



CABINET

MEETING : Wednesday, 12th June 2019

PRESENT : Cllrs. Watkins (Chair), Cook, Gravells, Morgan and H. Norman

Others in Attendance

Cllrs Coole and Haigh (not present for items 7-12)

Managing Director

Corporate Director

Head of Policy and Resources

Head of Place

Head of Communities

Solicitor

Democratic Services and Elections Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllr. James

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th May 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

A member of the public informed Cabinet of his experience of the distress felt by people made homeless. He asked if a telephone in the public reception of the Council offices made the right environment for individuals seeking assistance to have to talk about traumatic personal circumstances. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods replied that people arriving at reception are directed to the housing triage telephone so that a housing officer may assess how to help them at the earliest opportunity. She gave assurance that they are advised not to disclose sensitive information and given the opportunity to request a face to face assessment in privacy. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods emphasised the importance of understanding the vulnerability of each person and obtaining feedback from individuals and partner organisations to improve the experience. She thanked the questioner for sharing his observations

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and requested that individual cases be raised within the formal processes so that they can be learned from.

The member of the public further advised Cabinet of particular cases where vulnerable people had begun but been able to complete a telephone assessment and asked if housing officers had training in communication. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods confirmed that there had been a lot of investment in training to enable the Housing Service to deliver a good customer experience despite the difficult and highly emotive nature of homelessness. She expressed concern that people had experienced upset while engaging with the Council and reiterated that individual cases be raised within the complaints and comments process so that they may be investigated.

The member of the public referred to a case in which a homeless person with then undiagnosed mental health issues had returned to the street after perceived insensitive interaction with a housing officer. He asked how long housing officers had been assessing the mental health and vulnerability of individuals and if they believed it to be good practice. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods replied that the assessment of vulnerability as required by legislation had been conducted by housing officers for many years. However, concerning mental health, she made it clear that although housing officers ask if people receive treatment and take it into account they cannot assess it. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods further commented on the importance of understanding the individual circumstances of every person and urged that the case previously described be raised outside of the public meeting so that it could be investigated and learnt from.

4. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

5. LEADER AND CABINET MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions to the Leader of the Council or Cabinet.

6. GREEN TRAVEL PLAN PROGRESS REPORT 2018 AND UPDATE

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Environment that sought to update Members on the implementation of the Council's Green Travel Policy and its effectiveness following 12 months of operation from April 2018 to March 2019.

The Cabinet Member for Environment outlined the background to the report and highlighted the achievements. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure welcomed the positive steps being taken and commented on the importance of trialling new ideas. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods placed the reductions in CO₂ levels in the context of the Council's work to improve air quality and drew Members' attention to the successful partnership with the County Council.

RESOLVED that the effectiveness of the policy be noted following 12 months of operation.

7. TENANCY RESCUE AND HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION INITIATIVES

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods that sought support for revised tenancy rescue and homelessness prevention initiatives to be used as a spend to save approach for the Housing Service.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods summarised the report and emphasised that homelessness prevention was a key priority for the Council. She reminded Members of not only the considerable financial cost of temporary accommodation but also the emotional cost and disruption to the people and families involved. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods placed the proposals within the context of other recent initiatives to address homelessness such as the Private Landlord Incentive, Discretionary Housing Payments and the Empty Homes Premium. The Cabinet Member for Environment drew Members' attention to the importance of the spend to save approach and early intervention to reduce the distress suffered by residents. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy commented on the advantages of empowering officers with greater flexibility given his personal observations of the commitment of the housing team to helping people. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that the proposals were potentially innovative and asked if other authorities had comparable schemes that Members could review. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods stated that the Council was doing well in comparison to others and took the opportunity to thank officers for their work and emphasised the importance of obtaining feedback from both officers and customers.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the use of Homelessness Prevention Funding to be used for tenancy rescue initiatives be approved
- (2) authority be provided to the Housing Service Manager to adopt a flexible approach to Homelessness Prevention and to provide financial incentives that "allow households to remain in their accommodation or move to alternative accommodation" on the understanding that homelessness for these households is likely to have a greater financial impact on the Council's budget
- (3) a set of Homelessness Prevention Guiding Principles as opposed to a prescriptive policy in order to allow a degree of flexibility in the Council's approach to Homelessness Prevention be adopted (Set out in Appendix 1 of the report)
- (4) authority be provided to the Housing Services Manager to agree any variations to the Guiding Principles that may be required to reflect the housing market.

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8. ANNUAL REPORT ON THE GRANT FUNDING PROVIDED TO THE VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY SECTOR

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods that outlined the Council's financial contributions towards the voluntary and community sector during the year 2018-19.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods introduced the report and thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments at their meeting of 3 June 2019. She commented on the important contribution of the voluntary sector to the city, the improved collaboration between communities and elected members and the promotion of sustainability. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources especially commended the broad range of grants and projects both large and small.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9. TREASURY MANAGEMENT SIX MONTHLY UPDATE 2018-19

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that highlighted issues specific to the Council, interest rate forecasts and provided an overview of the Council's performance for 2018/19.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

10. DELIVERY OF STRATEGY PERFORMANCE PROJECT GOVERNANCE

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that sought approval for the establishment of two new posts to deliver an effective policy, strategy and performance management and governance function within the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources highlighted the key benefits of the report. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure advised Members that the new posts could alleviate the challenge of acquiring accurate, detailed and timely data that he had experienced while on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and help steer the Council forward.

RESOLVED that the creation of two new permanent posts as set out in the report be approved.

11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business (Agenda item 13) on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public are present during consideration of this item there will be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

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12. ACQUISITION OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods that sought approval for the Council to enter into agreements with the Cheltenham YMCA (CYMCA) to facilitate the acquisition by the CYMCA of a 48 unit scheme in Gloucester to be used as supported accommodation for households presenting to the council as homeless or at risk of homelessness.

RESOLVED as per the recommendations in the confidential report.

Time of commencement: 6.00 pm

Time of conclusion: 6.40 pm

Chair