

**At a meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC CENTRE (COMMITTEE ROOM NO. 1) on Wednesday 2 November 2011 at 2.00 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor P. Watson in the Chair

Councillors Allan, Blackburn, Charlton, Gofton, Kelly, P. Smith, Trueman and T. Wright

**Also Present:-**

Councillors Oliver and Wood

**Part I**

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 October 2011, Part I (copy circulated) were submitted.

(For copy report - see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**Receipt of Declarations of Interest**

The following Councillors declared personal interests in the reports below as Members of the bodies indicated:-

Item 10 – Surestart Review  
and an Integrated Approach  
to Service Delivery

Councillor P. Smith

Early Years and Childcare  
Strategic Partnership

Councillors P. Watson,  
Trueman, P. Smith, Allan

Children's Trust

## **Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Speding.

## **Report of the Meeting of the Personnel Committee, Part I**

The report of the meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 20 October 2011, Part I (copy circulated) was submitted and consideration was given thereto.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the report of the meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 20 October 2011, Part I be noted.

## **Items Arising from Committees**

### **Response from Management Scrutiny Committee – 13 October 2011 – Budget Planning Framework 2012/2013 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2011/2012 – 2014/2015**

The response of the Management Scrutiny Committee (copy circulated) was submitted which advised the Cabinet of the comments of the Committee on a joint report of the Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services which identified the key factors influencing the development of the Council's financial plans into the medium term and sets out the headlines and context for the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2011/2012 to 2014/2015.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Cabinet Members having been advised that the Scrutiny Committee had accepted the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the views of the Scrutiny Committee be noted and it be recommended to Council to approve the Budget Planning Framework 2012/2013.

### **Response from Management Scrutiny Committee – 13 October 2011 – Proposals for Budget Consultation 2012/2013**

The response of the Management Scrutiny Committee (copy circulated) was submitted which advised the Cabinet of the comments of the Committee on the proposals for the budget consultation strategy and framework to inform the preparation of the Budget for 2012/2013.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Cabinet Members having been advised that the Scrutiny Committee had endorsed the budget consultation strategy and framework and acknowledged that the Council was seeking to consult as widely as possible on the budget proposals, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the comments of the Management Scrutiny Committee on the proposals for the budget consultation strategy and framework be noted.

### **Response from Management Scrutiny Committee – 13 October 2011 – Revenue Budget Second Review 2011/2012**

The response of the Management Scrutiny Committee (copy circulated) was submitted which advised the Cabinet of the comments of the Committee on an aspect of the report on the Revenue Budget Second Review 2011/2012 namely, requesting the Council to approve the transfer of funds.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Cabinet Members having been advised that the Scrutiny Committee supported the issues of transfers, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be noted and that it be recommended to Council to approve the proposed transfer of funds as set out in the extract in the report.

### **Response from Management Scrutiny Committee – 13 October 2011 – Capital Programme Second Review 2011/2012 (including Treasury Management)**

The response of the Management Scrutiny Committee (copy circulated) was submitted which advised the Cabinet of the comments of the Committee on a report of the Head of Law and Governance which provided an extract from the report on the Capital Programme Second Review for 2011/2012 (including Treasury Management) including details of new schemes that have been added to the Capital Programme which are referred by Cabinet to Council for approval.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Cabinet Members having been advised that the Scrutiny Committee had accepted the proposed additional scheme as set out in the extract to the report and that they recognised the opportunities that the purchase of a mobile crane would create for the Port of Sunderland, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be noted and it be recommended to Council to approve the inclusion of the additional scheme for 2011/2012 costing over £250,000 as set out in Appendix A of the report.

### **Review of Parliamentary Constituencies – Initial Proposals**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which outlined the initial proposals of the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) for the review of Parliamentary constituencies in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman highlighted that the Boundary Commission for England was conducting a review of parliamentary constituencies in England which would reduce the number of parliamentary constituencies from 650 to 600. He explained that each constituency must have an electorate that is within 5% of the electoral quota of 76,641, which gave constituencies of no fewer than 72,810 electors and no more than 80,473 electors.

The Leader reported that the North East region currently had 29 parliamentary constituencies and the Boundary Commission for England proposed to reduce this number to 26. He added that Sunderland currently had three parliamentary constituencies which were coterminous with the City boundary. However the Boundary Commission had proposed two constituencies that contained only local government wards within the Sunderland area and a further constituency that contained seven Sunderland local government wards and two from Gateshead MBC.

During the discussion Cabinet Members noted that the two wards from Gateshead were part of Birtley and every effort would be required to be made to overcome any difficulties in engaging with the electorate.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the initial proposals of the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) for the review of Parliamentary constituencies in Sunderland be noted.

## **Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to advise of the results of the review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations carried out as required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman reported that the Electoral Administration Act 2006 placed a duty on all Local Authorities to review their parliamentary polling districts and polling places every four years. He explained that the last formal review was carried out and agreed by Members in 2007 and informal reviews had taken place every year since then.

The Chairman advised that the city had 123 polling districts with most wards in the City having five. He added that the only exceptions to this average were Copt Hill and Shiney Row wards which had six polling districts and Castle, Hetton, Washington North and Washington West Wards which had four.

Cabinet Members commended the work of the elections team and welcomed the report which gave helpful analysis of the electors' use of the polling stations across the city.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that it be recommended to Council that the proposed changes to Polling Places as set out in Appendix 4 of the report are approved.

## **Disposal of land at Rainton Meadows, Mercantile Road, Houghton-le-Spring**

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek approval to enter into an option agreement for the disposal of approximately 3 acres of Council land at Rainton Meadows, Mercantile Road, Houghton-le-Spring.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Trueman highlighted that Roseberry Leisure had approached the Council with a request for an option to acquire 2 acres and to lease 1 acre of Council-owned land at Rainton Bridge Business Park. He explained that the land in question was at the rear of the existing arena that was owned and operated by Roseberry Leisure.

Councillor Trueman reported that Roseberry Leisure wished to construct a new and larger arena with a car park on the Council owned land and dispose of the existing arena site for a predominantly non-food retail development in order to fund the cost of the new arena.

Cabinet Members were advised that the proposed re-development of the existing arena site would be dependent upon planning approval being obtained for the use, which was a separate process entirely which had not yet commenced and would require a planning application to be submitted and properly considered by the Council as local planning authority.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

9. RESOLVED that to agree to enter into an option agreement for the disposal of approximately 3 acres of Council land at Rainton Meadows, Mercantile Road, Houghton le Spring to Roseberry Club Leisure Limited for the price set out in the report on Part II of this agenda and otherwise on terms to be agreed by the Deputy Chief Executive.

### **Ombudsman's Annual Review 2010 - 2011**

The Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) on the number and outcome of complaints considered by the Local Government Ombudsman during 2010-2011 and to inform Members of the extended powers of the Ombudsman.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman was pleased to highlight that the Ombudsman had determined 15 complaints during 2010 - 2011, half the number of the previous year and the lowest in the Tyne and Wear region. He advised that there had been only 4 cases where the Ombudsman considered that action should be taken to remedy the situation and in all of these cases the council had no opportunity to consider the complaints through its own procedure first. The outcome in 3 of the 4 local settlements was to offer a fresh appeal to parents whose child had not been successful at the first school admissions appeal and the outcome in the fourth was to inspect the highway.

The Chairman was also pleased to report the average response time had reduced to 15 days, the fastest in the Tyne and Wear region and that there had been no findings of maladministration against the Council.

Cabinet Members having congratulated the Council's officers for their sterling work in improving the council's performance in dealing with complaints, it was:-

10. RESOLVED that the contents of the Ombudsman's annual review, and in particular that there were no findings of maladministration against the council for the municipal year 2010-2011, be noted.

## **Sure Start Review and an Integrated Early Intervention Service**

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) on the current position in relation to the development of an early intervention service which included services delivered as part of the former Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant (SSEYCG), to consider the recommendation to progress changes to current service delivery and to progress to formal consultation on a Children's Centre delivery model.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

In highlighting the report, Councillor Smith drew attention to the proposed consultation to consider how many designated Children's Centres and how many additional service delivery points there should be. She explained that if the Cabinet agreed to the proposals in the report, a further report on the matter would be submitted in February which would detail the outcome of wider consultation and the contracts for service delivery to be awarded from April.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

11. RESOLVED that approval be given for:-

- (i) Children's Services to formally consult on alternative models of Children's Centre delivery such as an area model based on the 5 localities and any other options identified through consultation,
- (ii) Children's Services to develop a proposal to put in place area based or community boards,
- (iii) following consultation with the appropriate groups, service specifications for the procurement of Children's Centre services to be progressed in order that contracts are awarded and in place by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 for a twelve month period, and
- (iv) a further report to be submitted for consideration in February 2012 in order to approve the services to be procured and to consider the Children's Centre delivery model following wider consultation.

## **Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment (NRA) for Maudlin Street, Hetton Downs**

The Executive Director Of Health, Housing And Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to advise of:-

- (a) the findings and recommendations of the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment (NRA) for Maudlin Street, Hetton Downs; and

- (b) the progress on the Hetton Downs Area Action Plan, in relation to Maudlin Street and refresh of the acquisition and clearance policy for the area.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Wright highlighted that the Hetton Downs area had been designated as a renewal area for some years and working with the Homes and Community Agency, funding had been secured for the acquisition, assembly and clearance of land occupied by the former terraces of colliery housing. He explained that the area displayed evidence of some of the poorest housing in the city, market failure, over representation of the private rented sector and high numbers of empty properties and related anti social behaviour and crime. He added that the programme had progressed well and today in the acquisition and clearance area previously identified, only Maudlin Street remained.

Councillor Wright reported that following a further independent NRA study, and it had reaffirmed that the most appropriate course of action was for the council to clear the street to make way for new affordable housing of the type that met modern day aspirations and which also fit with the developing draft Area Action plan for the future development of the Hetton Downs area. He advised that to date, of the 28 dwellings in the street the council had acquired 8 premises and had agreed the purchase of another 6. He added that this was as a result of owners coming forward with a request to purchase their properties and that the council had not yet approached owners to sell.

Cabinet Members were advised that owner occupiers wishing to sell their premises were given full market value along with home loss and disturbance payments and in certain circumstances were also eligible for relocation loans up to £35,000. In addition, all residents were assisted in finding suitable alternative accommodation.

Cabinet Members having been informed that Officers were working with the Homes and Communities Agency to consider how best to develop the cleared sites and that the outcome of these considerations would be the subject of future reports to Cabinet, it was:-

12. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the outcomes of the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment (NRA) and the proposed actions in the report be noted and approved, and
- (ii) the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services be authorised to continue with the programme of acquisition and assembly of land at Maudlin Street and the demolition of the street.



## **Empty Property Action Plan and the Financial Assistance Policy in relation to Empty Homes Assistance**

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek approval for:-

- (i) the adoption of the Empty Property Action Plan, and
- (ii) amendments to the Council's Financial Assistance Policy 2011 – 2014 in relation to Section FAP 15, Empty Homes Assistance.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Wright highlighted that the report sought approval for the action plan which would be used to target empty homes across the whole of the council area and provided specific targets for each Area Committee Area to assist in reducing the number of empty homes. He explained that the report also sought approval to utilise the New Homes Bonus of £577,000 which had been awarded to the council as a result of its work in bringing empty homes back into use and building new homes and therefore the approval was also sought to reinvest the funding to do even more.

Councillor Wright reported that the action plan targeted those dwellings in each ward across the city, for example, which had been empty for the longest period or were the cause for additional concerns such as anti-social behaviour, crime and vandalism, and had been welcomed and supported by each of the 5 area and scrutiny committees. He added that the plan looked to reduce all ward empty property figures down to no more than the city average.

Turning to the New Homes Bonus, Councillor Wright advised that it was proposed to use the funding in two ways; firstly to provide loans to help bring empty homes back into use and also to provide a fund which would assist organisations such as Registered Providers to purchase and refurbish empty premises in their areas which would otherwise remain empty and increase the problems associated with such premises.

Cabinet Members were advised that both schemes, which required an amendment to the Council's Financial Assistance Policy, were designed so as to be paid back to the Council over time so that the funds could be re-cycled in other premises and in some cases the Council would also have nomination rights to the property for those waiting for a home.

Councillor Wright reported that the Action Plan set a target of 360 empty homes brought back into use this year and that this figure currently stood at 195. He advised that an additional proposal to the Homes and Communities Agency was also set out in the report which, if successful, would add a further 55 homes to the target.

Councillor Trueman in commending the report, highlighted that it was an excellent achievement for the Council to be awarded the New Homes Bonus of £577,000 and to bring that number of empty properties back into use.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

13. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Empty Property Action Plan which will be implemented by partners in the City in order to return empty properties back into use be noted and approved, and,
- (ii) the amendments of the Council's Financial Assistance Policy in relation to Empty Homes Assistance be approved as set out in this report.

### **Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006**

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

14. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to any individual, which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual, the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) and to consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relations matters arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4).

(Signed) P. WATSON,  
Chairman.

### **Note:-**

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.