

CABINET

3 OCTOBER 2012

Present :- Councillor Anne Turrell (the Leader of the Council)
(Chairman)
Councillors Lyn Barton, Tina Bourne, Annie Feltham,
Martin Hunt (Deputy Leader) , Beverley Oxford and
Paul Smith

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Marcus Harrington
Councillor Pauline Hazell
Councillor Sonia Lewis
Councillor Sue Lissimore
Councillor Will Quince
Councillor Colin Sykes
Councillor Laura Sykes
Councillor Dennis Willetts

30. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2012 were confirmed as a correct record.

31. Apologies

Councillor T. Young's apologies were received. The Chief Executive indicated that Councillor Young was attending the Labour Party conference. Important meetings were not normally scheduled in the main party conference season and efforts would be made to avoid potential clashes in future.

32. Have Your Say!

Nick Chilvers addressed the Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(2). He requested an assurance that as part of the new bus station development there would be a highly visible safe route from the lift in Vineyard Street car park, across Vineyard Street and onto a made up area. He also requested confirmation from Councillor Feltham, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Leisure Services, that she had seen the full correspondence from the Chair of the Management Committee at Abbots Activity Centre with Matt Sterling, Housing and Communities Manager at Colchester Borough Council. The correspondence raised issues about the future of many items of equipment at the Activity Centre. He expressed support for comments made by Councillor T. Young about the art displays in the Visual Arts Facility, which he considered were a reflection of the views of the wider public. He asked what pressure he would bring to bear on firstsite to ensure a change of direction to make the displays more inclusive.

Councillor Barton, Portfolio Holder for Renaissance, indicated that white markings

would be placed across Vineyard Street to ensure the area was safe for users of the new bus station. Written responses would be sent to the other points raised.

33. Supporting Customers in Welfare Reform

The Executive Director, Ann Hedges, submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Quince attended and, with consent of the Chairman, addressed the Cabinet. He accepted that welfare reform would have an impact on both the Council's customers and the Council as a whole. The Council was taking the right approach by taking proactive action to help its customers. He thanked the Council's officers for the work they had undertaken on this issue.

Councillor Willetts attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Cabinet. He considered that the report dwelt on customers who were disadvantaged and did not explain the benefits welfare reform would bring to the majority. As a consequence of the reforms, benefits would be delivered in a more targeted way. He welcomed the increase in the number of residents who would pay Council tax. This would give more residents a better understanding of how the Council was seeking to manage its budget. He expressed concern that some residents on benefits could receive more than those in work. He expressed support for the proposals in the report which sought to improve the incentives for working and to improve the balance of fairness in the welfare system.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources, Councillor Felltham, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Leisure Services and Councillor Bourne, Portfolio Holder for Housing, responded. It was important to ensure residents were properly supported as the reforms were introduced. Council officers were working together across services to help residents and ensure they understood how the reforms would impact on them and their families. Councillor B. Oxford, Portfolio Holder for Customers, reminded Councillors that it was Customer Service week and invited Councillors to take the opportunity to shadow staff in the Customer Service Centre to see the problems residents were facing and how staff were helping resolve these issues.

RESOLVED that the actions being taken to support customers through Welfare Reform be noted.

REASONS

An innovative intervention is being undertaken to help support customers through the very significant changes that will take effect from April 2013 in Welfare to help to mitigate the impact for the Council and our customers.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to the Cabinet.

34. Supporting Families with Complex Needs

The Executive Director, Ann Hedges, submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member. Ann Hedges also made a presentation to Cabinet, which explained the background to the Life Programme that had been established in Colchester with Participle. The programme was designed to offer direct support to families with complex needs. A multi agency team will support families in a very different way from current practices and the programme aims to cut across traditional organisational boundaries. Good progress had been made in setting up the programme in Colchester, with a steering group and team in place and the first families to benefit from the programme had been identified.

Councillor Bourne, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Feltham, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Leisure Services and Councillor Turrell, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, indicated their support for the programme and their pride at being involved in such an innovative scheme. As well as supporting families with complex needs, the programme would benefits communities as a whole and participating organisations would also gain from the improvements in working practices that would result.

RESOLVED that the work being undertaken to improve the lives of families with complex needs be noted.

REASONS

A previous decision committed the Council and a range of partners to work with Participle on a new model for families with complex needs. The presentation to Cabinet provided more detail on the programme and the Council's progress to date.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

35. 2013/14 Revenue Budget

The Head of Resource Management submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Willetts attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Cabinet. He noted the inclusion of an assumption of a 2.5% Council Tax rise in the report. Given previous statements in Council meetings about the impact of elections by thirds in keeping Council tax low he wondered whether the lack of borough elections in May 2013 had encouraged a Council tax rise. If the administration did not intend to raise Council tax it was misleading to include an assumption of a rise within the report. Concern was also expressed about the dependency on car parking income and the

impact that Park and Ride may have on car parking income. Clarification was sought on what the Council was doing to reduce this dependency. The inclusion of borough wide food waste collections was welcomed but he considered this was a necessity given Colchester's fall in the Essex league tables for recycling.

Councillor Quince attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Cabinet. He noted the saving identified in the report from the fact that there were no borough elections in May 2013 and sought clarification as to whether this was the level of saving that would be achieved each year, bar election years, if the Council moved to four yearly elections. Colchester Borough Council had taken a political decision not to support the Inter Authority Agreement and therefore had brought the issues about funding from the County Council on waste issues on itself. He also sought clarification as to where the savings and risks associated with the recent decision on Abbots Activity Centre were reflected in the budget.

Councillor Turrell, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, indicated that no decision had been taken at this stage on whether to include a Council Tax increase in the budget. The assumptions underpinning the budget process changed frequently and it was only as the budget neared completion that an informed decision could be taken. Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources, indicated that car parking income had been reduced in the last budget. He confirmed that the cost for the elections given in the report was accurate as an approximate cost of each year's election, although this could fluctuate slightly. The costs relating to the decision on Abbots Activity Centre would be met from this year's budget, but £400 000 had been made available to cover a number of future risks factors.

Councillor Hunt, Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services, stressed that the decision not to sign the Inter Authority Agreement had been an environmental, rather than a political decision. Authorities that had signed the agreement had not received as many benefits from the agreement as expected. The key factor in respect of waste and recycling was that the Council had reduced the amount of waste that was sent to landfill.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources, introduced the report and stressed that savings of £1.67 million had been identified, without a significant impact on front line services. The budget gap of £374,000 was manageable and the administration was confident that a balanced budget could be achieved. A recurring risk factor of £400,000 had been included in the budget in respect of various potential risks arising from Government reforms and other budget issues such as inflation. This reflected a general trend for risk to be transferred from central government to local government. Without this risk factor, the budget would show a small surplus.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The updated 2013/14 budget forecast as set out at paragraph 6.1 of the Head of Resource Management's report showing a current gap of £374k be noted.

(b) It be noted that officers are working towards delivering a balanced budget and that progress has been made to identify savings to assist with the delivery of the budget strategy. (see section 9 of the Head of Resource Management's report).

(c) The cost pressures set out at paragraph 7.1 of the Head of Resource Management's report be included in the 2013/14 budget forecast.

(d) The growth items set out at paragraph 8.1 of the Head of Resource Management's report be included in the 2013/14 budget forecast.

(e) The provisional savings set out at section 9 of the Head of Resource Management's report be included in the 2013/14 budget forecast.

(f) The potential 2013/14 budget forecast variables and risks set out in section 11 of the Head of Resource Management's report be noted.

REASONS

The Council is required to approve a budget strategy and timetable in respect of the year 2013/14. The Head of Resource Management's report gives an update on the budget and a review of the capital programme.

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.

36. Calendar of Meetings 2013-2014

The Head of Corporate Management submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

It was noted that a meeting of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel was scheduled for 17 September 2013, which clashed with the Liberal Democrat Party Conference. It was agreed that this meeting be rescheduled. The Conservative Group were invited to let the relevant officer know of any potential difficulties with the meeting dates.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The draft Calendar of Meetings for the municipal year from May 2013 to April 2014 as set out in the Head of Corporate Management's report be approved subject to the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 17 September 2013 being rescheduled.

(b) Authority to cancel meetings be delegated to the Chairman of the relevant Committee/Panel in conjunction with the Head of Corporate Management.

(c) The possibility that the 2013-14 Municipal Year may be extended in view of the European elections to be held in June 2014 be noted and authority be delegated to the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy to agree revisions to the

Calendar of Meetings in these circumstances.

REASONS

(a) The Calendar of Meetings needs to be determined so that decisions for the year can be timetabled into the respective work programmes and the Forward Plan.

(b) Advance notice of the Calendar of Meetings needs to be made available to external organisations, parish councils and other bodies with which the Council works in partnership and to those members of the public who may wish to attend meetings of the Council and make representations.

(c) The meeting rooms also need to be reserved as soon as possible so that room bookings can be made for private functions by private individuals, external organisations and internal Council groups.

(d) A formal arrangement needs to be in place for the cancellation of meetings that no longer need to be held.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The proposals set out in the Head of Corporate Management's report were largely based on the current meeting structure and frequency. It would be possible to devise alternative proposals using different criteria.

37. Progress of Responses to the Public

The Head of Corporate Management 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.