

COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

21ST JANUARY 2016

Present:

Councillor Lynden Stowe - Chairman
Councillor NJW Parsons - Vice-Chairman

Councillors -

Sue Coakley Mrs. SL Jepson
C Hancock

Observers:

Miss AML Beccle BS Dare (until 4.35 p.m.)
AW Berry JA Harris (invited to speak on Minute
AR Brassington (invited to speak on CAB.71)
Minute CAB.69)

CAB.66 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lynden Stowe declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in respect of agenda item (9) (Visitor Information Centre Grants - 2016/17 to 2018/19), because he had a commercial relationship with the Chipping Campden Visitor Information Centre, and he left the Meeting while this item was being determined.

There were no other declarations of interest under the Code of Conduct for Members or Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

There were no declarations of interest under the Code of Conduct for Officers.

CAB.67 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 19th November 2015 be approved as a correct record.

Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

CAB.68 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

CAB.69 MEMBER QUESTIONS

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11, questions had been submitted, and responses provided, as follows:-

From Councillor AR Brassington to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Health, Environment and Communities

'The greatest threat facing the Cotswolds is climate change; its effects are unknown but could include more extreme weather such as the floods that have affected Scotland and northern England, drought, habitat change, and loss of certain animal and plant species etc. With this in mind it is important that we take every opportunity to minimise our carbon footprint. Has the Council considered placing solar panels on the roofs of buildings which it owns? If it has please state which buildings and if not why?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

'Over the last few years, the Council has carried out a range of activities to reduce its carbon footprint, both at its offices and Leisure Centres. These activities include:-

- Trinity Road: insulation to whole building / new boiler to south wing/associated controls/next phase of new controls for Trinity Road and Moreton-in-Marsh being planned over next twenty-four months;
- all leisure centres and museum: valve jackets and relevant pipework lagging/full LED lighting replacement scheme to identified areas;
- replaced boilers at museum to high efficiency condensing type;
- lighting control improvements carried out Bourton Leisure Centre;
- variable speed drives have been installed at Trinity Road to reduce energy consumption;
- general pump changes have taken place as part of maintenance programme.

In addition, the now completed upgrade to the gym at Cotswold Leisure Cirencester included:-

- new lowered ceilings to reduce room space to be cooled;
- new more controllable and efficient air conditioning system.

Solar PV has been considered on a number of occasions, but has been hampered by successive changes to the Feed In Tariff regime which impacts upon the business case assessments - indeed, recent changes realistically mean business cases need to be built around nil return to the grid and occupier use only. The sites considered have also had both fitting complications (roof loadings) and environmental considerations (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty etc.).

However, more recently, officers have worked alongside West Oxfordshire DC in securing revised business cases, which are currently being reassessed to take account of 'own use' only of generated power - when these business cases are complete, they will be brought forward appropriately on a 'spend to save' basis in addition to the environmental benefits.'

Councillor Brassington thanked Councillor Coakley for her response and commented that, according to NASA, fifteen of the sixteen warmest years had been recorded since 2001. Councillor Brassington stated that climate change was happening and that the Council should do what it could to mitigate against it.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Brassington asked if the Council used an energy company which supplied its electric from renewable sources and, if not, would it do so in the future?

In response, Councillor Coakley undertook to take the suggestion on board.

CAB.70 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements from the Leader.

CAB.71 NOTICE OF MOTION - SOCIAL HOUSING

The Cabinet was requested to consider the following Motion, which had been referred by the Council from its Meeting held on 15th December 2015, opposing Government proposals to extend the Right to Buy scheme to Housing Association tenants, to be paid for through the forced sell-off of the most expensive Social Housing Stock. The Motion had been Proposed by Councillor JA Harris and Seconded by Councillor PCB Coleman:-

'This Council notes:

- the Government's proposal to extend the Right to Buy scheme to Housing Association tenants, to be paid for by a forced sell off of the most expensive Social Housing stock;
- with alarm, the shortage of affordable rented homes in the Cotswolds with over 1,300 households on our Council's housing waiting list and is very concerned that the Housing and Planning Bill risks making matters worse;
- the LGA "First 100 Days" campaign which highlighted there are 1.7 million households on waiting lists for affordable housing across England and that more than 3.4 million adults between 20 and 34 live with their parents.

Council opposes the forced sell off of social rented housing to pay for this plan and is concerned that the Government also:

- fails to address the situation for many local authorities which no longer have any housing stock to sell as they have transferred theirs to housing associations;
- fails to address the situation in areas of high housing demand where there are often few suitable sites to build replacement social housing stock;
- fails to recognise that this means housing associations will simply be trying to catch up with replacing homes rather than building affordable housing to give more people homes they need.

Council recognises the desire by many to own their own homes, and suggests that a "Rent to Own" model and Shared Ownership housing would represent a better way of reaching this goal.

Council also regrets the following decisions of the Government that will reduce the amount of good quality social housing for rent to local families:

- the decision that 200,000 out of 275,000 “affordable homes” to be built in this parliament are to be for sale at a price of up to £250,000 and therefore only 75,000 will be built for rent - this means many local families will not be able afford these new “affordable homes”.
- that a tax will be imposed by the Government on the rents of council tenants to fund discounts for housing association tenants who are rich enough to buy their properties - taxing families on the lowest incomes to fund discounts for people who may well be much better off.
- the cuts to section 106 payments from developers, which will see fewer social housing properties offered to local residents in new builds.

These actions will mean that there is less money for the provision of new social rented properties and less money available to provide services to tenants such as repairs, estate services, youth clubs or play centres that significantly improve the life of families.

Council resolves:

(a) to work with other neighbouring authorities to oppose the current government proposals to force councils to sell off high value stock (or any equivalent charge based on estimates of high value stock);

(b) to write to Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP asking to support the Council’s position; to speak up in parliament for more social housing and to push for a genuine “one for one” replacement, but not at the cost of losing more social housing.’

In accordance with the Council’s procedures and custom and practice, Councillors Harris and Coleman had been invited to attend the Meeting to present and speak to their Motion. In the event, Councillor Coleman had been unable to attend the Meeting.

Councillor Harris referred to the challenges being faced by the Council in relation to the provision of housing, and expressed his view that the way in which the country targeted housing was wrong. While welcoming the drive towards more home ownership, Councillor Harris commented that home ownership was out of the reach of a lot of people and he considered there to be a lack of social rented housing, which the Council could not afford to ignore. He stated that, while there were 1,300 people on the housing waiting list in the District, many more were in need of homes, and he commented that the Council’s policy of seeking 50% affordable housing from developments did not go far enough. Councillor Harris contended that the Council should ensure that as much social housing as possible was provided and he concluded by urging the Cabinet to send a clear message to the Government that, whilst home ownership should be encouraged, adequate provision should be made for those who could not afford to buy their own homes.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing thanked Councillor Harris for submitting the Motion and stated that she would make a Proposition as to the way forward once the Cabinet had debated the Motion. The Cabinet expressed sympathy for the sentiments in the Motion, but considered that it would not be appropriate for the Council to seek to counter Government policy as it was being implemented.

It was acknowledged that there was an issue of affordability in relation to housing within the District, but a Member pointed out that such issue would be addressed through Local Plan policies. In particular, the Member noted that there were few options available for people to downsize, and that the emerging Local Plan would encourage a broader range of house types to address this and other issues. The Member expressed the view that the Council had a good record of delivering social housing through viable private developments and contended that future such delivery could be at risk if the Council sought in excess of 50% affordable housing through such developments.

The Leader of the Council expressed the view that the Government was correct to seek to increase home ownership, and he commented that the percentage of home ownership had reduced from 70% to 63% over the past ten years. The Leader also expressed concern that one local Housing Association appeared to be seeking to sell off its older stock without ring-fencing the proceeds from such sales for expenditure within the District, and he undertook to raise that issue with the local M.P. The Leader also referred to the number of planning permissions allowed on appeal over the past three/four years, commenting that whilst some settlements felt they had been overloaded with social housing, other settlements would welcome some element. In that context, the Leader asked if it would be possible to differentiate in the Local Plan between social rented categories for principal settlements, either through Section 106 Agreements or local development schemes.

Another Member expressed support for this latter suggestion, commenting that the maintenance of stock was also a challenge and that there was a need for appropriate protection for the Area of Outstanding Beauty. A second Member commented that various policies had been suggested in the emerging Local Plan relating to the 'exception' of development in rural areas, and the replacement and protection of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Member also reminded the Cabinet that each development funded individual contributions which could be translated into off-site allocations.

Councillor Harris stated that he was aware that there were still a lot of issues to come forward and that the purpose of the Motion had been for the Council to take the lead and communicate through the local M.P. to the Government. Councillor Harris commented that it was correct for the Council to raise such issues, which affected people's lives. He agreed that the Council had done well in securing private developments and contributions therefrom, but expressed his view that the Council should do more in that respect. Councillor Harris contended that a 'rent to own' scheme could see contributions through rent going towards the eventual ownership of properties and he further contended that the Council should seek to build houses itself. Councillor Harris concurred with the comments made by Councillor Stowe relating to the sale of 'unprofitable' Housing Association stock, and he concluded by

expressing his view that such action was outrageous and should be brought to the attention of the Government.

RESOLVED that the Motion be noted, but clarification be awaited on the Government's proposals and consultation on the Cotswold District Local Plan and Housing Plan.

Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

CAB.72

COUNTER FRAUD AND ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICY

The Leader of the Council introduced this item.

The Cabinet was requested to consider adopting a draft Counter Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy. The Leader explained that this was a County-wide initiative, which had been considered by the Audit Committee at its Meeting on 5th January 2016. Officers amplified various aspects of the draft policy and responded to questions from Members thereon. It was noted that the draft policy constituted an overarching strategy, and that Officers were now in the process of drawing up a procedure for its implementation across the County. Once in place, it would enable Officers to identify, investigate and enforce against potential instances of fraud.

The Cabinet endorsed the policy and congratulated the Internal Auditor on her work in relation to the draft the policy.

RESOLVED that the draft Counter Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy be adopted.

Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

CAB.73

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE GRANTS - 2016/17 TO 2018/19

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Partnerships introduced this item.

The Cabinet considered a report suggesting that grants be made to the existing community Visitor Information Centre (VIC) providers for a three-year period. The Cabinet Member reminded the Cabinet of the background to the Council's support for VICs, which were still considered to be an important resource both for local communities and tourists. The Cabinet Member explained that the financial impact of the proposal on the Council equated to approximately 35p per visitor. It was noted that the VICs also received support through financial contributions and complementary activities from various local sources, including Town/Parish Councils. It was considered that the proposed three-year commitment would help the VICs in forward planning and accessing other funding streams. In response to a question from a Member, the Cabinet Member explained that the grants would be reviewed annually during the three-year period, after which the situation would be reconsidered.

RESOLVED that the provision of grant funding in a sum of £54,000 per annum to the existing community providers of Visitor Information Centres be approved for a three-year period.

Record of Voting - for 4, against 0, abstentions 0, interest declared/absent 1.

Note:

Having previously declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in respect of this item, Councillor Lynden Stowe left the Meeting while it was being determined, and Councillor NJW Parsons took the Chair. Councillor Stowe resumed the Chair on his return to the Meeting.

CAB.74 SCHEDULE OF DECISION(S) TAKEN BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet noted a Schedule detailing decisions taken by the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning, and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing.

CAB.75 ISSUE(S) ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AND/OR AUDIT

There were no issues arising from Overview and Scrutiny and/or Audit.

CAB.76 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business that was urgent.

CAB.77 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public and Press be excluded from the Meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph (3) of Part I of Schedule 12A to the said Act (Information relating to financial or business affairs), and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information concerned.

Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

CAB.78 APPROVAL OF ENERGY RE-PROCUREMENT PROCESS/OUTCOMES

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Partnerships introduced this item.

The Cabinet considered a report detailing a proposal for a four-year contract for the provision of energy (electricity and gas). It was noted that the proposed contract had been negotiated using an OJEU-compliant framework, as this decision had been considered a key one, due to the value of the proposed contract. It was considered that the issues of risk and volatility of supply had been addressed and that the preferred contractor would be able to ensure a consistent supply of energy to the Council at a sustainable price. It was further considered that the Council should investigate the options to further reduce its energy bills in the future, including tracking renewable energy resources which would also improve the Council's carbon footprint.

RESOLVED that the letting of a contract, as detailed in the circulated report, for the procurement of the Council's energy (electricity and gas) for a four-year period, be approved.

Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

Note:

Officers were requested to circulate details of energy consumption at the Council's Leisure Centres to the Cabinet.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 p.m. and closed at 4.47 p.m.

Chairman

(END)