

CABINET

7 September 2016

Present: - Councillor Smith (Chairman)
Councillors Bourne, Cory, Feltham, Graham, Lilley, B.
Oxford and T. Young

Also in attendance: - Councillors Barlow, Coleman, Hazell, Laws, Scordis and
Willetts

98. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

99. Have Your Say!

The High Steward, Sir Bob Russell, addressed the Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). The Museum Resource Centre was a building of historical significance, given its industrial heritage. The Council had previously considered that the building needed to be retained. In considering the future of the building the Cabinet should reflect on its historic significance and the uses to which it is put. He would be willing to meet with Cabinet to discuss other potential uses for the building.

Councillor Smith, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked the High Steward for his comments, which would be taken into consideration when the Cabinet discussed the issue.

100. 2016/17 and 2017/18 Budget Update

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Laws attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Cabinet to express his disappointment that the Roman Walls would not be lit. It was important that Colchester promoted its heritage, which was its greatest asset. Given that the Council had given money to community groups, there was funding available. If the Museum Resource Centre was to be sold, he hoped that the funds would be reinvested into heritage and that some artefacts would be retained in Colchester.

Cabinet received a presentation from Karen Loweman, Director of Housing, Colchester Borough Homes, on the demand for housing in Colchester. This addressed the levels of housing demand and homelessness in Colchester. She explained the approaches taken to prevent homelessness and the impact of living in temporary accommodation. The challenges faced by homeless families in setting up a new home were highlighted together with the help the Council provided to families. In particular the help that the rent deposit guarantee scheme and new start home scheme would provide to vulnerable families was emphasised.

Councillor Smith, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked Karen for the presentation. He highlighted that there were 267 children in temporary accommodation in Colchester and that at current rates it would take 6 years to clear the housing waiting list. Only limited new social housing units would become available and the Council could no longer build housing itself. There was increased homelessness from the private rented sector, resulting from landlords no longer being able to afford their mortgages. The proposals in the report would allocate funding to help address homelessness, together with other priorities such as the town centre, businesses and the voluntary sector.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, presented the report to the Cabinet. The proposals in the report allocated funds to key priorities. In terms of the Roman Walls, the administration had invested heavily in the walls to maintain them to a high standard. The estimated cost of lighting the walls was £250,000. Funds were being allocated to projects such as the rent deposit scheme and the home start up scheme which would ameliorate the impact of government policies. It was proposed to “apply to accept” the proposed 4 year funding settlement. Whilst this meant that by 2019/20, the Council would be providing funding back to the Government, it was likely that if it was not accepted, then a more draconian settlement would be imposed. Overall the proposals contained in the report were prudent and would help the administration support vulnerable residents and community groups.

Councillor Bourne, Portfolio Holder of Housing and Public Protection, explained that the Council was under a duty to help those who were homeless or were threatened with becoming homeless. This was particularly difficult at present as there was little movement in the housing market band and therefore there were comparatively few properties available. Placing families in temporary accommodation removed them from their support networks, such as schools, families, GPs and transport links and therefore the Council pursued alternative options where possible. The proposal to fund a rent deposit scheme would allow a number of vulnerable families to move into the private rented sector and the home start up scheme would help rehoused families on low incomes acquire essential furnishing and appliances without resorting to high street loans at high interest. These schemes would make a huge difference to families in need.

Councillor T. Young, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Regeneration explained that whilst the administration would like to light up the Roman Walls, it had invested in improving and maintaining the walls, there were more important priorities that required funding. As well as the important funding towards addressing homelessness, £40,000 had been allocated to fund events in and around the town centre which would deliver economic benefit, increase tourism and boost the town centre. Councillor Annie Feltham, Portfolio Holder for

Business, Leisure and Opportunities, highlighted the £100,000 provided for grant funding which would enable residents to support their local communities.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Funding be reallocated as set out in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 of the Assistant Chief Executive's report.
- (b) The updated 2017/18 budget forecast as set out at paragraph 6.2 showing a current gap of £625k and the progress made to identify savings to assist with the delivery of the budget strategy be noted.
- (c) To "apply to accept" the Government's 4 year funding settlement with the publication of a required efficiency statement delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources.
- (d) It be noted that it is assumed that the Essex business rates pool will continue in 2017/18 and that an updated position will be reported to the next Cabinet meeting.
- (e) The Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources will reply to the Government consultation on 100% localisation of business rates.
- (f) The changes to the Treasury Management Strategy set out in section 8 of the Assistant Chief Executive's report including the change to the MRP policy be agreed.

REASONS

The Council is required to approve a budget strategy and timetable in respect of the year 2017/18.

The Assistant Chief Executive's report relates to the budget update, review of the current year's budget allocations, the Government's 4 year settlement offer and revisions to the treasury management strategy.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

There are different options that could be considered and as the budget progresses changes and further proposals will be made and considered by Cabinet and in turn Full Council.

The Council could choose not to accept the Government's 4 year settlement offer, however, this would not provide the certainty in respect of future funding and may result in lower grant funding in the coming three years.

101. Disposal of Museum Resource Centre

The Chief Operating Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor T. Young, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Regeneration, introduced the report and explained that the Museums Resource Centre was no longer fit for purpose. The Cabinet had visited the site and had noted the difficult working conditions experienced by staff working there. Whilst the concerns of the High Steward about the future of the building were noted, this could be addressed by the consideration of suitable conditions about the future use of the building. The current storage facility at Heckworth Close would be extended to provide modern office accommodation for museum staff and many resources would also remain in Colchester. Some archaeological material that was rarely accessed would be transferred to a deep store in Cheshire, but digital copies would be kept and these resources could be returned on request. The administration was also looking at how more of the collection could be displayed in Colchester.

Councillor Smith, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the capital receipt that would be generated from the sale of the Museum Resource Centre would be reinvested in the service and used to fund the extension of the facility at Heckworth Close.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The disposal of the Museum Resource Centre (MRC), 14 Ryegate Road, be approved.
- (b) The capital receipt from this sale be used for the extension of the Museum Store at Heckworth Close to allow the move of the service
- (c) Authority for the decision on the sale be delegated to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Regeneration.

REASONS

The MRC houses a range of functions for the Museum Service but is no longer fit for purpose. Significant spend would be required to bring the building up to a standard for the service.

We have looked at a range of options for an alternative location for the services working in the building and have identified that our Museum Store at Heckworth Close can be extended at a reasonable cost to accommodate these and providing more modern working conditions for our staff.

The building is in a very sought after location next to the park and has views over the Castle, making it attractive to developers.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

To not sell the building, however the building will be surplus to operational requirements

To keep the building and redevelop ourselves. While this option could be delivered it has

been agreed that the capital receipt from the sale will be available for the relocation of the services currently in the building and this would then be unaffordable

The capital receipt could be used for a range of other purposes, however this would mean the move would not be possible

102. Year End Performance Report Including Progress on the Strategic Plan Action Plan

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member together with minute 77 of the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 19 July 2016.

Councillor Willetts attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Cabinet to express his concern about the performance on KI W1 (residual household waste per household) and K1 W2 (household waste reused, recycled and composted), which had both not been met. Colchester's place on the league tables of best performing authorities in Essex had slipped in recent years, and Councillors should be given access to the latest figures. The administration should look at the best performing authorities in Essex and emulate them. More resources needed to be put into the service.

Councillor T. Young, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Regeneration, stressed that the report demonstrated an excellent level of performance overall. A very high percentage of targets had been met.

Councillor Graham, Portfolio Holder for Waste and Sustainability, explained that the administration was seeking to improve the performance on these indicators and more resources were being put in the Waste and Recycling Service. The results of the consultation on waste and recycling options would be published imminently. Information about the league table of Essex authorities was freely available.

Members of the Cabinet also highlighted Colchester Borough Homes performance on the Housing key Indicators and the performance on the payment of benefits. The high level of performance in these areas made a huge difference to vulnerable residents. The performance on the key indicator relating to staff sickness was also highlighted. This target had now been met which was indicative of improved staff engagement.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The performance update for the Council's key performance update for the period 31 March 2016 be noted.
- (b) The key performance indicators proposed for 2016/17 at Appendix 1 of the Assistant Chief Executive's report be agreed.
- (c) The progress of the Strategic Plan Action Plan for the year ending 31 March 2016 at Appendix 2 of the Assistant Chief Executive's report be noted.

REASONS

The Council has agreed a number of key performance measures which it uses to help

monitor progress and improvement. The report provides an update on the indicators and a review of progress against the Strategic Plan Action Plan along with our proposals for 2016/17 indicators.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were proposed.

103. Local Government Ombudsman - Annual Review 2015/16

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2015-16 be noted.

REASONS

To inform the Cabinet of the number of complaints received by the Local Government Ombudsman in relation to Colchester during 2015-16.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options are proposed.

104. Recommendation from the Governance and Audit Committee

Cabinet considered the recommendation contained in minute 12 of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 26 July 2016.

Councillor Willetts attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Cabinet to express his concern about the conduct of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting on 26 July 2016. He was concerned that the complaint against Councillor Buston had been politically motivated. He welcomed the recommendation to Cabinet and hoped it would be adopted. Whilst he was pleased that a member briefing on issues relating to travellers had been arranged for 13 October he hoped that this would cover issues relating to the rights of Councillors to raise residents' concerns that had been highlighted by this complaint.

Adrian Pritchard, Chief Executive, explained that if Councillor Willetts had concerns about the conduct of the Governance and Audit meeting on 13 October 2016 these should be addressed by formally referring them to the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Bourne, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Public Protection, explained that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex was arranging a meeting with the Leaders, Chief Executives and relevant Portfolio Holders of all Essex local authorities to discuss the issue and find a way forward with the Essex County Travellers Unit. This was welcomed and an update would be provided at the member briefing on 13 October 2016.

RESOLVED that a private meeting between Colchester Borough Council Councillors,

Colchester Borough Officers, Essex County Council, Essex Police and the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit be held to share information and provide an update on the situation within Colchester.

REASONS

Cabinet welcomed the recommendation from the Governance and Audit Committee as it would provide an opportunity to share information and provide an update on the situation in Colchester.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

It was open to the Cabinet not to accept the recommendation from the Governance and Audit Committee.

105. Progress of Responses to the Public

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a progress sheet a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Progress Sheet be noted.

REASONS

The progress sheet was a mechanism by which the Cabinet could ensure that public statements and questions were responded to appropriately and promptly.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to the Cabinet.