

CABINET

Decision Notices and Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 8th December, 2011 at 5.00 p.m. at the Civic Offices, Telford

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY, 14th DECEMBER, 2011

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN MONDAY, 19th DECEMBER, 2011)

PRESENT: Councillors K.S. Sahota (Leader and Chair), E.A. Clare, S. Davies, A.R.H. England, W.A.M. McClements, R.A. Overton, H. Rhodes, C.F. Smith and P.R. Watling

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor A.J. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) and Councillor W.L. Tomlinson (Lib Dem/Independent Group Leader)

CB-70 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10th November 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CB-71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

CB-72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CB-73 SCRUTINY REPORT – FIRST POINT FOR BUSINESS

Key Decision identified as **Scrutiny Committee Reports** in the Forward Plan published on 16th November 2011.

Councillor A. McClements, Chairman of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee, presented the Committee's report on the establishment of a single point of contact for businesses to Council services.

The Scrutiny Committee considered this issue at a Special Interest Meeting in September 2011. The Local Economic Assessment had highlighted access to Council services as a key issue for businesses, with the perception that communication with the Council was currently fragmented and inconsistent. The Committee had considered the suggestion that the Council develop a one-stop shop for businesses, and explored some of the key considerations for its development. It had concluded that this proposal would improve the quality of service provided by the Council to businesses, would help retain and attract business investment in the Borough, and would be consistent with the Co-operative Council approach. The Committee were therefore recommending to Cabinet that the principle of establishing a First Point for

businesses to access Council services be endorsed; that a further report with detailed costings be brought to Cabinet by summer 2012; and that the development and implementation be led at a senior level as an Early Adopter project.

Councillor C.F. Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration & Economic Development, presented the Cabinet's response to the Scrutiny Committee's report and recommendations. The recommendations were broadly supported, and the proposed actions to implement them were detailed in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report. It was anticipated that the proposals could be implemented at no additional net cost to the Council, and there was likely to be a phased introduction of the service.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor A. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) that Shropshire Chamber of Commerce would be better placed to deliver this service on the Council's behalf, Councillor A. McClements stated that, while it was important to have close links with the Chamber, the Scrutiny report was focussed on the services that the Council provided directly to businesses. The Cabinet Member added that the Borough Business Board, which included representatives from the Shropshire Chamber, were fully supportive of the proposals.

RESOLVED – that the recommendations made in the Scrutiny report be noted, and the response set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report be approved.

CB-74 TELFORD INTERNATIONAL RAILFREIGHT TERMINAL

Key Decision identified as **Telford Railfreight Terminal** in the Forward Plan published on 17th October 2011.

Councillor C.F. Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration & Economic Development, presented the report of the Head of Economy & Skills, which sought agreement to commence a European procurement process to secure an operator for the Telford International Railfreight Terminal.

In 2008 the Council entered into an agreement with J.G. Russell (Transport) Ltd as operator of the Telford International Railfreight Park (incorporating a rail terminal hub and 24 acres of associated development land). On 23 September 2011, J.G. Russell had executed a 30 month break clause in their 15 year lease/operating agreement. The reasons for this were that the company were bearing losses on the operation of the site that could not be sustained. J G Russell were currently operating the railfreight terminal under a temporary licence at a maximum cost of £2,250 per week, pending procurement of an operator for the terminal.

It was important to maintain an operational railfreight facility in order to meet grant funding obligations and to enable MOD Donnington to have the option of moving military equipment and vehicles by rail. It was therefore proposed to secure a new operator for the terminal through a full EU procurement process.

Details of the process and indicative timetable were outlined in the report. Four expressions of interest had been received, mitigating the risk that a suitable operator could not be secured.

Members expressed the view that the Railfreight Terminal was a long-term project that needed to be supported, and that it was important to secure a new operator who was able to pro-actively market the facility.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that the commencement of a European procurement process to secure a new operator for the Telford International Railfreight Terminal be approved;**
- (b) that an evaluation panel, involving the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration & Economic Development, be established to assess submitted tenders and make a recommendation to Cabinet;**
- (c) that a further report be brought to Cabinet seeking authority to enter into a contract with a preferred operator;**
- (d) that the current temporary licence agreement for operation of the site be extended, pending procurement of an operator.**

CB - 75 LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (LSCB) HALF YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

Non-Key Decision

Councillor P.R. Watling, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families, presented the report of the Interim Head of Safeguarding, which provided an update on the focus and progress of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) – a statutory multi-agency partnership - in delivering its annual business plan.

The Interim Director of Children’s Services highlighted the role of the LSCB in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, with its activities and focus aligned with a key priority to “keep children safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation”. The LSCB Business Plan had four safeguarding priorities together with a number of functions and work streams that were detailed in the report. The LSCB had made considerable progress in achieving its Business Plan objectives, and some of the key examples were appended to the report. Also appended to the report were examples of the engagement and involvement of children and young people, particularly vulnerable groups, in the work of the LSCB.

In response to a question concerning what links existed between the LSCB and the Council’s scrutiny function for children’s services (particularly in its role as corporate parent), the Cabinet Member advised that this was currently

being discussed, and that it might be useful for the Chair of the LSCB to attend a future meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – that the progress made in delivering the LSCB business plan be noted.

CB - 76 PROPOSALS FOR WELFARE BENEFIT REFORM AND LOCALISED SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL TAX – IMPACT ON LA SERVICES

Non-Key Decision

Councillor E.A. Clare, Cabinet Member for Adult & Social Care, presented the report of the Head of Leisure, Libraries & Customer Services, which provided information on the Government's proposals for welfare reform and the potential impact that they might have on residents and businesses in the Borough.

The Welfare Reform Bill introduced in February 2011 gave effect to the Government's plans to introduce a Universal Credit that would merge out-of-work benefits and in-work support. There would be a phased approach to its introduction, with the first individuals (new claimants) expected to enter the new system from 2013, followed by the gradual closure of existing benefits and transfer to the new arrangements over the succeeding four years. The Government's aim was for people to claim the Universal Credit online. A final decision on the delivery model for Universal Credits, including the role that might be played by local authorities, had been deferred until 2015, and it was important that the Council lobbied Government to ensure that the final arrangements fully met the needs of residents.

Council Tax Benefit did not form part of the Universal Credit, and local authorities would have a duty to run a scheme to provide support for vulnerable and low income households to meet their Council Tax bills. The Government had issued a consultation document in August 2011 setting out its thinking on how Councils should deliver such a rebate scheme – including four key principles that should underpin local schemes. The Government was also consulting on the future of benefit fraud investigation, including proposals to create a single fraud investigation service that would potentially replace large elements of local authority in-house fraud teams, especially in relation to housing benefit fraud.

Members expressed significant concerns at the implications of some of the proposed changes to welfare benefits and their administration, including the reliance on ICT systems and the move away from face-to-face services to automated on-line applications; the 10% cut in the funding available for council tax rebates; the impact on families and young people – including the threat of loss of benefits; and the loss of experienced Council staff due to the long-term uncertainty about their future. A letter expressing many of these concerns had been sent by the Leader to the Department for Works and Pensions (with copies to local MPs), a copy of which was appended to the report for information.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that the report, and the significant impact that the changes will have on the residents of the Borough and the business of the Council, be noted;
- (b) that the Head of Customer Services, Leisure & Libraries provides a regular update report on the progress of the proposals at least every six months, or whenever key decisions are required to be made;
- (c) that the concerns outlined in paragraphs 4.10 and 6.3 of the report, and reflected in the letter from the Leader to the Department for Work and Pensions attached at Appendix 1, be acknowledged;
- (d) that a Members Information Seminar be organised, to include Town and Parish Councils as well as Ward Members, to allow a detailed presentation of the Government's proposed changes in order to further understanding of the implications and impact for residents in the Borough.

The meeting ended at 5.57 p.m.

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

**Jonathan Eatough
Head of Governance
Date: 14 December 2011**

Signed:

Date: