City of
Doncaster
Council

BE STEADFAST

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS
DECISION RECORD

The following decisions were taken on Wednesday, 1st February, 2023 by Cabinet.

Date notified to all Members: Friday, 3rd February, 2023

End of the call-in period is 5.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 14th February, 2023. These decisions will not be implemented until after this date and time.

Present:

Chair - Mayor Ros Jones (Mayor of Doncaster with responsibility for Budget and Policy)
Vice-Chair - Councillor Glyn Jones (Deputy Mayor, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Business.)

Cabinet Member for:

Councillor Lani-Mae Ball	Portfolio Holder for Education, Skills and Young People
Councillor Nigel Ball	Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Leisure, Culture and Planning
Councillor Joe Blackham	Portfolio Holder for Highways, Infrastructure and Enforcement
Councillor Rachael Blake	Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities
Councillor Phil Cole	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Trading Services
Councillor Mark Houlbrook	Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Waste
Councillor Jane Nightingale	Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources
Councillor Andrea Robinson	Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care

Apologies:-

An apology was received from Damian Allen, Chief Executive.

PUBLIC MEETING – SCHEDULE OF DECISIONS

Public Questions and Statements

No public questions or statements were submitted for the meeting.

Decision records dated 18th January, 2023, (previously circulated) were noted.

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1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

6.   School Admissions Arrangements for 2024/25 Academic Year.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet approved the following admission arrangements for the 2024/2025 school year:-

- Community School Admission Arrangements (as set out at paragraphs 13 to 14 of the report);
- Community School Nursery Admission Arrangements (as set out at paragraphs 13 to 14 of the report);
- Primary Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements (as set out at paragraphs 15 to 17 of the report);
- Secondary Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements (as set out at paragraphs 15 to 17 of the report);
- Notification of parents of the arrangements for admission, including those to the Doncaster University Technology College (as set out at paragraph 18 of the report); and
- Relevant Area for Consultation on Admission Arrangements (as set out at paragraph 33 of the report).

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Consideration was given to a report, which set out the requirements for the adoption of schemes for Co-ordinating the Admission Arrangements for Primary and Secondary Schools and sought Cabinet's approval of the Admission Arrangements for the City of Doncaster's Community Schools for the 2024/2025 School Year.

Councillor Lani-Mae Ball, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Young People, introduced the report and outlined that:-

- The Council had a statutory responsibility to determine the arrangements for the coordinated admission arrangements of children to primary and secondary schools and nurseries across the City each year;

- The Council has an important role to ensure that parents are given every opportunity to apply for a place at their preferred school. This is best achieved through the Council co-ordinating and monitoring the process;

- The co-ordinated arrangements apply to all types of schools across the City, including academies and free schools;

- In September 2013, the Government withdrew the requirement to co-ordinate in year applications. This raised concerns within the Authority regarding the safeguarding of children. Since March 2012, each year Cabinet has reaffirmed its commitment to co-ordinate in year admissions

and the Council is in a privileged position, with all schools taking part;

- Co-ordinating year of entry admissions is a statutory function of the Council and it achieves this through an online application and paper based system of which 99% of applications are received online;

- Outcomes for applicants in Doncaster are very positive and have improved when compared to the previous year. For Secondary admissions in 2022, 88% of children were offered their first preference and this was even higher at 96% in primary schools. These improve further when we look at children receiving a place at one of their preferred schools to over 96% in secondary and 99% in primary;

- Separate to the Council co-ordinating the overall process, each admission authority in the City must set its own admission arrangements which include the order in which places are offered when a school is full;

- The Council is responsible for setting these for 20% (24 out of 118) of the schools in Doncaster, the remainder are the responsibility of church schools and Academies;

- The Council's arrangements reflect the requirements to give first priority to children in care and are followed by catchment area children. In recognising the importance of keeping families together the Council then prioritise children with siblings attending the same school;

- These arrangements are reviewed annually and updated as necessary to take account of relevant legislation, guidance and local changes;

- It is crucial to offer support for parents throughout the admission process to minimise any disruption to a child's time in education. The support the Council provides through the Admissions Service has previously been reviewed and a number of actions were taken to ensure smooth transition into and between schools;

- This includes having dedicated support staff for each phase of education, minimising complaints and allowing the processing of applications in a timely manner.

Following the presentation of the report, the Mayor invited questions from Members.

In response to questions from Phil Cole, officers detailed how the Council ensures that parents are made aware of the process for school applications.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The options considered were set out in paragraphs 21 to 32 of the report.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations.

6.	**IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION**
	Not Exempt
7.	**DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**
	Riana Nelson, Director of Children, Young People and Families.

DECISION 2.

1.	**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE**
	7. Asset Management Strategy 2023-2030.
2.	**DECISION TAKEN**
	Cabinet:-
	(1) approved the draft Asset Management Strategy 2023-2030; and
	(2) that Cabinet review and work through the Overview and Scrutiny Community and Environment Panel recommendations relating to the Asset Management Strategy and Community lettings policy, and that these recommendations be attached as an appendix to the minutes from this meeting.
3.	**REASON FOR DECISION**
	Cabinet considered a report introduced by Councillor Joe Blackham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure, and Enforcement, which sought endorsement of the Council's Assets Management Strategy 2023 to 2030.
	The report sets out a revised and updated Asset Management Strategy to replace the existing strategy which ran from 2017 to 2022. The new strategy aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan and supporting strategies, including those covering Sustainability and Housing Delivery and builds on the principles established for asset management with a focus on;
	• Developing a modern, fit for purpose estate
	• Reducing costs and maximising income
	• Supporting skills development & economic growth; and
	• Supporting our communities
	The refreshed Strategy sets out the principles and approach the Council would take with regard to the management of its Assets, including clear strategic objectives and decision making guidelines that would enable Doncaster Council's teams and services to make consistent and joined up decisions regarding the physical assets required to deliver its objectives and operational priorities; and in doing so, supports

residents, partners and businesses to realise the City's collective goals.

The Strategy would guide future decisions associated with the use, acquisition and disposal of the Council's property assets over the next decade. The Strategy is based around 4 guiding principles:-

- Evidence-led decision making

- Whole Council, whole partnership approach

- Maximised Value

- Environment focused

The principles would guide the Council in relation to the decisions it makes, which would ensure that its assets were managed efficiently and sustainably, such that they remained 'fit-for-purpose' and thus supported front line services to deliver their core functions to its residents and businesses. The Strategy would be mindful of new technologies and ways of working, as well as putting the environment at the forefront of the Council's thinking to ensure that its carbon footprint and any negative impact on the environment was minimised.

Councillor Blackham outlined that the Council has an extensive asset portfolio, that both provides a home for its services, and, in some instances, brings income into the Council to support vital services. Due to ongoing financial pressures the Council must look to rationalise its assets accordingly and increase income, where possible. This does however mean that the Council can look to consolidate services within its communities, to see local hubs instead of multiple Council facilities, enabling the Council to invest in its reduced estate and provide a cost effective modern estate. Councillor Blackham reported that as part of the Council's review and consultation process, feedback received from Cabinet and Members of the Community and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel had been included in the updated Strategy.

The Mayor invited Councillor Gemma Cobby, Chair of the Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel to the meeting, who was in attendance to provide the Panel's feedback on the proposed Asset Management Strategy, and also referred to the recommendations of the Panel's recent Review of the Community Asset Transfer process.

Councillor Cobby thanked the Mayor and Cabinet for accepting the Panel's recommendations and outlined the recommendations from the Panel's review and also the recommendations relating to its consideration of the Asset Management Strategy.

Cabinet thanked Overview and Scrutiny for their work on reviewing the Strategy and its feedback on the Community Lettings Policy. This had been an open and transparent process and showed how the effective use of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny procedures could help to improve and contribute to the Council's Policy and Strategy.

Cabinet welcomed the Strategy, and in particular referred to the proportion of assets that the Council had been successful in disposing of in the last 5 years in order to rationalise and make more efficient the use of Council buildings, which

would enable the Council to lease the assets to community groups and community organisations.

In response to comments and questions from Cabinet Members, it was confirmed that the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority did not have authority in terms of the disposal of, or use of, Council assets.

4. **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

To choose not to update the Asset Management Strategy and continue without a current and published document.

5. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

There were no declarations.

6. **IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION**

Not Exempt

7. **DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Dan Swaine, Director of Economy and Environment.

Signed……………………………………Chair/Decision Maker

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   The following recommendations and observations are proposed by the Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel. These have been developed as part of a review, following evidence gathering sessions relating to the Community Asset Transfer Process.

2.   The Panel recommends that:

a.   **Recommendation 1: There to be an evaluation and review undertaken of the current Community Lettings and Asset Transfer Policy and this also takes account of Recommendations 2 – 6, and the observations and findings, included as part of the Panel's review.**

b.   **Recommendation 2. Improving Communication between the Local Authority and Community Groups to be further explored as part of the assets transfer process.**

Reason

Members were informed of the lengthy process that Community Asset Transfers (CAT) could be subject to. Although it was recognised that there were reasons for this, it was felt that better communication between the authority and Community Groups (and Ward Members) would improve the process. The Panel found that poor communication could lead to community groups losing volunteers and funding opportunities, and becoming disillusioned particularly where there were delays in the CAT process.   The Panel believed that better communication at the beginning would help understanding and expectations of the process being clearer for groups to have better clarity of their status, as to understanding what was happening and why. It was also noted that feedback from community groups was not generally sought following the process and it was recognised that there could be value in receiving this in future.

c.   **Recommendation 3. Consideration be given to the Ways of Providing Additional Support to Community Groups (and Ward Members), to ensure they are equipped and prepared to move through the process and successfully take on and maintain the leasing of an asset.**

These could include:

- Regular attendance at Ward Member meetings by officers (on a quarterly basis).
- Having a dedicated resource/specialised officer for Community Asset Transfers within the Asset Team and closer links with Stronger Communities (and other key groups that would support this process).
- Better information, guidance and signposting to what is available to community groups, for example, signposting to training for Community Groups at an early stage to ensure they are prepared and aware of their responsibilities in taking on a community asset.

- Consider the potential of involving third sector organisations and through partnering with other groups, to support both the Council and Community Groups in going through the process and providing additional capacity and resource e.g. Locality (national charity organisation).

Reason

Members heard during an evidence gathering meeting that some groups and Ward Members did not understand the obligations and responsibilities of taking on a community asset, for example, statutory maintenance and therefore felt that more needed to be done to make them aware of this and the support that was available to assist them

It was felt that this could also help protect council assets, preventing risks arising due to worsening conditions of buildings and support groups in continuing to add value to their communities.

It was noted that the Assets Team was a small team with a number of responsibilities and limited capacity. This also applies to the work of the Stronger Communities Team, who have a number of increasing demands and expectations on them. Members recognised that the Stronger Communities Team already provided a range of support, for example, providing introductions, backgrounds, advice and support with activities that the community group may want to do later on.

d. **Recommendation 4 – The monitoring of transfers that have taken place be included within the lease agreement.**

Reason

It was felt that this would provide a mechanism to ensure that the process is more robust. Members heard from another Local Authority, that they undertake monitoring 6 months after the transfer has taken place, although it was noted that it could be a challenge to retrieve appropriate information.

e. **Recommendation 5 – To improve clarity and transparency within the Community Asset Letting Process.**

Reason

Members felt that greater transparency within the wider remit of Asset Management would also benefit the Community Asset Letting Process.

During the period of its review, Members were provided an opportunity to input into the proposed Strategic Asset Management Strategy 2023-2030, prior to its consideration at Cabinet on the 1st February 2023. Reviewing the wider strategy highlighted some of the issues around openness and transparency and helped inform Members views in relation to issues that were also applicable to the Community Asset Lettings Process.

As part of the feedback provided on the strategy, the Panel asked that consideration would be given to the following;

- The strategy be strengthened to provide a greater transparency within the process and accessibility to information, such as, making the asset register more easily accessible to the public and that Asset Board decision meetings be held in public.
- Reflects the importance of providing an opportunity for public input and ensure that Ward Members consultation and engagement has taken place prior to decisions being made (particularly on community lettings of a higher value and that has significant impact on the local community).
- More clarify is provided around the process itself and appeals process as part of the governance around community and commercial lettings.
- On page 17 of the strategy, the paragraph relating to Governance is made clearer around eligibility of assets for community leases and what can be undertaken.

f. **Recommendation 6 – To look at the potential role of Parish and Town Councils in relation to what value they can add and what support to the process.**

Reason

It was felt that there were opportunities to better engage and utilise Town and Parish Councils within the process, due to their local knowledge, position and connections with the community. For example, they could be involved more as a consultee at an early stage or as an alternative body to take on a freehold transfer, where community groups were unable able to do so.

3. **In undertaking the review, the Panel made a number of observations, which it believed were important issues and should be noted as part of its findings.**

<u>**Key Observations:**</u>

a. **Links to Localities Model** - It was recognised that understanding local key assets and their value were important to our communities and this should link strongly to the localities agenda and be further embedded as part of the localities model.

b. **That there are a number of challenges faced by the Council around availability of assets and legal considerations.**

   These include;

   - That there were now less assets available across the borough.
   - That there were varying lease arrangements and different letting types (for example, community libraries that are managed uniquely).
   - The need to meet Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES).
   - Buildings with restrictions.
   - Consent required for alterations.
   - General conditions of property.

c. **Lack of available capacity/resources within the Council** – it was explained that this was about managing the expectations of what support can be provided above and beyond the necessary work undertaken by teams within the Council. It was heard that this could lead to a risk of being more reactive to issues than being proactive.

d. **Improved 'Easy Read' Community Lettings Policy** – Members were informed that the policy would soon be adapted into an Easy Read format (in collaboration with the Communications team) and this would be made available on the DMBC website. The Panel welcomed this initiative.

e. **Impact and consequences of the delays and length of time transfer is taking -** It was commented that delays and the length of time taken for the transfer to go through had, in some instances, resulted in community groups losing funding and volunteers and could lead to worsening conditions of unused buildings. On a strategic level, it was felt that this could further impact the Council's ability to deliver the priorities of Delivering Doncaster Together.

f. **Other Challenges -** The wide and diverse range of community groups wishing to take over local assets could on occasion result in challenges such as difficulties in collaborating with other groups (for example, Charity Law conflicts), or providing effective support including to those that relied on a small number of people. It was also seen that there were instances where groups might not be fully aware of their responsibilities or be fully prepared to take on a community asset.