

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Date: 13 September 2010

Venue: East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

Time: 7.30 pm

Present: Councillors:-

Robin Underwood (Chairman)
Wendy Brackenbury (Vice-Chairman)
Andy Mercer (Leader of the Council)

David Brackenbury
Pauline Bradberry
Albert Campbell
Lisa Costello
Roger Glithero JP

Philip Hardcastle
Sylvia Hughes
Richard Lewis
Steven North
John Richardson MBE

135. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2010 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

136. APOLOGIES

Councillors Glenn Harwood sent his apologies.

137. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared a personal interest in the agenda item indicated but remained in the meeting during the discussion and voting thereon:-

Councillors	Item	Nature of Interest
Sylvia Hughes	7	The Council's representative on Nene Valley Citizens Advice Bureau
Richard Lewis	7	Knows the minister Mark Lees
Philip Hardcastle	15	Knows the owner of a property in option 5

The following Councillors declared a prejudicial interest in the agenda item indicated and left the meeting during the discussion and voting thereon:-

Councillors	Item	Nature of Interest
Roger Glithero	6	Circulates the Nene Valley News
Andy Mercer	7	Recommended grant to one recipient from another source
Robin Underwood	8	Has a building control application in progress

138. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

There were no questions.

139. PERSONNEL SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received and considered the recommendations in the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee on 31 August 2010, which are set out at 154 to 246 and form part of this minute).

RESOLVED:

That the recommendation contained in minute 7.4 (Redundancy Policy) be approved:

That the appeal panel referred to in sections 22 and 23 of the policy be established at the meeting of the Council on 4 October 2010 and that, to ensure that the rules of natural justice be followed, the members to be appointed should not serve on the Policy and Resources Committee.

140. NENE VALLEY NEWS

Nene Valley News had been published fortnightly since its introduction in 1998. It was introduced because there was no single alternative format that could reach all households in the district. It was noted that the contract was due to end on 31 March 2010. Members were asked to consider the way forward. The options outlined were

1. Discontinue Nene Valley News when the contract expires in March 2011
2. Extend the current contract for Nene Valley News for one year only
3. Change the frequency of Nene Valley News to a quarterly 16pp publication with no advertising and designed in house
4. Continue with Nene Valley News fortnightly for a two year contract with a reduction to 16 pages – 9 of editorial and 7 of advertising
5. Continue with Nene Valley News fortnightly in its current form of 20 pages and approve the tender process to start end September 2010.

The Committee discussed the balance between the financial considerations and the value of the publication to the council and community. During the discussion Members debated the following issues:

- The need to make savings
- Whether the money would be better spent protecting front line services
- The utility and effectiveness of the publication as a communications tool
- Reducing the number of pages would increase editorial pressure
- No local newspaper covered the whole district so there would be considerable costs just to produce statutory notices in different papers
- The need to keep the public informed of what the Council was doing, particularly over the next few months as more austerity measures came into effect and the new waste contract was finalised
- Alternative ways of communicating with the electorate across the district
- The inability to control the bias of local newspapers

- Government concerns regarding council publications and the possibility that controls might be introduced not allowing council newspapers to accept paid-for advertising.

The Committee noted that delivery problems had largely been solved and that even if the publication was not read, it continued to be received and people could see that the Council was making an effort to communicate with them.

RESOLVED:

That the Council continue with Nene Valley News fortnightly for a two year contract with a reduction to 16 pages (9 of editorial and 7 of advertising), subject to the inclusion of a clause within the contract allowing the Council to withdraw should controls on council newspapers be introduced by the government.

141. HOMELESSNESS GRANT 2010/11

Further to minute 90 (5 July 2010), the Committee considered requests from the East Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Forum, East Northamptonshire Community Services and Nene Valley Citizens Advice Bureau for funding from the Homelessness Grant 2010/11.

The Committee concluded that a grant would be invaluable in helping the Domestic Abuse Forum protect the most vulnerable people in the community and the low average spend per person meant that the money could help a number of people. Members also commented on the good work of Community Services in Rushden.

During consideration of the application from the Nene Valley Citizens Advice Bureau Members referred to the existing Service Level Agreement and associated grant of £60,822. As the money from the Homelessness Grant that had been granted to the Citizens Advice Bureau for 2009/10 had been to deliver the governments Mortgage Rescue Scheme and no specific project had been put forward for the funding this year, the Committee felt that the Bureau should not be given extra funding to replicate existing services.

RESOLVED:

That the applications from the East Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Forum and East Northamptonshire Community Services be approved, and that the application from Nene Valley Citizens Advice Bureau be not approved.

142. THE BUILDING (LOCAL AUTHORITY CHARGES) REGULATIONS 2010

The Vice-Chairman took the chair for this item.

The Committee received a report which set out government proposals to amend the way a local authority building control service could charge for its services. The new legislation required charges to be based on productive man hours. The new regulations aimed to:

- enable a building control service to fully recover its costs in respect of the part of the service known as the building regulations chargeable activities, by setting fees directly related to actual operating costs;
- make the way fees are calculated more transparent to customers;

- give building control services more flexibility in how they operate their charges, thus allowing them to better combat private sector competition;
- provide the opportunity for modern day working procedures to be taken into account when determining fees.

It was reported that the changes should result in a similar income to previous charges although some activities remained non-chargeable.

RESOLVED:

That the new Building Control Charges document, as established under The Building (Local Authority Charges 2010) Regulations and set out at appendix 1 pages 247 to 259, be adopted and take effect from 1 October 2010.

143. LOCAL LAND CHARGES FEES

The Committee considered a report which sought agreement to a change to the current charging regime because on 27 July 2010 officers had received notification from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) that the personal search fee of £22 would be revoked with effect from 17 August 2010. The data revealed in a personal search had been deemed to be free to inspect under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

In order to reduce the time spent by staff it was intended that as much information as possible be put onto the web site so that searchers could be provided unsupervised or remote access. A project team would be set up for this purpose.

It was proposed that when the Council was requested to carry out the work for a personal search where the searcher did not wish to visit the offices, a fee be introduced which would be based on salary cost recovery of £6 per property address and that this fee be reviewed in six months time. Once a significant proportion of the land charges register had been transferred to the web, then where requests to carry out the work on behalf of the searcher are received, the Council would need to base the fee on full cost recovery. A further report would be presented at this time.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Local Land Charges Fees be charged according to the regime set out at appendix 2 pages 260 to 261 with immediate effect;
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Planning Services and the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee to further amend the charging regime should further changes to the Land Charges regime be issued which provide for additional free access to register data.

144. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTNERSHIP

Members were asked to consider their support for the pooled fund under the Section 10 agreement of the Northamptonshire and Young People's partnership for 2010/11. At its meeting on 9 November 2009 (minute 227 refers), the Committee had given approval for the Council to adopt the section 10 agreement formalising the arrangements for the pooled fund for three years. Allied to this, the Committee approved a financial contribution of £8,650 for 2009/10 under this agreement. It was noted that the Council had negotiated a reduced

financial contribution last year and that it would like to continue with this amount. Members were reassured that although changes to children's trusts were anticipated, it was unlikely that they would happen in this financial year.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That support for the Children and Young People's Partnership under the Section 10 Agreement continue;
- (2) That a contribution of £8,650 to the Children and Young People's Fund for 2010/11 be approved, subject to the continuation of the Partnership during this financial year and a pro rata refund should it not continue;
- (3) That a report be brought to a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee concerning future partnership arrangements.

145. VILLAGE HALL GRANT SCHEME

The Committee considered an application to the Village Hall Grant Scheme for improvements to community facilities in Polebrook village hall. Officers reported that the parish council had been awarded £1,250 from the Maud Elkington Trust and £4500 from Northamptonshire County Council's Empowering Councillors Scheme for the project. Members were keen to support the project and highlighted the importance of supporting community initiatives in rural areas.

RESOLVED:

That £24,675 from the Village Hall Grant fund be awarded to Polebrook Parish Council for the refurbishment of Polebrook village hall.

146. EMPTY HOMES GRANT

The Committee debated the implications and options for Corby, East and South Northamptonshire following a joint award of £53,000 from the Communities and Local Government (CLG) to assist the three Councils to step up efforts to get empty homes in the private sector back in use and reduce anti-social behaviour associated with such properties. The report highlighted activities that had been carried out to date through empty property strategies and how officers intended to utilise some of the money. East Northamptonshire Council's and Corby Borough Council's proposed approach was to identify the properties that were proving to be the most problematic and also those where the councils could make a significant impact relatively quickly. From a prioritised short list of ten properties, the councils would then aim to return three properties in each area back into use employing the monies awarded.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the use of the monies awarded to support the delivery of empty property initiatives jointly with Corby Borough Council be approved; and
- (2) That one third of the award be released to South Northamptonshire Council to enable it to progress local initiatives.

147. HOUSE TO HOUSE COLLECTIONS POLICY

A draft policy to support decisions around house to house collections was submitted. The number of house to house collections had increased significantly over the past two years and an increasing numbers of bogus collectors and illegal collections were being identified. Members were concerned as to how officers or members of a licensing panel would ascertain the percentage of the value of the collection was being retained by the collector. It was noted that this might need further clarification in future. The Committee also concluded that it would be advisable for licenses to be awarded for a period of two years as one year would not be enough time for proper accounts to be available at the point of review.

RESOLVED:

That the House to House Collections Policy, as set out at appendix 3 pages 262 to 269, be adopted.

148. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE WASTE PARTNERSHIP

The Committee received a report summarising the prospective joint working options that the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership (NWP) was considering so that Members could provide clear direction to the Council representatives, Councillors Harwood and North. The signing of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) marked the first legally binding attempt to capture the joint working arrangements and responsibilities of the NWP authorities. The SLA built upon the memorandum of understanding. It formalised important legally binding obligations and indemnity arrangements and set recycling and composting targets. Although the execution of the SLA was a significant step forwards in terms of progressing joint working within the NWP, it was always intended to be an interim arrangement. The NWP would now be looking to move towards a stronger structure and more joined up commitment.

Councillor North reported that at the last NWP meeting there had been no desire amongst other authorities to progress towards a joint waste authority. The Committee agreed that the Council would not support a joint waste authority with delegation that would reduce its sovereignty. It was felt that a joint waste authority would be driven by higher level outcomes for the County Council and that local preferences would not necessarily be taken into account. The Committee concluded that a joint committee would be a flexible option.

The Head of Environmental Services reported that a new draft service level agreement would be submitted to the Committee in December which would contain a level of delegation that members would then be able to negotiate. The ability for a local authority to withdraw from the agreement should its circumstances change would be included.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's representatives on the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership be informed that the preferred option of the Policy and Resource Committee is a joint committee and that the Committee did not consider a joint waste authority to be appropriate.

149. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because exempt information, as defined under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, may be disclosed.

150. ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN OUNDLE

Options for alternative face to face delivery of council and tourism services in Oundle were considered. The options had been produced as a result of consultation with possible partners and all would result in a saving of at least 25% on the current budget.

The total projected users for a future full year in Oundle was 17,000, 2000 of which would be for Council services and 15,000 for tourism related enquiries. It was therefore concluded that tourism and council services required different solutions. Members considered the library an ideal location for council services and felt that, as tourism was so important to the local economy, a tourism centre based in the town centre was needed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the future delivery of services at Oundle from 1 December 2010 be via a combination of council services being delivered from Oundle Library on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 4pm together with the provision of an East Northamptonshire Council staffed tourism service Monday to Saturday from 10am to 4pm in a dedicated space at the front of the Talbot Hotel.
- (2) That the current lease be terminated on 31 December 2010.
- (3) That officers prepare a communication plan to ensure effective communication of future service delivery arrangements to local residents.

151. CONTINUATION OF MEETING – COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 8

During the consideration of the above item, the Chairman reported that the two hour period under the above Rule had been reached and it was

RESOLVED:

That the meeting continue until the item had been concluded.

Chairman