

DEPUTY LEADER
11th July, 2013

Present:- Councillor Akhtar (in the Chair) and Councillor Gosling.

An apology was received from Councillor Sims.

N8. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 10TH JUNE, 2013

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10th June, 2013.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th June, 2013 be approved as a correct record.

N9. NATIONAL CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION 2013, HARROGATE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE, WEDNESDAY 16TH - FRIDAY 18TH OCTOBER, 2013

Consideration was given to the request for attendance at the National Children and Adult Services Conference and Exhibition 2013 to be held at Harrogate International Centre from Wednesday 16th to Friday 18th October, 2013.

Resolved:- That Councillors J. Doyle and P. Lakin be authorised to attend.

N10. FUND FOR CHANGE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Rob Cutts, Service and Development Manager for Revenues and Benefits, which detailed the changes to the discretionary social fund, as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, and which saw community care grants and crisis loans abolished from April, 2013. Local authorities have been provided with funding to establish replacement local support schemes for vulnerable groups. For Rotherham funding of £773,437 was received for 2013/14 together with administration funding of £163,431.

The scheme that had been developed in Rotherham was known as Fund for Change and was built around existing service provision in the Authority and with external parties. It provided grants and loans to vulnerable people who were in urgent need; or under exceptional pressure; or who needed support to remain or resettle in the community. The types of help that were available were:-

- Small emergency payments for people whose health or safety was at immediate risk and who have no other means of support.
- Interest free loans provided through Laser Credit Union for people

who were in financial difficulty and needed additional or less urgent support to meet essential expenses.

- Provision of goods through the Furniture Solutions Team for those needing help to resettlement or stay in the community.

This report outlined the progress of Rotherham's scheme in the first quarter of 2013/2014 and provided details of spend so far relating to:-

Emergency Payments – This was a large area of expenditure for the DWP under the old Crisis Loans scheme - this had not been the case under the Fund for Change. So far emergency payments totalling only £100 have been given as it was found that support through the scheme could be provided more successfully in other ways.

Laser Credit Loans – The majority of successful applicants have been referred to Laser Credit and provided with interest free loans. Figures for the first three months of the scheme show 475 loans have been granted totalling £65,807.

Furniture Solutions – Qualifying claimants who need help to re-settle or stay in the community may be provided with essential furniture items by the Furniture Solutions Team. These claimants will not be expected to repay the value of the goods to the fund. Figures for the first three months of the scheme show eighteen claimants have been assisted through the Furniture Solutions Team with the total value of the goods provided being £6,748.

Bridging Support – Cabinet agreed that £30,000 bridging support would be allocated from the Fund to assist various advice agencies in providing support for people affected by Welfare Reform.

In order to qualify for the Fund for Change support customers must be resident in Rotherham and be in receipt of one of the four qualifying benefits. However, should any customer fall outside of this criteria and still require support, then their needs would be considered on an individual basis by benefit experts and a detailed analysis undertaken. Of those people who were found to be ineligible for help they were signposted to other agencies, including the DWP.

At present it was anticipated that the scheme would be delivered within the funds available, but claims could increase and there be a big rise in demand as claimants found themselves on reduced incomes and as winter approached.

Discussion ensued on the success of the scheme to date, which was to be monitored on a month by month basis. Currently from the numbers received one-third qualified for support and two-thirds were unsuccessful.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the contents noted.

N11. CABINET REPORTS AND MEMBERS' ISSUES

(a) Phil Howe, Director of Human Resources, reported on a number of issues including:-

- Discussions have continued between management and trades unions regarding pay issues in respect of Refuse Collection employees and an agreement now reached on working arrangements and pay negotiations. The finer details were yet to be worked through. Thanks were expressed to staff and colleagues from Human Resources and Streetpride for their support in the process.
- In terms of the National Pay Negotiations Unison and GMB have confirmed that their membership had voted in favour of accepting the National Employer's pay offer of a 1% across the board pay rise. Confirmation of Unite's ballot outcome was still awaited.
- It was proposed to delete spinal column point 4 from 1st October, 2013.
- With regards to Investors in People the Council had received confirmation that the accreditation was completed successfully and the Gold status had been retained. The final report was expected towards the end of July.

(b) Richard Copley, Corporate ICT Manager, reported on a number of issues including:-

- The number of calls, open jobs and change requests for the last month handled by the service desk.
- The progress of the ICT Strategy 2011/15, the projects of which were on target and should come in under budget.
- Implementation of the cost effective self serve software for Council Tax and Revenues and Benefits.
- The new version of the Intranet, which would go live from the 31st July, 2013.

(c) Stuart Booth, Director of Finance, reported on a number of issues including:-

- The Comprehensive Spending Review and the implications of a revised funding gap for 2014/15 and 2015/16.
- The implementation of the new financial systems on the 10th

July, 2013 including a revised Chart of Accounts Structure and the proposed introduction of a new budget monitoring and report solution.

- The Council's unaudited Statutory Accounts have been published and will be on deposit for inspection from July 16th. The external audit of the Accounts is due to commence at the end of July.
- (d) Rob Cutts, Service and Development Manager for Revenues and Benefits, reported on the forthcoming review of the Single Person's Discount and the relaunch. A briefing on the process would be circulated to all Members.
- (e) Jacqueline Collins, Director of Legal and Democratic Services, reported on a number of issues including:-
- The re-structure of Legal Services, which was nearing completion.
 - Discussions were to take place regarding the Access to Information Regulations and the elements of recording Council Meetings. Views from other Local Authorities were to be sought on this issue.

N12. 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act (as amended March, 2006 (information relates to finance and business affairs)).

N13. PROCUREMENT OF SOFTWARE LICENCE FROM NORTHGATE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Rob Cutts, Service and Development Manager for Revenues and Benefits, which confirmed that in order to enable the Council to implement the Housing Benefit, Benefit Cap legislation from 15th July, 2013, and include Personal Independent Payments (PIP), there was a need to use the Northgate software functionality enhancement.

An exemption from Standing Orders for procuring this new, software licence key was sought as the provision of the Housing Benefit software could only be supplied by Northgate.

Resolved:- That the contract for the purchase of a software licence key

be exempt from the provisions of Standing Order 47.6.2 (requirement to invite at least two oral or written quotations for contracts with a value of £5k but less than £20k) and the purchase be made from Northgate be approved.

N14. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting take place on Monday, 9th September, 2013 at 9.30 a.m.