



POLICY, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

PARKSIDE, STATION APPROACH, BURTON STREET, MELTON MOWBRAY

27th JANUARY 2015

PRESENT:

Councillors J.B Rhodes (Chairman), P. Posnett, D. Wright, J. Wyatt, M.M. Gordon,
R. de Burle, G.Bush

As Substitute:
A. Freer-Jones

Chief Executive (LA), Strategic Director (KA), Head of Central Services (DG),
Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods (HR), People and Place Manager (RB),
Senior Democracy Officer (SE), Committee Support Officer (DS)

P48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Orson, Hutchinson and Simpson.

P49. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th September 2014 were signed at this meeting having previously been confirmed and authorised at the meeting of this Committee on 2nd December 2014.

The minutes of the 2nd December 2014 meeting were confirmed and authorised to be signed by the Chairman.

P50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gordon declared a personal and pecuniary interest in Item 7, Appendix 1 recommendation 2.7, due to her receiving council tax support.

Councillors Rhodes and Posnett declared personal interests in any items relating to the County Council due to their positions as County Councillors.

P51. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

There were no recommendations from other committees.

P52. RECORDING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS – FEEDBACK ON TRIAL

The Senior Democracy Officer submitted a report giving Members feedback on the 6 months trial of recording Full Council Meetings.

At the Full Council meeting held on 11th December 2013, the Committee considered a range of options in support of openness and transparency including video, webcasting an audio recording of Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings. Following consideration of options at the Full Council meeting on 16th April 2014, the Committee agreed to a six month trial of audio recording Full Council meetings using existing software and equipment.

Following the first ordinary meeting of the Full Council following the Annual Meeting on 16th July 2014, an audio recording was made of this meeting which was available on the Council's internal network and by download to a CD. Lessons were learned from this experience in regards to formatting of the audio file type. Instead of using an MP3 format, audio files were created as WAV files, and meant that the audio files were too large for uploading to IDOX (the committee storage filing system which publishes to the website). The recording equipment has since been reset to ensure that the MP3 format is used for future recordings.

It has not always been possible to meet the 48 hour deadline for downloading the recording the day after the meeting and checking the recording in order to publish it to the website. Therefore it has been proposed that the timeframe be extended to 5 working days.

Data has been unavailable to collect from the IDOX system in regards to public interest in the audio recordings on the website. No public comments have been received regarding the recordings and no logged calls to Customer Services with this information have been recorded. Future collection of public interest in Committee papers and audio files via the IDOX system is being looked into. It must be noted that the online availability of the audio recorded Council Meetings does contribute to ensuring that the Council operates in an open and transparent manner. Moreover, should the service continue, there are opportunities to use Social Media to promote the audio facilities and this could generate more public interest.

The storage capacity on the IDOX system can currently publish up to 7 audio files of up to 10mb per meetings for up to 25 meetings per year. 5 downloads from the website can be done at any one time, any more and the performance of other web services would be affected. In order to increase the capacity for another 5 audio files at a time to be downloaded would cost between £7,000 - £10,000. Due to no public interest data being available, and assuming that downloads of Full Council meetings is low, it is doubtful that continuing to provide audio recordings of Full Council Meetings would create any website repercussions.

A Protocol for Audio Recording of Meetings (Appendix A) and a Hints and Tips document (Appendix B) has been produced and circulated to Councillors with the aim of providing guidance to Members at recorded meetings. It is intended that these documents will form part of the Council's Constitution and the New Councillor Induction Pack and be updated as to best practice by the Head of Communications as and when required.

The Council is under no legal obligation to record or broadcast its meetings. The approved minutes are the statutory record of the meeting and would have precedence over any audio/visual recording made. There is a need to consider the increased risk of audio recordings being used as evidence against the benefits of greater public engagement which the technology delivers. If continuing with publishing recordings then further advice may be needed.

Members agreed that the audio recording of Committee and Council meetings is a positive step towards generating public interest in Council Meetings as well as providing a means to ensure more accurate record keeping. However, without public interest data being available it is difficult to judge the worth of the service entirely and Members requested that the service continue with the understanding that it be brought back for review in 6 months' time at the Meeting of this Committee in July 2015.

All recommendations were moved by Councillor Rhodes and Councillor Posnett seconded.

Members were unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED that

- 2.1) The continuation of the recording of Full Council Meetings and uploading these audio files to the Council's website by 5 working days following the meeting be approved with a further review in 6 months.
- 2.2) The Head of Communications be given delegated authority to update the Protocol for Audio records of Meetings (Appendix A) and the Hints and Tips document in accordance with local arrangements and best practice as required. That the Protocol be referred to Full Council for incorporating into the Constitution as guidance for Members be approved.

Here the Senior Democracy Officer left the room and did not return for the remainder of the meeting.

P53. REVENUE CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/16

The Head of Central Services submitted a report to Members which outlined the key budget issues which will go forward to the Council's budget setting meeting on 4th February 2015 and provide an opportunity for Members to comment on these in advance of the meeting.

A Strategic Planning Away Day was held on 15th January 2015 for all Members to discuss the Council's financial position with regard to general and special expenses, including proposals for growth and savings to net expenditure and capital programme submissions alongside available funding.

The full draft revenue budget report to the Council was attached as Appendix 1. The Key proposals set out in the report for this committee's considerations were:

- To not take up the Government's offer of a further freeze grant for 2015/16 equivalent to a 1% increase. Alternatively to approve an average increase across all funds of 1.9%;

- To include all on-going growth proposals totalling £43,000 (see Appendix A to the Council Report);
- To include savings proposals of £40,570 (See Appendix A to the Council Report).

Option 1 The additional council tax raised would be retained annually to assist with austerity in future years.

Option 2 would see Council Tax at 1.5%, however £395k would come out of contingency monies and it would mean that there would be less funds going into future budgets.

Option 3 would see no future revenue support and the funds themselves are less secure than either Option 1 or 2.

Members debated the merits of each option with the majority supporting Option 1 because the increase was seen to be modest and more secure.

The Full draft capital programme report to the Council was attached as Appendix 2. Key proposals set out in the report for consideration at this Committee were:

- To set a capital programme of £3,959,000 for 2015/16 in respect of General Expenses. This includes mandatory schemes and schemes already pre-approved. Funding where not provided through third party contributions, grants or specific reserves to be through the use of capital receipts. (See Appendix A to the Council report);
- To set a capital programme of £23,000 for Special Expenses Melton Mowbray all funded through the special expenses reserve (See Appendix B to the Council);
- To approve the capital programme for the Housing Revenue Account as recommended by the Community and Social Affairs Committee (see Appendix C to the Council Report)

Councillor Gordon's pecuniary interest did not arise in discussions.

It was proposed by Councillor Rhodes and seconded by Councillor Wright that the recommendations contained in the Full Council Revenue Report be endorsed by this Committee.

7 Members were in agreement of the recommendation and 1 against.

RESOLVED that

- 2.1) the recommendations to Full Council in the revenue budget report be endorsed.

P54. ITEMS FOR APPROVAL UNDER FINANCIAL PROCEDURE RULES

The Head of Central Services submitted a report seeking approval of this Committee under Financial Procedure Rules and to provide information on amounts approved under delegated powers and to report the impact of these on the Council's reserves and balances.

Since the last meeting the Head of Central Services had approved seventeen requests for virement within the same service totalling £373,250 and eight requests for virement between services totalling £85,250. More details of those requests in excess of £10,000 could be found in Appendix A of the report.

£3,000 had been approved under delegated authority in 2014-15 and funded from budget reduction money for Central Services – Professional Fees for the Equalities services from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Centre.

All recommendations were moved by Councillor Rhodes and Councillor Posnett seconded.

Members were unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED that

- 2.1) the virements approved under delegated powers (para 3.1.1 refers) be noted and;
- 2.2) the supplementary estimates approved under delegated powers (para 4.1.1 refers) be noted.
- 2.3) the approach to managing the changes proposed by Leicestershire County Council in relation to the management of 'green' waste be noted and this be included into the 2015-2016 budget as requested by the Rural Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee as detailed in paragraph 5.1

P55. BUSINESS RATES – EXTENSION OF THE TRANSITIONAL RELIEF FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM PROPERTIES SCHEME

The Head of Central Services submitted a report requesting Members' approval of an extension for the small and medium properties scheme (extension of transitional relief) following a new discretionary power available to Local Authorities to support businesses throughout the whole Borough.

In the Autumn Statement released on 3rd December 2014, the Government had announced that it intended to support businesses that may be affected by the withdrawal of transitional relief in 2015/16 and 2016/17 by enabling Local Authorities to administer an extension of the transitional relief scheme for the years 2015/16 and 2016/17, leading up to the next revaluation which comes into effect on 1 April 2017.

The current transitional relief scheme was introduced in April 2010 to help ratepayers who were facing higher rate bills following the last revaluation of business properties. This scheme ends on 31 March 2015 and a small number of ratepayers will see their full rates on bills from 1 April 2015.

In the Autumn Statement, the scheme was extended to March 2017 for those properties with a rateable value up to an including £50,000.

The Government is encouraging Local Authorities to use their discretionary relief powers introduced under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended by Part 4 of the Localism Act 2011. It should be noted that each Local Authority adopt a scheme within certain criteria. Local Authorities will be fully reimbursed for all relief paid to 'qualifying' ratepayers.

The Government will fund Localism Act discounts to ensure eligible properties receive the same level of protection that they would have received had the transitional relief scheme continued into 2015/16 and 2016/17 with prescribed adjustments as outlined in the Scheme attached at Appendix A.

Work has been undertaken to identify the qualifying properties and it is expected that relief will be credited to each ratepayer and shown on their 2015/16 annual rate bills. A ratepayer will not be stopped from making an application for relief to the Council. If a ratepayer is unhappy with a decision from the Council to not award relief, or the amount awarded for relief, a panel of Senior Officers drawn from the T3 level will meet to review the decision made.

Currently 4 properties will be eligible to receive the extension of transitional relief.

The scheme will be publicised on the Council website and the Town Centre Manager and Economic Development Officer will also market the scheme as appropriate.

The relief amount for the four eligible rate payers amounts to £12,476.11 of which £4,990.44 is Melton's proportion.

Members requested rewording of portions of the Appendix for easier understanding.

All recommendations were moved by Councillor Rhodes and Councillor Posnett seconded.

Members were unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED that

- 2.1) The Business Rate – Extension of Transitional Relief for small and medium properties scheme as set out at Appendix A of the report be adopted by Melton Borough Council for financial years 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- 2.2) Delegated Authority be given to the Head of Central Services in consultation with the Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods to make any necessary changes to the Extension of Transitional relief for small and medium

properties scheme, in accordance with further guidance and legislation from central Government consultation with partners across Leicestershire and to improve the scheme based on experience from delivery of the scheme.

P56. OUT OF HOURS SERVICE REVIEW

The Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods submitted a report which allowed Members to consider a new model of how the Council's 'Out of Hours' service should be delivered from 1st April 2015.

The current out of hours emergency service is managed using five Melton Borough Council members of staff. Four of the staff have volunteered to be included in the service and one member of staff who is contracted on a fixed term contract.

Staff are on call on evenings, weekends and bank holidays to take emergency calls. Calls are received on a mobile phone and staff have a guidebook to refer to when dealing with queries and issues from customers. Currently staff handle calls of varying natures, and could be dealing with Housing Repairs queries, Anti-Social Behaviour incidents or other major incidents.

Trained staff with specific customer service skills do not currently manage the service and the level of service experienced can sometimes differ, depending on the level of knowledge from the member of staff on call that particular week.

Melton Borough Council currently has a contract with Harborough District Council (HDC) to manage our sheltered housing life line calls service. Negotiations have taken place with HDC in relation to incorporating our Out of Hours service into the work they undertake for us. HDC have agreed to undertake the service should the committee make a decision to do this.

Advantages to allowing HDC to take on the managing of the service would see a more consistent service delivered through a 24 hour call centre with experienced staff undertaking the work on a daily basis. HDC managing the service also means it will be easier to manage instances where staff are unable to cover the service due to sickness. Customers can therefore expect an improved service.

The service currently received between 750 and 1000 calls in a year. Fluctuations occur when there are instances of adverse weather or if a particular incident occurred. It is anticipated that Melton Borough Council will not exceed the upper threshold of calls as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

Approximately 60% of calls are housing related and 40% are in relation to general inquiries. All calls are logged individually and this will continue but in a more robust electronic method.

The new arrangements for the financial year 2015/16 will result in a saving of £11,360.

Questions were taken from Members enquiring about how staff feel about the situation with answers given that the consultation with staff is still on going and that officers are looking into what other local authorities are doing with the intention of streamlining the process to be more efficient and seamless for both staff and customers.

Members noted that the new service would be an improvement over the current service and would be positive for callers who do phone in because their queries would be handled by experienced and trained staff in a 24 hour environment, rather than on-call staff with intermittent call connection issues or unavailability to cover due to sickness.

All recommendations were moved by Councillor Wright and Councillor Freer-Jones seconded.

Members were unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED that

- 2.1) A new model of delivery with a new cost structure as detailed in Appendix A of the report be approved.
- 2.2) Delegated Authority be granted to the Head of Communications in consultation with the Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods to cease the current contract arrangements for staff who undertake the role as 'Out of Hours Standby Officers' and deal with any associated compensation payments subject to staff consultation.
- 2.3) The new 'Out of Hours' Service be incorporated into the current Lifeline service contract with Harborough District Council and be reviewed by January 2016 with the aim of re-tendering the whole service competitively in line with current lifeline arrangements

P57. HOMLESSNESS CHARGE REVIEWS

This item was previously removed from the Agenda.

P58. REVIEW OF PRIVATE LIFELINE SERVICE

Here the Chief Executive and Strategic Director (KA) entered the room.

The Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods submitted a report which informed Members of the outcome of a review of the 'Private Lifeline Service' and allowed for recommendations from Members on the charges for the Service for 2015/16.

Melton Borough Council currently provides a private lifeline service to 250 private housing customers. The service includes a lifeline support unit that is monitored by Harborough Lifeline Control Centre 24 hours a day. Additionally customers receive a monthly visit from a Lifeline Support Officer who provides advice and support to customers. The Private Lifeline helps vulnerable residents who are not in their own home.

In the local area, Melton is the most expensive service at a charge of £4.60 per week. Due to this, officers recommended that the charge should be frozen for the 2015/16 year and the Intensive Housing Management Task Group review how the service performs by carrying out a six monthly review and report back to the

appropriate committee in September 2015.

The service would be self-sustaining, in that all of the direct costs associated with the service bring in an income of £60,000 per annum. However there would be a number of specific overheads covering areas such as management, invoice generation and associated payments.

Continuing to provide a Private Lifeline Service would mean that the Council would be continuing its priority of supporting vulnerable people and helping older people to maintain their independence.

In answer to questions raised by Members, the People and Place Manager advised that those qualifying customers must meet specific criteria and have a particular income and needs and that each individual is assessed separately.

All recommendations were moved by Councillor Gordon and Councillor de Burle seconded.

Members were unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED that

- 2.1) The current charge made by Melton Borough Council in comparison to other local providers (Appendix A) be noted;
- 2.2) There be a freeze on the charge for 2015/16 at £4.60 due to Melton Borough Council currently being the most expensive option for clients;
- 2.3) An action plan be developed through the Intensive Housing Management Task Group in relation to increased marketing and promotion of the Private Lifeline Service.

P59. INTENSIVE HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE PROPOSAL

The Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods submitted a report to Members looking for consideration of proposals for the implementation of a new Intensive Housing Management Service which would meet the needs of vulnerable Melton Borough Council Tenants to ensure they were able to remain independent for as long as possible and sustain their tenancies.

Leicestershire County Council had formally informed Melton Borough Council in October 2014 of their intention to withdraw funding for the amount of £192,784 in relation to the Housing Related Support Service. In turn, Melton Borough Council had been reviewing how they would deliver the service to manage the needs of those more vulnerable tenants.

The Intensive Management Task Group had recommended that a new service be created to provide intensive management to tenants who have medium to high needs and that properties agreed by the Intensive Housing Management Task Group be included.

The proposal included de-designation the properties listed in Appendix C of the report. This would mean that the properties will become available for general needs housing instead of being ring-fenced for those over 55's with specific vulnerabilities.

The new charges would be subject to benefit assessment and those tenants on benefits would be protected because charges would be covered as part of their housing benefit assessment.

The implementation of this new service would complement the Council's priority to improve outcomes for vulnerable people.

Members queried how the service would be funded, and were advised that the service would be self-sustaining.

Members also queried the situation at Gretton Court, asking whether it would be similar case but the People and Place Manager explained that Gretton Court would have a separate review.

Finally Members enquired what happens to residents if they do not have sufficient money to afford the scheme. The People and Place Manager explained that the scheme is benefitable and each individual is assessed separately and in many cases, tenants would be better off under the new scheme.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Wright and Councillor Posnett seconded.

Members were unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED that

- 2.1) The establishment of a new Intensive Housing Management Service (Appendix A of the report) be approved.
- 2.2) Charging rates for tenants who receive this service and a contribution of up to £30,000 per annum from the Housing Revenue Account (Appendix B of the report) which is to be capped at this rate be approved;
- 2.3) The de-designation of properties stated in Appendix C of the report, be approved;
- 2.4) The Intensive Housing Management Task Group be continued ensuring a six monthly review takes place to evaluate the effectiveness of the new service.

P60. CORPORATE ISSUES

The Chief executive submitted a report to Members regarding the growing interest in Melton's approach to the service delivery, including since the fire in 2008 and also to advise of certain developing Corporate issues.

The Council has been the subject of four case studies, including two of which were promoted nationally at the launch of the Centre for Excellence in Information Sharing and more recently two developed by SOCITIM relating to the use of technology in tackling the pressures raised by austerity and a further study on how IT can assist with flexibility in working methods.

The Council has also been requested to explain the Melton Method of service delivery to the National Assembly members of DCN at its January meeting. From the published Agenda, it appears that Melton is the only council asked to take part in these workshops promoting good practice and a methodology for service delivery in these difficult economic times. A number of individual Councils have or are scheduled to make visits to the Council on occasions with partners to better understand that aspect of the Council's work.

The Chief Executive also fed back comments from visiting senior visiting Officers who relayed sentiments that their own boroughs have something to aspire to with regard to the Me and My Learning Programme.

The Council, together with the two other co-located sites in Leicestershire has been selected for the further roll-out of the National Universal Credit. This will commence in the coming weeks and the Council will adopt the principles of Universal Credit which will be delivered locally (UC-dl). Melton already has its arrangements in place through the Me and My Learning service at Phoenix House.

To complement this work, the District Council Chief Executives have agreed that their county wide group looking at Stronger Communities will take prime responsibility for Welfare Reform. This will allow the three co-located sites to share experience, develop approaches and assist the other councils in Leicestershire as the next rollout in the region continues.

Significant pressures have been experienced with the rollout of the Individual Elector Registration (IER) and this has now progressed through to its final stages in readiness for use in the up and coming General, district and parish elections. A report to the Governance Committees on Elections Matters was made in this cycle. In order to ensure successful implementation of the coming elections in light of significant changes through IER, Officers have elected to remain with current suppliers of services including printing, who have previously worked with the Council in relation to the rollout of the IER and related Electoral Changes.

Members congratulated Officers at Melton Borough Council on their efforts and achievements.

All recommendations were moved by Councillor Rhodes and Councillor Wright seconded.

Members were unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED that

2.1) The contents of this report be noted;

- 2.2) The continuing work of Officers in explaining Melton's developing approach be endorsed.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the Public be excluded during the consideration of the following item(s) of business in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (Access to Information: Exempt Information under Paragraph 3).

P63. **STAFFING STRUCTURES FOR THE INTENSIVE HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE**

The Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods submitted a report to Members to seek approval for the implementation of a new staffing structure for the Intensive Housing Management Service.

RESOLVED that all recommendations in the report be approved.

The meeting which commenced at 6.30 p.m., closed at 7:45pm.

Chairman