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Doncaster Council

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS DECISION RECORD

The following decisions were taken on Tuesday, 23rd February, 2021 by Cabinet.

Date notified to all Members: Friday, 26th February, 2021

End of the call-in period is 5.00 p.m. on Tuesday 9th March 2021. 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 Framework)

Vice-Chair - Councillor Glyn Jones (Deputy Mayor, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Equalities.)

Cabinet Member for:

Councillor Nigel Ball	Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Leisure and Culture
Councillor Joe Blackham	Portfolio Holder for Highways, Street Scene and Trading Services
Councillor Chris McGuinness	Portfolio Holder for Communities, Voluntary Sector and the Environment.
Councillor Bill Mordue	Portfolio Holder for Business, Skills and Economic Development
Councillor Jane Nightingale	Portfolio Holder for Customer and Corporate Services.

Apologies:-

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rachael Blake and Councillor Nuala Fennelly.

PUBLIC MEETING – SCHEDULE OF DECISIONS

Public Questions and Statements

No public questions or statements were made at the meeting.

Decision Records dated 16th February, 2021, be noted.

DECISION 1.

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

6. 2020-21 Quarter 3 Finance and Performance Improvement Report.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet:-

- (1) approved the virements per the Financial Procedure Rules, detailed in the Appendix A – Financial Profile;
- (2) noted the allocations of block budgets in the Capital Programme, detailed in Appendix A – Financial Profile, in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules (sections A&B);
- (3) approved the payment to the Doncaster Children’s Services Trust (DCST) for the non-Covid element of their overspend (£2.56m) with a reconciliation at year-end to ensure any surplus is returned to the Council;
- (4) delegated the allocation of the £5m Environment & Sustainability/Net Zero Carbon Earmarked Reserve to the Director of Economy & Environment and Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151) in consultation with the Mayor, as outlined in paragraph 84 of the report.

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Cabinet received a report introduced by Mayor Ros Jones on the 2020-21 Quarter 3 Finance and Performance Improvement Report. She stated that it continues to be a challenging time for the delivery of council services as the COVID-19 pandemic impacts right across the Council.

The Council and Team Doncaster partners remained on a response footing throughout this quarter. A large proportion of services continue to operate as normal during the pandemic and through the lockdowns, with some of the services being delivered successfully via remote working.

The Council are pleased to recognise areas of improvement, for example

- There has been a large increase in green waste and recycling;
- 628 new homes have been built so far this year; and
- spend was just under £30 million with local firms this quarter equating to 77% of council spend

The Mayor also reported that there are areas where the Council needs to recognise that these will continue to be a challenge or reconsider whether other actions can be introduced to improve customer service delivery. These include:

- sickness rate remains below target, though there has been some improvement since last quarter
- Due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic there has been a significant drop in the collection of business rates although this is an improvement on

quarter 2 position.

In terms of dealing with the financial challenges brought about by Covid, Mayor Jones stated that the Council have received £31.7m to support its operations. The Council are managing the additional resources carefully alongside existing resources to ensure that services and cost pressures are funded during the financial year.

It was noted that this has created the opportunity to re-allocate £7.5m for significant investment to support the following areas;

- £5m to support the Environment & Sustainability Strategy approved by Council on the 21st January 2021 and Net Zero Carbon Masterplan
- £200,000 for flood prevention measures including high volume pumps, modelling software and monitoring points. Parts of the borough narrowly avoided flooding only last month, these resources will help prepare and protect residents in case of potential future flooding.
- £100,000 investment in the Strategic Asset Management service.
- £900,000 for demolition costs to support the Doncaster town centre master plan; and
- £1.2m for targeted capital investment, including the accelerated replacement of street light columns, and feasibility works

Mayor Jones commented that these funds are one off and provide much needed resources to continue the regeneration and environmental sustainability aspirations for the borough.

In conclusion, Mayor Jones stated that the Council are continuing to forecast a balanced budget position at year-end for 2020/21 and carrying forward an element of the Covid-19 emergency grant funding to support services through the rest of the pandemic.

Councillor Chris McGuinness wished to make comment in relation to paragraph 18 on page 4 of the report (delivering net zero carbon) which is the first time that this type of information had been gathered centrally into one document, which is an important step. The Council will now produce a newsletter throughout the year for Elected Members and others putting all this information in one accessible place.

Councillor Nigel Ball emphasised the need to recognise the contribution of Council staff who had stepped up and continued to provide vital services despite the pressures they were facing themselves as a result of Covid-19. The work of services such as Highways, Street Scene, and the fact that the Council had been able to maintain its Blue/Black bin collections all need to be recognised. He highlighted the recent staff wellbeing survey where over 1700 staff responded which clearly showed that lockdown and the restrictions were taking a toll on staff in terms of social isolation etc.

Councillor Joe Blackham made comment with regard to paragraph 25 of the report, where it detailed local wages. He stated that it was heartening to see that the figure currently stood at £563.90, which was the highest within South Yorkshire and

Yorkshire and the Humber. Secondly, in relation to paragraph 53 of the report detailing the increase of 1,500 children in receipt of free school meals, he stated that this equated to 23.5% of children. This identifies another devastating sign of the deprivation levels that exist in Doncaster, and which the Council could not afford to understate. He commented that this was a huge problem within the borough that was getting worse.

Councillor Glyn Jones reported that it was encouraging to see the work that had continued around rough sleepers and the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, as it was important to never forget people who have fallen on hard times through various reasons. He stressed that this work should continue around that particular cohort of people in society to provide support to enable them to lift themselves out of rough sleeping.

Councillor Jones also reported on the number of new homes that had been completed, which cumulated to 628 homes that will be completed and ready to use at the end of Quarter 3. He stated that whilst this was significantly down on last year, if you take into account impact of Covid, this was a reasonable effort. He went on to say that new accommodation was certainly required as Doncaster is a growing borough and the Council need to support people as much as possible and this was one of way doing that.

In conclusion Mayor Ros Jones, wished to highlight again that 77% of spend had been spent with local firms and she would encourage each and everyone in the borough to buy local and to spend local. She was delighted to see that the Council had been able to help stimulate Doncaster's economy in these uncertain times.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Not applicable

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations.

6. IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION

Not Exempt

7. DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Debbie Hogg, Director of Corporate Resources.

DECISION 2.

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

7. St Leger Homes of Doncaster Ltd (SLHD) Performance and Delivery Update: 2020/21 Quarter 3.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet:-

- (1) noted the progress of SLHD performance outcomes and the contribution SLHD makes to supporting Doncaster Council (DC) strategic priorities; and
- (2) accepted SLHD's VFM statement for the financial year ended 31 March 2020 (2019/20).

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Cabinet received a report introduced by Councillor Glyn Jones on the St Leger Homes of Doncaster Performance and Delivery Update 2020/21 Quarter and the Value For Money (VFM) statement attached as an appendix.

Councillor Jones stated that as discussed previously in respect of the Q2 report, the shadow of the current pandemic hangs over the performance report. As performance dipped in the first quarter of 2020-21, and performance data is cumulative it has been difficult to catch up and achieve performance at the levels that was anticipated at the start of the year.

He commented that some of the restrictions brought about by the pandemic such as the number of staff that can safely be working in a house at any one time are still impacting on performance. That said, on a monthly basis performance continues to return to more normal levels.

He outlined some KPIs that are off target as follows:

KPI 1 Rent Arrears.

Rent Arrears rose to 3.49% at the end of Quarter 3, this trend is being seen nationally across other housing organisations and it is expected that improvements will be reported for the post-Christmas performance.

KPIs 4, 5 & 6 cover the homeless indicators.

Performance in these areas still remains extremely challenging and the service are witnessing unprecedented pressure. The temporary extension of the rehousing duty to non-statutory homeless means that there is a significant increase in the number of homeless people being temporarily re-housed. Given the economic pressures on many people and the anticipated ending of the furlough scheme, it is expected, that these performance indicators will remain under pressure for some time.

He stated that considerable work is taking place right across the homelessness partnership to address the increasing demand for support.

With regard to the VFM Report, Councillor Jones reported that there is a lot of detail provided in the VFM statement. He commented that the key elements of this report are provided by the National Housing Benchmarking Organisation,

Housemark which, helps to have confidence that it is an independent verification and a genuine comparison with other housing providers across the country.

He advised that overall you can see that St Leger continues to be a low cost, mid to high performing organisation when benchmarked with both peers and with all other housing organisations.

Councillor Jones pointed out that the charts in section 5 are derived from Housemark and indicate that in the vast majority of instances costs are low and performance is above average. The only issue being below the average when compared to other ALMOs relates to the public's perception of the neighbourhood.

In summary, he stated that there's a lot more detail in the report, but overall the Council can have confidence, in part due to the use of independent organisations for the provision of the data, that St Leger is performing well and delivering good value for money.

Mayor Ros Jones made comment with regard to the 8.5% of current rent arrears, which was worse than the target. However, she stated that the Council have got to have due recourse to pressure that has been put on the service over the last year and how it has been impacted by the Covid 19 Pandemic. She stated that it shows there have been 6,300 universal credit cases compared with 4,325 in the same period last year and of these 2,776 were in rent arrears. She stressed that the Council needs to assist all its residents and ensure that it works alongside them in order to help them get out of rent arrears, but more importantly, assist them in being able to balance things where we can. She also expressed her delight in seeing that people are taking up the offer of support and the service have been able to keep people in their homes due to that assistance being provided.

Mayor Jones also wished to compliment St Leger Homes regarding the sickness levels outlined in the report and stated that it was unbelievable that this was showing a reduction, so congratulations were given to St Leger for that. However, she said caution was required because out of the days lost in sickness over a third were stress related. She pointed out that she had asked for assurance that support was being given to staff and she was pleased to hear from the Chief Executive at St Leger Homes that support and assistance was being provided to all staff suffering from stress.

Councillor Glyn Jones echoed the comments made with regard to stress and explained that the different aspects of stress can be hard to pick up, if a person is not willing to ask for help. He was pleased that those assurances had been given and all need to be aware of the symptoms of stress before they become more serious.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Not applicable.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations.

6. IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION

Not Exempt

7. DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Dave Richmond, Chief Executive, St Leger Homes of Doncaster.

DECISION 3.

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

8. Performance Challenge of Doncaster Children's Services Trust: Quarter 3, 2020/21.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet noted the progress of DCST performance outcomes and the contribution that the Trust makes to support the Council's strategic priorities.

3. REASON FOR DECISION

In the absence of Cllr Fennelly, Mayor Ros Jones introduced the report stating that throughout both local and national Coronavirus restrictions Doncaster Childrens Services Trust has continued to deliver its service to children, young people and families by working closely with Doncaster Council

The impact of Covid has been felt throughout Quarter 2 and into Quarter 3, in particular between July-December 2020 the Trust saw an increase in:

- Referrals of 39%;
- Children & Family Assessments of 59%; and
- Section 47s initiated up by 42%.

She reported that the full impact for 2021/22 due to local and national coronavirus restrictions is not yet known but likely to be felt well into 2021/22.

It was advised that caseloads in the Trust increased due to additional demand pressures and the Trust and Council have taken action to reduce this pressure. Despite Covid and demand pressures, the Trust's performance remains strong across its contractual KPIs and strategic indicators

Mayor Jones reported that the Trust is working with the Council on the Future Placement Strategy, increasing local homes offer (which should impact on Out of Authority numbers) and local Trust foster carers

The Trust, with Council support, has developed approaches to reduce agency costs including a Social Worker Academy and a Social Worker attraction and retention strategies

She advised that overall the Trust believes that it can achieve Medium Term

Financial Strategy, excluding Covid, albeit with changed phasings, over the next three years

The Trust and Council continue to invest in innovative practice such as Mockingbird, Pause, Domestic Abuse Navigators and Vulnerable Adolescents.

Cabinet were advised that a Doncaster Children's Partnership Recovery and Resilience programme has been established to help keep children and families safe, working with strategic safeguarding partners, including the Council, police, health and schools.

In conclusion, she commented that the full impact of Covid, on society, children coming into care and the likely financial burden is still unknown. She went on to say that these are unprecedented times, however, it was important that the Council along with the Trust, look after the Borough's children.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Not applicable.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations.

6. IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION

Not Exempt

7. DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

James Thomas, Chief Executive, Doncaster Children's Services Trust.

DECISION 4.

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

9. The Independent Review and Redraft of DMBCs Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management Plan for Doncaster Council's Trees and Woodlands.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet:-

(1) noted and discussed the independent review findings and how these have been translated into the revised policy; and

(2) approved the revised policy

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Cabinet considered a report introduced by Councillor Chris McGuinness on the independent review and redraft of DMBC's Tree Policy and Tree Risk Management

Plan for Doncaster Council's Trees and Woodlands.

He reported that the independent review, which was initiated by the Mayor is because the Council Tree Policy was developed and adopted before the Declaration of a Climate & Biodiversity Emergency. The aim is that the Council is to increase tree establishment and woodland creation to support nature recovery, clean growth and the commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. He advised that the actual target was 2040.

Councillor McGuinness stated that Doncaster Council is committed to the principle of minimal tree removal, considered only as a last resort, where no feasible alternative solution can be found. There are situations where trees are unsafe and pose a health and safety risk to people or property, and so need to be removed for risk management.

He advised that on other occasions, other reasons such as a road improvement scheme, root damage from utility works, or root damage to pathways and driveways means that a range of measures need to be considered including removal and replacement (the number of replacement trees required to compensate will depend upon the size of the tree(s) being lost).

He commented that the Tree Policy is not therefore a strategy for delivering Doncaster's entire contribution to the England Tree Strategy and the borough's 2040 net-zero target. It will of course be a very important document moving forward. It is visible to the general public and may well be a reference point for public perceptions around practical progress.

The objective was to ensure that the policy was fit for purpose in relation to the management of street trees, local decision making processes, engagement with residents and its alignment to the borough's ambitious environmental conservation plans set out in the Environment and Sustainability Strategy.

Cabinet were advised that Professor Ian Rotherham was approached mid-December 2020 and agreed to guide the review. Professor Rotherham is an academic at Sheffield Hallam University.

Cllr McGuinness stated that the review saw a number of direct engagement sessions between a wide range of key stakeholders, as well as online consultation through the Doncaster Talks platform. It is believed that there was around 800 responses. The consultation and engagement process ran throughout most of January. Two resident focus group meetings also took place in January, and further opportunity was made for Campaigners to speak directly to Professor Rotherham.

He went on to say that the consultation feedback has then been evaluated, along with Professor Rotherham's findings, and included in the revised policy. There has therefore not been a complete re-write, but new sections or amendments have been made in accordance with the agreed scope.

He reminded Cabinet colleagues that the scope of the policy review extends to all trees and woodland under the direct management of Street Scene (i.e. on parks, open spaces and highways) and to those where Street Scene is acting as a

managing agent (e.g. for other Council departments or schools). This has to operate within the capability and resource base of the Tree Service.

In conclusion he stated that this policy does not apply to decisions relating to protected trees or trees affected by development, which are administered by the Local Planning Authority, or trees on land not owned by Doncaster Council, except where issues of public safety override. As he had previously explained this is a very important document moving forward and is visible to the public. He commented that he hoped Cabinet will support the review and officers were available today to answer any questions members may have.

Councillor Joe Blackham welcomed the well-crafted document. However, he stated that it was important that the synergy is right between those who are writing documents and those who are delivering, because there is a gap and there is a need to ensure that the gap is closed. He commented that groups of people from different parts of the authority need to come together to ensure all aspects of the Tree Policy are covered because this is what the people of Doncaster deserve and what the Council is seeking to achieve.

Mayor Ros Jones stated that nobody should take this resource for granted and there is a need to manage and constantly replenish Doncaster's municipal tree stock for the borough's children and future generations. She commented that it was important to raise awareness of the importance of the urban forest on both public and privately owned land and encourage all residents to manage all of Doncaster's trees carefully for many years to come, and to plant more.

She went on to thank everyone who has made the effort to get involved and shared their experiences with the Council because this was something that cannot be pushed back. She stated that there is a definite timeframe which the Council has to deliver for the borough, the environment, the country and the world, and the Council will ensure they do all they can to manage tree stock appropriately and seek to encourage the private sector to follow its lead.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The appointment of a specialist independent reviewer was the only option considered. An independent review ensures a broad range of views can be considered alongside national best practice to improve the policy where necessary, but particularly in relation to the management of street trees and engagement with residents.

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

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