

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Minutes from the Meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee held on
Thursday, 19th November, 2015 at 6.00 pm in the Committee Suite,
King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn**

PRESENT: Councillor J Collop (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs J Collingham, Mrs S Collop (Substitute), P Gidney, C Kittow,
G Middleton and T Wing-Pentelow

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors I Gourlay and P Kunes

CSC58 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED: That Councillor Claire Kittow be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the meeting.

CSC59 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CSC60 **URGENT BUSINESS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7**

There was no urgent business.

CSC61 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chairman declared an interest in relation to CSC69 as a taxi driver was a relative of Councillor Mrs Collop.

Councillor Mrs Collop declared that she was related to a taxi driver in relation to CSC69 and would not take part in the debate.

CSC62 **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillor J Moriarty attended and spoke on item CSC67 – Customer Services and Channel Shift.

CSC63 **CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no Chairman's correspondence.

CSC64 RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

None.

CSC65 MATTERS CALLED IN PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 12

There were none.

CSC66 SCRUTINY OF CABINET DECISIONS**a Cabinet Report - Customer Services and Channel Shift**

The Chairman invited Councillor J Moriarty to address the Committee under Standing Order 34.

Councillor Moriarty stated that the Resources and Performance Panel had considered this issue however the Regeneration, Environment and Community Panel had not looked at the community aspect. He added that an initial presentation had been given to the R&P Panel to note. The presentation established that there was no idea of what savings would be made.

Councillor Moriarty made reference to the comments from Councillor Devereux at the R & P meeting held on 27 October regarding consultation arrangements and the response being that if customers were asked about the proposed changes the majority would answer that they preferred to see the service remain as it was currently. He added that as he read the report, the proposed changes would come into effect in 2016 therefore there was not going to be any consultation.

Councillor Moriarty also referred to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) which had accompanied the Cabinet Report. Within the EIA it stated that consultation had taken place with members of Extended Management Team, Corporate Equalities Group and the Resources and Performance Panel. Each group considered the change a positive one overall. However, he considered that the Council was not consulting on the important element which was the impact on the community.

He asked whether the implementation of the decision could be deferred until the amount of savings was known.

In responding to the points raised by Councillor Moriarty, the Leader stated that channel shift would provide a better and more effective service to the customer.

Councillor Moriarty stated that his point related to the fact that there was no way of measuring the changes. In addition, there had not been any consultation carried out but the report alluded to the fact that the

changes would come into force in April 2016. He added that his concern was that the Council had not taken the opportunity to talk to people about the changes.

The Chairman stated that he had voted against this item at the Resources & Performance Panel meeting. His concerns related to the reduced opening hours of the Downham Market and Hunstanton satellite offices. He considered that there would be a gap for certain vulnerable people not being able to go and speak to someone. He understood that a telephone would be provided at the Downham Market Office but not at Hunstanton.

He agreed with the report that this needed to be the way forward but still had concerns that this could affect some vulnerable people.

The Leader acknowledged the concerns raised by the Chairman, but from past statistics it could be demonstrated where the past use was. He added that by the use of technology this would help to make sure that people had access to services at all times. He explained that he knew how important these things were but facilities would be in place to improve services for everyone.

Councillor Mrs Mellish stated that it was a difficult decision but the Council had to make savings and efficiencies. She referred to the Police Station in Downham Market, which she lived opposite, where she saw people going in and out of the car park all day long. The opening hours had now been reduced to 10am – 3pm on the grounds of a reduction in footfall, however she could not see that there had not been any reduction in footfall.

The Leader explained that the report was not saying that there had been a reduction in footfall but the staff knew for example the numbers of people who visited the Downham Market Office.

The Chairman added that he considered that if an emergency telephone was provided at Hunstanton then people would still be able to contact officers.

The Leader responded that people could still contact the Council but the Council's services would be refined and customers would be able to get answers/support more effectively. The Council needed to be as accessible as possible and improve efficiency.

In response to a query regarding the additional recommendation put forward by the Resources & Performance Panel, the Assistant Director explained that public consultation would not take place, instead a comprehensive Communications Plan would be produced to communicate to the members of the public the changes being implemented. In addition, consideration had been given to placing notices in the local press however the changes would mostly be communicated by signage and word of mouth from advisors. Partner

organisations would also be informed of the changes. She explained that there would still be a presence at the Hunstanton and Downham Market offices which would suit a number of people. In addition, most people had mobile phones and signs would be erected to tell people what numbers they needed to ring for assistance. The Assistant Director explained that she had carried out an analysis of enquiries and she was confident that the new arrangements would satisfy not only the day to day enquiries but also any emergencies. She added that most homeless people came to the King's Court offices for assistance.

The Assistant Director advised that the Council would be talking with service partners. The new arrangements would be communicated with members of the public and it would be important to manage expectations and be seen as a way to maintain services at all the offices.

In response to a comment from the Chairman regarding the telephone in Downham Market, the Assistant Director explained that the office was based in the Priory Centre which also housed the library therefore an emergency telephone could be based there. However, the offices at Hunstanton could not be open without staff being there, which was why an emergency telephone could not be housed there. She reemphasised the fact that most people did have mobile phones.

In response to a comment from Councillor Mrs Collingham, the Leader acknowledged that not everyone was online, however, there were facilities at King's Court for people to use with a member of staff available to help them if required. He added that technology gave an advantage and people could have a faster 24 hour service.

Councillor Moriarty referred to the additional recommendation made by the Resources & Performance Panel and asked whether consultation was going to take place or not.

The Assistant Director explained that it was difficult to consult once a decision had been made but with these types of services people did not like change. If an alternative was presented then people's fears were allayed. She added that the proposals were trying to preserve the service.

The Chief Executive explained that it was important to be straight with people. He added that Cabinet had made a decision and people would be aware of that. He considered that the proposals put forward were a good alternative. He acknowledged that maybe the wording was wrong with the additional recommendation but considered that the Council was doing the right thing. He added that the Council would be supporting people with the changes and already staff were helping customers using an Ipad and showing them how to access services, which appeared to be working well. He considered that it was better not to consult customers over the proposal with people saying no and

then going ahead with the proposals anyway, which would not instil confidence in the Council.

b Cabinet Report - Treasury Management - Mid Year Report

The Chairman stated that he had asked for this to be considered by the Committee. He stated that there had been a good discussion at the Audit & Risk Panel when it was considered, where he had asked questions regarding alternative investment options. He also referred to the comments made by Councillor Beales at the Cabinet meeting held on 3 November 2015 regarding non-traditional investments. The Chairman added that he would like to see the Council moving forward to look at alternative investment opportunities.

The Leader stated that he did not disagree with the comments made by the Chairman, and agreed that the Council had gone through a period of stagnation in investment rates. He acknowledged that the Council should be looking at other investment opportunities and there were also development opportunities which would also benefit the public. In addition, this Council had played a big role in 2 or 3 projects ie: the University Centre and KLIC.

Councillor Mrs Collop stated that the Treasury Team had given a good report at the Audit & Risk Committee.

The Assistant Director explained that the Leader was right that the Treasury Statement had the opportunity to take non-traditional investments. She explained that there was the opportunity to invest in property funds but investment in development opportunities in West Norfolk would have an added advantage of additional business rates. She added that the opportunities would come through the Cabinet process.

c Cabinet Report - Review of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Fees

With the agreement of the Committee, this item was taken first.

Councillor Collop stated that he had been contacted by taxi drivers regarding the proposals, and had invited two drivers to the meeting.

Steven O'Donnell and Jason Smith addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- Some of the fees looked like they had been duplicated, for example new wheelchair accessible vehicles had additional checks carried out by the testing station and at the Borough Council. He added that the Borough Council only checked with the operator and not the driver as it was important that the driver knew how to load/unload wheelchair users.

- Changing name had gone up from £5.50 - £11.00. He asked whether there was a way to do this online.
- Door stickers at £19.98. £5.60 of that related to administration charges but the drivers could go directly to the sign makers.
- The drivers could not pass on any additional charges as they were on a metre.
- Wheelchair accessible vehicles cost a third more to operate.
- The trade needed to have clear understanding of the charges.

He concluded that he was aware that the Act had been brought in by Central Government but felt that a fair balance could be sought for both the Council and drivers.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community advised that it was the Cabinet's decision only that should be scrutinised.

The Chairman advised that several taxi drivers had written in about the issues and had attended the Cabinet Meeting. He added that the taxi drivers were a credit to the Council but at the same time the taxi drivers were unhappy with the proposed fees. He stated that he hoped the Portfolio Holder could reassure the taxi drivers the reasons why the changes had to be introduced.

The Leader thanked both Steven O'Donnell and Jason Smith for attending the meeting tonight. He explained that the Council now had to cover its administration fees which should not be costing the Council money for providing the service.

The Chairman stated that the taxi drivers knew their costs, and he would ask the Portfolio Holder to take on board what they were saying. He suggested that a meeting could be arranged with the Portfolio Holder, taxi drivers and officers, which seemed to be a sensible way forward.

The Leader explained that this was not a public consultation meeting. The Portfolio Holder was here with the appropriate officers to answer questions from the Committee.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community stated that the taxi drivers could contact the officers present to arrange meeting. He added that the Council could not subsidise the fees and had to recover the actual processing costs. He further added that a Member could have attended the Cabinet Meeting under Standing Order 34, if they had any points to raise, but did not think that this meeting was the right place to do so.

The Chairman stated that this would be costing taxi drivers extra money and could impact on their business.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community responded that the changes had been brought in by Central Government, therefore the Council had no choice but to adhere to those changes. A cost exercise was carried out which was how the fees were arrived at. The last time there had been a fee increase was in 2011. As the report stated, the proposed fees now looked to recover the actual processing costs and costs to the Council for providing this service. In the past fees had not been calculated in that way and therefore had resulted in the service being subsidised by other service areas, however it was not intended to recover the costs previously incurred and not re-

charged. He added that someone had to pay for the increase and he could not see why it should be the taxpayer.

The Chairman stated that taxi drivers charged a set price for trips and the prices that the Council set may be adverse to their businesses.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community explained that the changes had been out to consultation and some of the issues raised had been taken into account. The proposals would also be advertised in the press. He added that every plate holder had the opportunity to put their points forward as part of the consultation process.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community agreed that a meeting could take place with officers and members of the taxi trade. He further explained that the Council had to carry out this exercise to recover the costs incurred by the Council in providing the service.

Steve O'Donnell added that the consultation came out at the end of August and the end of the consultation process was 22nd September. He felt that this had been pushed through and left to the last minute, whereas other authorities had appeared to consult quicker. He also stated that there had not been any response to the objections raised as part of the consultation process.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community explained that all responses had been looked through in detail and this took time to do.

The Chairman asked why other authorities sent out their consultation document quicker. The Portfolio Holder responded that he could not answer that question.

The Chairman added that he thought that a meeting between the Portfolio Holder, officers and the trade would be beneficial. He thanked Steve O'Donnell and Jason Smith for attending the meeting.

d Cabinet Report - Polling District and Polling Place Review

Councillor Collop stated that he had asked for this item to be on the agenda, and stated that the report showed that the Leader had been consulted but did not indicate that Ward Members had been.

The Leader explained that the Returning Officer had a responsibility to keep polling stations under review. The changes put forward within the report were being made to improve accessibility and an improvement to the current polling station, or in one case the Olive Branch Café was no longer available.

The Chief Executive reassured the Committee that Ward Members had been consulted but reference to this had been omitted from the report. He explained that officers' routinely went round and inspected all polling stations, particularly looking at issues relating to access, car parking, etc. With regards to the proposed polling stations, he

considered that these would be a better alternatives than the existing polling stations.

The Chairman asked that when looking at alternative venues, was the cost of the venue taken into account. The Chief Executive confirmed that this would be taken into account.

Councillor Mrs S Collop confirmed that Ward Members had been consulted on the proposed changes.

The Chief Executive also explained that it was sometimes difficult to find venues. He reported that if Presiding Officers had any difficulties with the venue during an election, then this would be reported back to the Elections Team.

CSC67 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was Thursday 17 December 2015 at 6.00 pm.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm