

**THE CABINET
27th March, 2013**

Present:- Councillor Stone (in the Chair); Councillors Akhtar, Hussain, McNeely, Rushforth, R. S. Russell, Smith and Wyatt.

Also in attendance Councillor Whelbourn (Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Doyle and Lakin.

C177 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

C178 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Akhtar declared a personal interest in Minute No. 183 on the grounds that he was a Trustee on the Magna Trust Board and left the room whilst this item was discussed.

C179 COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY RELIEF POLICY 13A(1)(C)

Councillor Akhtar, Deputy Leader, introduced a report the Director of Financial Services detailing a proposed Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy.

Councils could reduce the amount of Council Tax payable by granting locally defined discounts under provisions contained in Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Section 13A(1)(c) allowed for a discretionary reduction which could be used in relation to any individual case or by determining a class of case for which the charge should be reduced. The discount must be funded from the Council's Revenue Budget (General Fund) and could amount to anything up to 100% of the Council Tax charge.

The Council had previously used the allowed discretion to grant discounts for groups such as those affected by the 2007 floods. It had not had cause to consider granting discretionary discount for any individual case and did not currently have a Policy for doing so.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme would limit support to working age claimants to a maximum of 91.5% Council Tax liability (and other Welfare Reform changes) and it was expected that Councils may now receive more individual discretionary relief referrals. To enable the Council to administer and determine potential referrals, there was a need for clear guidelines under which individual requests could be determined.

It was not possible to forecast the numbers of applications and the likely

cost to the Authority. Whilst it was not anticipated that the cost and numbers would be significant, there was potential for applications to be high with over 16,000 working age claimants affected by a reduction in Council Tax support through the introduction of the new Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The workload of the Benefit Assessment Team would be increased due to the assessment of applications. It was anticipated that the work would be carried out without additional resources, however, should a substantial number of applications be received, it may create a capacity issue which could adversely affect service performance standards.

Recommended:- (1) That the introduction of the Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy, incorporating powers to grant relief under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, be approved as from 1st April, 2013.

(2) That the Director of Financial Services be delegated authority to determine such applications for Council Tax Discretionary Relief where they related to individual cases of exceptional financial hardship.

(3) That the application of Council Tax Discretionary Relief to a class of case be considered by the Cabinet subject to the submission of an additional report by the Director of Financial Services.

C180 CELEBRATORY SERVICES - RELOCATION AND FEES REVIEW

Councillor Rushforth, Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism, introduced a report by the Strategic Director of Environment and Development Services proposing to relocate Celebratory Services to Clifton Park Museum and revise fees for Services delivered under the Well Being Power.

The Registration Service, delivered by the Local Authority on behalf of the General Register Officer (GRO), was governed by the Registrar General and delivered in accordance with Legislation and the GRO good practice guide. The Service offered a range of statutory and non-statutory services. Statutory fees were set by the Registrar General for certain services, applied nationally and could not be varied. The local authority had discretion to deliver additional services in accordance with the Well Being Power contained in the Local Government Act 2000.

Celebratory services were primarily delivered at present from the Town Hall. A premises rationalisation programme had enabled the Council to improve the use of the Town Hall and transferred the Members' base there from the Eric Manns Building. It had also created an opportunity to review and improve facilities for the delivery of celebratory services with Clifton Park Museum having been identified as the preferred site.

The relocation would bring significant benefits to celebratory services as well as advantages/opportunities for Clifton Park Museum and the Town Hall:-

- Improved sustainability for the Museum, increase to opening hours, potential visitor numbers and likely supplementary spend.
- Provides opportunities for Heritage Services, in partnership with Green Spaces, to increase revenue through the potential to offer reception package options e.g. function room hire, catering.
- Possibility of closing Town Hall on Saturdays if no other functions were taking place.
- Possibility of increase revenue at Town Hall if the Garden Room/John Smith Room become available for hire.
- Improved access for Members and others to facilitate within the Town Hall.

It was proposed that group citizenship ceremonies continue to be delivered from the Town Hall due to the large number of attendees, the requirement for the involvement of the Mayor or other dignitary and the expectation that they were delivered in a Civic setting.

However, private citizenship ceremonies, attended by individual citizens, their families and guests would be held at Clifton Park Museum. These were only delivered when citizens were unable to attend a group ceremony.

It was proposed that the new Service model be implemented as from 1st December, 2013, as a number of customers had already made bookings for the Town Hall during 2013. It would also allow sufficient time for the preparation of facilities in the Museum.

A full fees review for celebratory services had not been carried out for over 5 years and the full cost of services provided was not currently being met by the fees charged. Since fees were last set, the Register Office had moved from Bailey House to Riverside House with the majority of celebratory services taking place in the Town Hall. The change in location and the need to offer off-site delivery of celebratory services came with additional costs for caretaking and building attendants, neither of which was accounted for in current fees. In order to minimise the impact on customers, it was proposed that the increases to fees were tied in with the relocation of celebratory services to Clifton Park Museum.

The proposed set of fees and charges was set out in the Appendix submitted.

Cabinet Members welcomed this report and suggested that as part of the relocation of the services to the Museum that consideration be given to wedding packages that could be tailored to meet individual needs at these facilities.

Resolved:- (1) That the relocation of Marriages, Civil Partnerships and individual Citizenship ceremonies from the Town Hall to Clifton Park Museum be approved with effect from 1st December, 2013.

(2) That the changes to the fees for non-statutory celebratory services be approved.

(3) That the required increase in opening hours of Clifton Park Museum to accommodate the requirement to deliver statutory services be approved.

(4) That the resultant budget pressure on Heritage Services be noted.

C181 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act (as amended March, 2006) (information relating to financial and business affairs of any particular person).

C182 AWARD OF INSURANCE CONTRACTS

Councillor Akhtar, Deputy Leader, introduced a report by the Strategic Director of Environment and Development Services seeking authority to award new insurance contracts following an OJEU tender process.

The contracts would be for three years with an option to extend for a further two years.

The financial information and risks and uncertainties associated with the tender were set out in detail as part of the report.

Resolved:- That the awarding of the insurance contracts, as set out in the report submitted, be approved.

C183 MAGNA TRUST LOAN REQUEST

Councillor Stone, the Leader, introduced a report by the Director of Financial Services seeking approval to continue to provide a one year loan facility to the Magna Trust.

The financial information and risks and uncertainties associated with the loan were set out in detail as part of the report.

Cabinet Members clarified the position with regards to the rationale for this temporary loan facility for this key tourist attraction.

Resolved:- (1) That a short term Council loan facility to the Magna Trust of £250,000, on the terms specified in the report submitted, be approved.

(2) That the process to secure the amendment of the Magna Inter-Creditor Deed be approved.

(Councillor Akhtar declared a personal interest in Minute No. 183 on the grounds that he was a Trustee on the Magna Trust Board and left the room whilst this item was discussed)