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Doncaster Council

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS DECISION RECORD

The following decisions were taken on Wednesday, 1st December, 2021 by Cabinet.

Date notified to all Members: Friday, 3rd December 2021.

End of the call-in period is 5.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 14th December 2021. This decision 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 Nigel Ball	Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Leisure, Culture and Planning
Councillor Rachael Blake	Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities
Councillor Phil Cole	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Trading Services
Councillor Jane Nightingale	Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources
Councillor Andrea Robinson	Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care

Apologies:-

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joe Blackham, Lani-Mae Ball and Mark Houlbrook.

PUBLIC MEETING – SCHEDULE OF DECISIONS

Public Questions and Statements

There were no questions or public statements submitted at the meeting.

The decision records from the Cabinet Meeting held on 17th November, 2021 (previously circulated) were noted.

DECISION 1

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE
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6. Specialist Safeguarding Update.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet:-

- (1) noted the information in the report; and
- (2) approved the allocation of £3m funding for the specialist safeguarding investigation from uncommitted general reserves.

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Consideration was given to a report, introduced by Councillor Rachel Blake, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities, which outlined the action taken by the Council as part of its statutory responsibility, in carrying out an investigation with regard to allegations of abuse at two independent children's homes based in Doncaster. In February 2021, Ofsted received a whistleblowing referral which outlined allegations of abuse at two independent children's homes within the borough. Proactive and immediate action was taken in order to put in place actions to safeguard children and young people, and following visits from Ofsted to the homes on 12th and 23rd March, 2021, the decision was taken to suspend the homes' registration, which remain in place to date.

It was agreed by Doncaster Safeguarding Partners in March 2021, that the thresholds had been met to instigate a Complex Abuse Investigation (CAI). The investigation would be completed within a legal framework that set out the roles and responsibilities of public services, in order to fulfil the required statutory functions. However, further to this, an investigation of this scale would not be possible without additional staffing and resources, and approval was sought from Cabinet for the allocation of £3m funding to carry out the specialist safeguarding investigation to come from uncommitted general reserves. Councillor Blake outlined that this was deemed necessary in order to ensure the voices of children, young people and young adults across the Borough, were heard.

Councillors commended the positive response from the Council following the allegations and the swift action taken to address the situation, and acknowledged that as Corporate Parents they had a responsibility to ensure the protection and safety of children and young people throughout the Borough.

In relation to the allocation of funding, Cabinet agreed that this was vital in ensuring the Council was robust and that adequate resources were in place to ensure the protection of children from harm.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The scale and scope of the investigation demands dedicated resourcing, and therefore, the only option available is to provide additional resources to fund the estimated cost to conclude the investigation and meet our statutory requirements.

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 Learning, Opportunities and Skills

DECISION 2

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

7. Proposals for Digital Switch over of the Home Alarm Service.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet:-

- (1) gave approval to secure funds for a potential 12 month roll out of new home alarm equipment which is compatible and offers a future proof solution for the HEART service and residents of Doncaster;
- (2) agreed that funds of up to £0.96 million be accessed to procure and award a contract to a provider to replace home alarm equipment across the Borough, and purchase the supporting software, and to employ temporary staffing in order to safely install the new equipment whilst maintaining existing service; and
- (3) noted that the current charges to residents for the equipment and services may be the subject of a future review to reflect the increased cost of the equipment. Any change to the charges will be subject to the appropriate internal Council approvals.

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Councillor Andrea Robinson, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, introduced a report which proposed the replacement of all existing telecare home alarm equipment and supporting software across the Borough with a more modern digital compatible technology. The report also sought approval to secure funds of up to £0.96m, for a potential 12 month roll out of the new home alarm equipment which is compatible and offers a future proof solution for the universal Home Alarms (HEART) Service, and the residents of Doncaster.

The UK is moving from an analogue telephone system to a faster digital system. The current telephone systems across the UK work by connecting households to a telephone exchange via a copper line connection. These lines are being replaced with digital lines to each household. This is a national programme being coordinated by telephone exchanges across the country. There are different telephone exchanges covering different parts of Doncaster, and therefore the replacement will take place at different times for different parts of the Borough. The national end date of the programme is expected in 2025. This programme of the digital switchover is being coordinated by Open Reach and is called the PSTN Digital Switchover (Public Switched Telephone Network).

The Council currently provides a universal Home Alarms service (the HEART service) for the citizens of Doncaster. This supplies telecare equipment to people who benefit from this support, to enable them to stay safely in their own home and provides equipment that will summon help for them in an emergency. This equipment currently plugs in to existing analogue phone lines to summon the help that people need.

It is the service's opinion that the safest course of action is to ensure that all people who use this service are protected from telecare equipment failure, and are futureproofed against the consequences of the digital switchover, by replacing all existing telecare equipment with more modern digital compatible technology.

The HEART Service has explored a range of options and solutions, and recommend a new smart hub alarm which works on both analogue and digital lines from the current provider. There are currently around 4100 analogue telecare lifelines in use in the Home Alarms Service. It is proposed to replace all of these units with a digital compatible version over a 12 to 14 month rollout period, at a total cost of over £800,000 for the equipment, and the necessary hardwiring and software upgrades. There is also the need to recruit to backfill existing installation staff in the service, in order to undertake the roll out of the new equipment across the community. Based on estimated agency rates for the resource required for this roll out, there is a cost of over £150,000. The above actions will ensure the Council's HEART service is fit for the future, supporting people who would otherwise be at risk of injury or accident, and making sure they have rapid access to help and reassurance.

It was noted that if the Council does not invest in these improvements, there was a risk of equipment failure as the digital switchover takes place. The Council was not willing to take this risk and although no money has been provided nationally, it is the Council's intention to invest in the service to ensure it can continue supporting older and disabled people in Doncaster, who rely on this essential service.

In addition to the one-off installation costs, the ongoing running costs of the new digital equipment will be higher than the previous analogue connections. In spite of the Council not receiving increased funding from national government for this and other expanding costs of Adult Social Care, in view of the huge impact of the pandemic on Doncaster people, the Council will not increase the charge for the HEART service in the immediate future. The Council periodically reviews charging arrangements for all of its services and change to the future charges for the HEART service will be subject to transparent and robust decision making, and will continue to prioritise those most in need of support.

Councillor Phil Cole stressed that it was vital for the Council to future proof the Home Alarm Service and for residents to have access to technology, and to be able to remain in their own homes. In response to a question from Councillor Cole, Councillor Andrea Robinson confirmed that due to an ageing population, it was anticipated that there would be a greater demand for people using the services in the future. She highlighted the importance of ensuring that connectivity was up to date.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Do nothing

If the Council did nothing, this risks people within the service being left with poor functioning or incompatible equipment, and reduced safety. This could result in a negative impact to life and limb for Doncaster residents reliant on the current provision. This option is not recommended.

Find an alternative piece of equipment

An exploration of other equipment took place. If the service went with a different equipment provider to the current one; all sensors for equipment would need to be changed and the costs would rise significantly to those forecasted. There are no alternatives available to continue to use telephone lines in an analogue way. This option is not recommended.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations.

6. IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION

Not Exempt.

7. DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Phil Holmes, Director of Adults, Health and Well-Being.

DECISION 3

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

8. 2021-22 Quarter 2 Finance and Performance Improvement Report.

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet:-

- (1) noted the quarter 2 performance and financial information;
- (2) approved the virements per the Financial Procedure Rules, as detailed in Appendix B – Financial Profile of the report; and
- (3) noted the allocations of block budgets in the Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix B – Financial Profile of the report, in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules (sections A & B);

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Councillor Phil Cole, Cabinet Member for Finance and Trading Services, introduced the Finance and Performance report for Quarter 2 for the 2021-22 financial year, which set out the Council's current financial forecast position towards the 2021/23 budget and performance against key Service Standards.

At the end of Quarter 2, the Council agreed a partnership Borough Strategy,

'Doncaster Delivering Together', up to 2030, which sets out the Council's key priorities and as a partnership that the Council will need to contribute to in the short, medium and long term.

Further to the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, Councillor Cole reported that Doncaster has secured some significant investment, including a 'Levelling Up' Fund, two 'Town Deals' and Community Renewal Funding totalling over £64m.

Demand for services has and is increasing in many of the Council's service areas, with some services seeing 1.5 times higher demand than 2019-20 levels in the first part of 2021-22. Over the coming months, the Council would assess the extent to which this is pent up demand that simply was not available during restrictions, or if this is the new level the Council will experience in the future.

During the winter period and 'living with Covid', there is likely to be disruption to some extent and higher than usual pressure on the health and care system, and the Council will need to regularly assess the risks and mitigations to ensure it can best respond over what will be a difficult period.

The Council is also aware that the rising cost of living will be playing out in households right across the Borough, with increasing energy prices and food prices. This, coupled with a recovering economy that is moving in the right direction, but still high levels of unemployment, will mean the Council's support to families has never been more needed. The Council is making sure the £2.9 million Household Support Fund gets to those who need it most.

The Council last year incurred new and additional costs to support operation services, experienced reduced income through less trading activity, pressures in Council tax and Business rates income, and had seen delays in delivering savings, which were required to achieve a balanced budget. The financial impact of these pressures was wholly funded from COVID-19 funding provided by the Government. This, coupled with attention being focussed on responding to the emergency situation, resulted in an underspend on the general fund position of £6m and increased level of carry forwards, including specific COVID funding. The Council's financial strategy continues to be focused on managing the short-term position, whilst maintaining an eye on the longer-term baseline position.

As Covid-19 continues to provide significant volatility, at Quarter 2, pressures have increased further, particularly in relation to Children's Social Care, and overall, an £0.9m overspend was currently projected. This included the use of £6.8m of Covid-19 emergency funding to meet the increasing and emerging Covid-19 related cost pressures, and new initiatives as part of the Council's recovery phase approved at Quarter 1. The position had worsened mainly due to increased costs of children's social care and included £7.7m being delivered against planned savings, although overall savings remained on track with an estimated £2.4m shortfall. Specific Covid funding allocation was detailed in the Finance Profile at Appendix B of the report, which included emergency Covid 19 funding and the Hardship funding of £12.6m. Further details of the Council's variances were provided in paragraphs 119 to 128 to the report.

Cabinet on 17 November, 2021 had considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy update which outlined the impact of cost pressures on the Council in 2022/23 and beyond.

Councillor Cole was pleased to highlight the improved standards of services delivered in Quarter 2, for example, in Environmental Services:-

- the percentage of recycling proportionate to the total tonnage collected has increased by over 10% compared with last year;
- the percentage of successful household waste collections remains at over 99.9%;
- the backlog of incidents of fly-tipping which largely occurred during lockdowns, has reduced by 94%, since this time last year;
- 65% of fly tipped waste is removed by our staff, with the first time this target has been met for two years; and
- The Council's ambition for a greener Borough is demonstrated by 5 of its parks judged during Quarter 2 receiving Green Flag awards.

Councillor Cole further outlined the key headlines from the report:-

- approximately 225 net additional new homes built in the second quarter; 401 new homes so far this year and a successful bid for £3.6million for Brownfield Housing grant funding which will provide 128 new affordable homes for rent;
- Both the inward investment and house building illustrate the Mayor's determination to promote Doncaster's economic recovery;
- The new school year has seen 97.1% of primary pupils and 88% of secondary students attending the first school of their choice; far higher than the national and regional averages;
- Doncaster continues to contradict the national average for 2-year-old children accessing free childcare. Doncaster is now ranked 6th out of the whole country;
- In Quarter 2, Doncaster has welcomed over 25,000 visitors to the new Danum Library Art Gallery and Museum; and
- In keeping with the Mayor's pledge to buy local, of £51.7million spent on Council procurement, £36.3m was spent with local companies, which is 70% of Council spend, against the target of 66%.

Comments were raised in relation to the completion of PDRs across the Council and it was queried as to why only 70% had been recorded. However, officers assured Members that this was largely due to recording them within the system and the Director of Corporate resources was confident that these were taking place across the Authority, and that this would be seen clearly in the next 12 months.

In response to a question from Councillor Blake seeking clarification regarding the performance indicators target in relation to 'Safe and Resilient', Dan Swaine, Director of Economy and Environment, reported that this related to major improvement works and not minor road improvement works. He gave an undertaking to provide more information to Cabinet on this matter.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

There were no other alternatives considered or rejected.

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 4

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

9. St Leger Homes of Doncaster Ltd (SLHD) Performance & Delivery Update: 2021/22 Quarter Two (Q2).

2. DECISION TAKEN

Cabinet noted the progress of SLHD performance outcomes and the contribution SLHD makes to supporting DC strategic priorities.

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Cabinet considered a report which provided an update on St Leger Homes of Doncaster's (SLHD) performance successes and challenges against the 2021/22 Key Performance Indicators, introduced by the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Glyn Jones.

As part of the Management Agreement and governance arrangements for SLHD, the Trust previously, in agreement with Doncaster Council officers, the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Mayor, produced an Annual Development Plan. This Annual Development Plan identifies the key deliverables, outcomes, milestones and performance measures by which performance is assessed. Part of the agreed governance framework is a quarterly report of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to Cabinet.

Appendix A to the report contained the SLHD 2021/22 performance summary for Quarter 2, 2021/22. At the end of Quarter 2, 2021/22 (30 September 2021), 8 of the 19 KPIs did not meet the target, or were within acceptable tolerance levels. Commentary on the performance against all indicators is provided in paragraph 7.2

of the report.

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Glyn Jones, reported that SLHD's performance had dropped significantly during the early stages of the pandemic and has gradually improved since. The report provided a detailed account of those issues influencing St. Leger Home's performance. Whilst some improvement had been made, the Deputy Mayor stressed that he expected to see a more rapid improvement in performance.

It was noted that four of the measurable targets were on target, two were within agreed tolerances and eight were off target.

The Deputy Mayor highlighted the following areas:-

KPI 2 Void Rent Loss

In relation to void rent loss. This is a subset of all rent collection areas. You will see that performance improved in the quarter to 0.79% against a target of 0.5%. This reflected that whilst voids had fallen markedly from the height of the pandemic, they remained higher than required. Considerable attention was being given to this issue, but some factors, such as the availability of materials, were proving challenging.

KPI 4 – Number of Households placed in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation, KPI 5 – Number of Full Day Homelessness Acceptances and KPI 6 – Number of Homeless preventions

Performance in these areas had been extremely challenging and was still problematic. There had been a fourfold increase in requests for help since the start of the pandemic. Consequently, it was expected that these performance indicators would remain under pressure for some time. Considerable work was taking place right across the homelessness partnership, to address the increasing demand for support and the figures have started to reduce from the highs experienced earlier in the year.

To conclude, the Deputy Mayor highlighted that the Council was currently in the midst of a cost of living crisis, with rising food and fuel prices, and Council services were struggling to keep up with demand.

Cabinet, in noting the strong performance regarding the percentage of current rent arrears against the annual rent debt relating to KPI 1, commended staff for the work undertaken.

Cabinet was also pleased to observe an improving picture in relation to void rent loss (lettable voids), but wanted to see further improvements being made in this area in the future. It was acknowledged however that there was an increased demand on SLHD.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

There were no other alternatives considered or rejected.

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 5

1. AGENDA ITEM NUMBER AND TITLE

10. Performance Challenge of Doncaster Children's Services Trust: Quarter 2, 2021/22.

2. DECISION TAKEN

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

3. REASON FOR DECISION

Councillor Rachael Blake, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities, introduced a report which provided an update on the current progress of Doncaster Children's Trust's performance against key performance indicators at the end of Quarter 2, including the response to the Covid-19 local epidemic curve, the impact on the delivery of services to the people of Doncaster and the steps taken to mitigate the risks.

As part of the Management Agreement and governance arrangements for Doncaster Children's Services Trust (DCST), the Trust provides a quarterly report of operational and financial performance.

In August 2021, Early Help, Children's Social Care and Leaving Care Services transitioned from Liquid Logic case management and recording system to MOSAIC, in order that children and adult services were using the same case recording system. The transition to MOSAIC had introduced significant challenges in relation to performance reporting and this was impacting across most data areas. This impact had been anticipated and work was underway to address the issues that needed to be resolved in order to restore confidence with regard to the performance. Some of these impacts will be more easily resolved than others, as what is needed is to re-establish internal reporting pathways. Other issues will prove more complex as they relate to the data generated by the system. There had been an increase in the allocation of staff caseloads since the position reported at the end of Quarter 1.

The report provided data for those areas where there is some confidence about the accuracy of the information available. Unfortunately, there are a number of areas where the information is clearly incorrect or has clear gaps in it. One example of the

former is the number of reviews for children in care, which, according to the system, stood at 2% at the end of Quarter 2. Prior to this, rates have been consistently above 90%.

Where possible, performance is benchmarked against national, regional and similar authority statistics. Although national comparator data for the period 2020/21 has recently been published (28th October 2021), this is currently only published at a national level. Given this, the comparisons are against latest available information, which is currently 2019/20.

The report outlined the current demand and activity levels for children's social care services, which had been impacted by Covid, with significant variances from quarter to quarter. The changes in the demand for different sections of the social care pathway, the reasons behind this and the impact on services, and children and families, were detailed in the charts at paragraph 10 of the report.

The report also provided a summary of the performance position against the contract measures at the end of Quarter 1, in relation to those that were on target, those better than target and those below target, which were detailed at paragraphs 15 to 22 of the report. 3 exceeded the target measure, 2 were within 5% of the target and 2 had not met the target.

Paragraph 26 of the report, outlined those strategic partnership indicators that were performing at or better than target, and those within accepted and outside tolerance levels.

Information regarding the current challenges and financial performance of the Trust, was set out at paragraphs 27 and 28 of the report, respectively. The report showed a projected year end outturn position of £2.8m overspend for 2021/22, against the contract sum, with further costs attributed to Covid, of which the Council had provided funding of £1.3m to offset, making a £3.1m forecast overspend; an increase in spend of £2.3m since Quarter 1, mainly due to increased numbers on the Care Ladder, revised savings assumptions and continuing caseload pressures.

It was noted that some cost pressures, particularly care ladder, had been brought forward into 2021/22. Additionally, as expected, Covid cost pressures had continued into 2021/22. The main Covid pressures related to increases in Out of Authority (OOA) Placements at £0.93m, increased Fostering Placements of £0.25m, CiC 16+ Placements of £0.31m, and Agency costs of £0.16m, mainly due to increased Legal caseloads.

Councillor Nigel Ball referred to the national picture in terms of the spiralling costs of Looked After Children, which was a national trend and spoke of the urgent need to move forward on this issue.

In response to a question from Councillor Andrea Robinson, Rebecca Wilshire, Director of Doncaster Children's Trust, acknowledged that the transition to MOSAIC had brought significant challenges in relation to performance reporting. However, she reassured Members that the implementation of the new system had not put children at risk.

4. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

There were no other alternatives considered or rejected.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations.

6. IF EXEMPT, REASON FOR EXEMPTION

Not Exempt.

7. DIRECTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Rebecca Wilshire, Director, Doncaster Children's Services Trust.

Signed.....Chair/Decision Maker