)
Chris Attwell
Kimberly Barrett
Jason Fazackarley
Lee Hunt
Steve Pitt
Darren Sanders
Lynne Stagg
Matthew Winnington

30. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Suzy Horton.

31. Declarations of Interests (AI 2)

No interests were declared.

Record of previous decision meetings - 21 February 2023 and 7 March 2023 (AI 3)

The record of decisions from the meetings held on 21 February 2023 and 7 March 2023 were approved as a correct record.

32. Hilsea Community Centre - Feasibility Outcome (AI 4)

James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services, introduced the report. He asked to put on record thanks from Stephen Baily (Director of Culture, Leisure & Regulatory Services) and himself to the following officers for their support in carrying out the feasibility study: James Daly, Catherine Ramsay, Kelly Nash, Stuart Palmer, Sarah Lindley, and the quantity surveyors. Vivid, who own the community centre in Howard Road, have commissioned Chichester Community Trust to develop a model to bring it back into use. Officers have encouraged the Trust to talk to ward members. It was still intended to develop the former Hilsea Lodge site as social housing. The report recommended the development feasibility include scope to develop a scheme with a community room/space whilst remaining sensitive to residents at the Russets, which was next door. Officers were also investigating preferential rates for using the facilities at the Rugby Club and Gatcombe House.

Since the report had been written and briefings with ward members held:

- Officers had cross-referenced the 2021 census with the 2011 census; there was no significant change in the ward's characteristics.
- The Director of Culture, Leisure & Regulatory Services has talked to Father Bob White about using the St Francis church hall.
- There have been discussions with the Head of Portsmouth Grammar School about access to the Hilsea playing fields.

- The ward member enquiry from residents of Southdown View about a community room has been raised with VIVID and the answer when received will be shared with Hilsea ward members.

Members thanked the Portsmouth Independents Party, particularly Councillor Russell Simpson, for bringing a notice of motion that led to the feasibility study; there had been no such work for about 20 years. Hilsea had a range of different communities and as there was already so much provision available, although some of it was under-used, it would be a waste of time and money to build a new community centre, especially as construction costs were likely to increase. Facilities at Gatcombe House were particularly recommended. There was significant deprivation in the north-west of the ward which was why officers were working with Vivid to bring the community room back into use. Members noted there has been anti-social behaviour in the ward.

As a community centre would have to operate in the evenings as well the day to be viable it would be inappropriate to use the former Hilsea Lodge site, next to the Russets, which was for adults with learning disabilities, some of whom lived there.

Members thanked Mr Hill and officers for working to bring buildings back into use. They looked forward to seeing the full results of the community engagement. The stocktake was a good starting point and would help identify resources.

Councillor Vernon-Jackson thanked ward councillors and officers for their work and noted it would continue after the elections.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet

1. Noted the outcome of the work to find a suitable location for a potential new community centre in the Hilsea ward.
2. Agreed that in light of the conclusions of the feasibility work that Portsmouth City Council funding and/or building a new community centre is not feasible.
3. Instructed officers to continue to work with VIVID to bring back into use an existing community centre located in the Hilsea Ward at Howard Road to the benefit of the community.
4. Noted the progress of a Youth Investment Fund bid in the Hilsea Ward utilising the VIVID owned community centre located in Howard Road which complements the facility and would work alongside a community centre.
5. Noted the potential for further community space to be available arising from the Hilsea Linear Park consultation and asks that the design of a social housing scheme at Hilsea Lodge considers including a community room/space.
6. Noted the work to engage existing property owners in the Hilsea Ward, specifically, Gatcombe House and the Rugby Club to promote a community hire rate and the positive outcome of those discussions.

33. Widening Participation in Local Democracy (AI 4)

Ian Fitchett, Electoral Services Manager, introduced the report.

In response to questions, Mr Fitchett said that so far about 200 to 250 people had applied for a voter authority certificate. The Electoral Engagement Officer joined the team in January 2023 and was doing a good job in what was a tough assignment. With the run-up to elections and applying the new requirements for voter identification Mr Fitchett would have liked the postholder to start earlier but that was not possible. The team would learn much from the experience of this year's local elections and would review it. There were six staff in Electoral Services, including an apprentice who started four weeks ago.

Mr Fitchett did not have precise numbers of students at the University who are registered to vote but at the voter registration stage of enrolment he received about 7,000 names. Many students registered the same way as other residents so numbers were difficult to measure but 6,000 to 7,000 at enrolment was encouraging. The electoral process was constantly being reviewed and evaluated.

Members were concerned the requirement for a voter authority certificate would deter people from voting. Members thought a report looking at people's experiences at polling stations, especially in view of the new requirements, of what worked well, what not so well, what could be done better, and the number of people who wanted to vote but could not, would be helpful. A report to the Cabinet in July would allow enough time to examine how the elections went and gather feedback.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

34. Member Champions Annual update (AI 5)

James Harris, Senior Local Democracy Officer, introduced the report.

Councillor Attwell, Cabinet Member for Communities & Central Services, thanked officers for compiling the report and the Champions for their work. He was keen to support Councillor's Hunt work on getting the Central Library listed.

Councillor Vernon-Jackson thanked the Champions for their work.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

35. Development of Equalities and Diversity Strategy (AI 6)

Lee Todd, Head of Marketing, Communications & Engagement, introduced the report.

In response to concerns that 263 respondents to a survey was not representative of a city of about 215,000 people, Mr Todd explained the survey was part of work to inform initial approaches. The draft strategy would go to the Cabinet for endorsement and then to full consultation.

Councillor Attwell thanked officers for the report, noting work had started from almost nothing. He thanked Karolina Szczepaniak, Equalities & Diversity Officer, for her energy and passion. He looked forward to the strategy. He thanked the Director of Corporate Services and highlighted the "achieving" status for commissioning and procurement, which had helped the social value team win a Gold award a couple of weeks ago.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

36. PFI - The Way Forward (AI 7)

Martin Lavers, Assistant Director for Regeneration, introduced the report and outlined the process for handing back the highways maintenance contract from Colas to the council. Further reports would return to the Cabinet.

Councillor Stagg, Cabinet Member for Traffic & Transportation, thanked Mr Lavers for his work on the massive contract. Keeping business running as usual as well as preparing for the handing back of the contract would need staff and resources. It was important roads and other assets were in the state specified in the contract. Councillor Vernon-Jackson thought it would be useful to have another Cabinet Member in addition to the Cabinet Member for Traffic & Transportation involved with the handback.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

37. Proposed extension to Shared Service Provision of Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response Services with Southampton (AI 9)

Laura Betsworth, Head of Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response, introduced the report.

Members thought the shared arrangements made sense in a number of ways as Portsmouth and Southampton shared many similarities. The huge value of the shared service provision was shown when the Covid pandemic started as it enabled a logical and co-ordinated response. Members placed on record their thanks to Ms Betsworth and her team.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet agreed:

1. That the Director: Culture, Leisure, and Regulatory Services (CLRS) be given delegated authority to extend the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Southampton City Council for the continued provision of the joint emergency preparedness, resilience, and response function with effect from 1st April 2023 at the latest for a further 5 years upon such terms and conditions as the Service Director: CLRS considers appropriate.
2. That the Director: Culture, Leisure, and Regulatory Services (CLRS) be given delegated authority to employ such staff as are reasonably required to undertake the services under the SLA.

38. Climate Change - A Year in Review (AI 10)

Kristina Downey, Principal Strategy Adviser, Climate Change, introduced the report and highlighted the significant, positive engagement and partnership working with the Hive, the University of Portsmouth and Shaping Portsmouth. Councillor Barrett, Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment, said the report was full of "good news stories" and hoped officers were pleased the initiatives were not siloed. Funding had been put into different initiatives across the council. Meeting climate change targets was quite scary but there were some amazing partnerships across the city to share ideas. Even if the council could not get funding for some projects, it could encourage and support other groups, for example, the Hive, to get it. She thanked Ms Downey and officers for the achievements described in the report and hoped it would be bigger next year.

Members said the current administration had made climate change a priority so had created a Cabinet post to be responsible for it. Since then there had been many achievements such as shore to ship power, solar panels in schools, and collecting food waste. There had been a huge change in the council's approach.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

39. Support for Armed Forces Families (AI 11)

Caroline Hopper, Lead Officer, Armed Forces Covenant, introduced the report.

Councillor Vernon-Jackson said as the Navy was based in Portsmouth the city had a different role than other port cities. It had to consider how it could support families when someone was deployed for four to six months. For example, service families needed support getting children a school place, particularly when they were moved at short notice. Families also needed support with housing. Members recognised the importance of service families as they held surgeries on naval estates and were working to implement and extend support. Members recognised there are families of other armed forces in Portsmouth.

Members thanked Ms Hopper for the report and Councillor Vernon-Jackson for being the Armed Forces Member Champion.

Councillor Vernon-Jackson thanked members who had been on the Cabinet in the past year, particularly Councillor Stagg, who was standing down, and formally recognised her work over many years.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

The meeting concluded at 1:24pm

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Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE
Leader of the Council