

**CABINET/COMMISSIONERS'
DECISION MAKING MEETING
11th April, 2016**

Present:- Councillor Read (in the Chair); Councillors Alam, Roche, Sims, Wallis, Watson and Yasseen.

Commissioners:- Kenny, Myers, Newsam and Ney.

Also in attendance was Councillor Steele, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Lelliott.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Commissioner Sir Derek Myers declared a personal interest in Minute No. 61 (Administration of "Breathing Space" – regional mortgage rescue scheme) on the grounds that he was a trustee of the national association of Shelter.

56. OUT OF AREA CROSS CHARGING POLICY FOR SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Roche, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, which detailed how the Local Authority would manage non-contracted sexual health out of area activity (Rotherham residents attending Sexual Health Services commissioned by other Local Authorities in England) and provide clarity on the conditions and payment terms for cross charging. This was based on the agreed Yorkshire and Humber approach endorsed by the Regional Directors of Public Health Network.

Under the terms of the policy, the Authority would only reimburse invoices for Genito-Urinary Medicine activity within the national tariff cost envelope and would not reimburse invoices for contraception activity or pay charges for Market Forces Factor.

Before making payment invoice supporting data would be reviewed to ensure it provided all the required information to determine if Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council was the responsible Authority, which was clearly outlined in the policy.

Resolved:- That the out of area cross charging policy, based on the agreed regional approach endorsed by the Yorkshire and Humber Directors of Public Health Network, be approved.

57. STRATEGIC REVIEW OF ICT RELATED CONTRACTS

Consideration was given to a report, which required a joint decision by Cabinet and Commissioner Ney, which was initially presented by Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budgeting. The report provided details of work being undertaken to strengthen arrangements for the procurement of contracts, in particular the centralisation and co-ordination of the Council's Contracts Register which was a published register of all contracts that the Council had in place

As part of this activity, a number of contract areas have been identified where a re-tendering procurement exercise should have taken place, but had not and as a result an exemption from Standing Orders was sought. This exemption would enable a full consideration of the future procurement and tendering options for each of the contracts listed.

This report also clearly identified the management actions to be put in place to strengthen procurement arrangements across the Council to ensure Standing Orders were adhered to.

Stuart Booth, Assistant Director of Financial Services, emphasised the amount of work undertaken by the officer core during 2015 and the requirement for the contracts register to be published.

More work was required and a Procurement Officer Group, chaired by the new Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services, with support from appropriate officer representatives, had been established to ensure a robust forward plan of procurement activity would eradicate requests for standing order exemptions going forward.

An external peer review, carried out by the Local Government Association, would also inspect the procurement processes with the findings being reported into the Cabinet/Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting when complete.

This was also endorsed by Sharon Kemp, Chief Executive, who confirmed that one of the Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services' priorities was to ensure the Council's procurement activity was open and transparent.

Commissioner Ney welcomed the comments made by officers, the need to ensure best value and how the contracts were being reviewed and audited and any renegotiated contracts would contribute to the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Resolved:- (1) That Cabinet:-

(a) Notes the actions being taken to strengthen the application of procurement processes.

(b) Approves exemptions under Standing Order 38 from the provisions of Standing Orders 47/48, to enable the continuation of contracts scheduled in Appendix 1 for one year

(c) Agrees to the conducting of procurement reviews of all contracts included in Appendix 1 to ensure that future exemptions are not sought.

(2) That Commissioner Ney:-

(a) Notes the actions being taken to strengthen the application of procurement processes

(b) Approves exemptions under Standing Order 38 from the provisions of Standing Orders 47/48, to enable the continuation of the contract scheduled in Appendix 2 for one year.

(c) Agrees to the conducting of a procurement review of the contract included in Appendix 2 to ensure that a future exemption is not sought.

(The Commissioner part of the decision is not subject to 'call in')

58. KERBSIDE COLLECTIONS

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Sims, Cabinet Member for Waste, Road and Community Safety, which detailed how from 5th July, 2014 a three year contract (with annual review) was awarded to Beatson Clark PLC to process kerbside collected household waste for recycling from the blue box - glass, cans and textiles.

For the third annual review of the contract, Beatson Clark had requested a reduction in the current contract price they paid to the Council. The company cited the reason they wished to reduce the price paid per tonne was due to a major reduction in the market price of recycled materials. They had also confirmed officially and in writing on 21st December, 2015 that if a reduced price could not be agreed they would have no other option than to terminate the agreement to treat glass, cans and textiles at the end of the current contract term on the 4th July, 2016.

Caroline Bruce, Interim Strategic Director of Environment and Development Services, explained that only through negotiation between officers of the Council and Beatson Clark had a final improved price per tonne been agreed and offered. This was the best advantageous financial position for the Council and the recycling market for 2017/18 onwards would be incorporated into the the Waste Strategy moving forward.

Commissioner Ney Resolved:- (1) That the revised contract price paid by Beatson Clark PLC for the processing of Glass, Cans and Textiles collected at the kerbside be approved.

(2) That the revised contract price take effect from 5th July, 2016.

(3) That the market price be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

(4) That the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment be delegated authority to review and agree any future re-assessment of the price mechanism for this contract in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Commissioner.

(As this is a Commissioner decision, it is not subject to 'call in')

59. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

60. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14TH MARCH, 2016

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting of the Cabinet/Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting held on 14th March, 2016.

Resolved:- That the minutes be received and the contents approved.

61. ADMINISTRATION OF "BREATHING SPACE" (A REGIONAL MORTGAGE RESCUE SCHEME)

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Wallis, Cabinet Member for Housing, which sought approval for the Council's participation in the Regional Mortgage Assistance Loans Scheme, known as "Breathing Space".

The Regional Mortgage Assistance Loan Scheme was to be operated by Wakefield Metropolitan District Council on behalf of local authorities across the Yorkshire and Humber region, to enable them to offer loans to help home owners experiencing difficulties with their mortgage and/or secured loan payments.

The scheme, therefore, offered customers an interest free loan and payment free secured loan. The loan must be paid in full at the end of three years and loan amounts were between £2,000 and £15,000. The loan could be used to pay off arrears or mortgage payments for up to twelve months instalments. If the customer could sustain their mortgage and had the capacity to repay the loan in three years they would remain in their home. If the customer could not sustain ownership in the longer term a loan would be made on a support for sale. The customer in all cases must agree to a three monthly review meeting to build financial capability and skills issues.

The Regional Housing Board had provided the funding for the scheme for the region and, therefore, there was no capital funding implications for the Council. Unrecovered loans were not recharged to the partner authorities so the Council would not have any financial risk.

Resolved:- That participation in the “Breathing Space,” the Regional Mortgage Assistance Loan Scheme by Rotherham, operated by Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, be approved.

(Commissioner Sir Derek Myers declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a trustee of the national association of Shelter)

62. MEASURES TO IMPROVE LEASEHOLDER INCOME COLLECTION

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Wallis, Cabinet Member for Housing, which detailed how, over the past eighteen months, a wide range of improvements have been made to the services the Council provided to its 499 leaseholders and it was now important to focus on improving income collection.

The report set out details of the proposed changes and how they could be implemented and specifically the three key ways in which income collection could be improved.

These included:-

1. Bringing the administration and management fee in line with similar authorities.
2. Revising the major works repayment options to improve cash flow and overall income collection rates.
3. Implementing interim arrears recovery measures.

Dave Richmond, Assistant Director of Housing, Asset Management and Neighbourhoods, pointed out that the implementation of the range of measures would be introduced in a sympathetic and compassionate manner.

This review of the administration and management fee would not be completed before the 2016/17 service charge process commenced and as an interim measure the administration and management fee was proposed to increase from £25 per annum to £60 per annum. The fee had been fixed at £25 since 1989 and the revised £60 charge reflected the equivalent value had indexation been applied each year since 1989. This interim increase was part of the longer term aim to move towards full cost recovery.

In terms of the major works repayment options it was proposed to revise the existing major works repayment options in order to reach a better compromise between supporting those who may experience financial hardship, whilst minimising any detrimental effect on the Housing

Revenue Account resulting from the delayed collection of costs which have already been incurred; the implications of which affect Council rent payers as well as leaseholders.

In terms of the service charge arrears policy, procedures and staff resources these were currently under review, but as an interim measure the Council would employ a temporary agency resource for a period of three to six months to address the existing debts. It was expected that the debt recovered as a result of this additional resource would exceed the cost of implementation.

Resolved:- (1) That the increase to the administration and management fee be approved and the principle that the Council should move towards full cost recovery be adopted.

(2) That the proposed amendments to current major works repayment options be approved.

(3) That a temporary resource recruited to work on arrears recovery be noted.

63. HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2016/17

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Wallis, Cabinet Member for Housing, which set out the details of the 2016-17 Housing Capital Programme, which was being implemented and had been continuously updated as a result of amendments and additions approved by the Council throughout the year.

The review of the Capital Programme was now complete and approved and focused on confirming priorities, contractual commitments and reviewing resource availability in light of changes to Housing Revenue Account income.

Resolved:- That the detailed Housing Investment Programme for 2016-17 be approved.

64. FINAL REPORT OF ROTHERHAM COUNCIL'S GOVERNANCE WORKING MEMBER'S GROUP

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Read, Chairman, which provided the detail from the final report of the Members' Governance Working Group and their recommendations for the consideration of Cabinet with a view to recommendations being made to Council as to amendments to the Constitution.

Further amendments were moved by the Chairman and seconded by Councillor Alam to revise Appendix 1 with regards to changes to the Constitution to now read:-

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7. Paragraph (2) of Schedule 1 to the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules be amended so as to read:-

“(2) The membership of the OSMB shall comprise:-

- a chairperson who shall be a councillor appointed by the Council;*
- a vice-chairperson who shall be appointed by the Council and who shall be a member of the main opposition group;*
- the chairs and vice-chairs of the overview and scrutiny select commissions who shall be councillors appointed by the Council so as to reflect the political balance of the Council;*
- the chair and vice-chair of audit committee;*
- sufficient opposition councillors nominated by Opposition Parties or councillors and appointed by the Council, to ensure political balance.”*

9. Paragraph 9 (all members of Council to receive all confidential and exempt material included in reports to Cabinet) would be:-

“5.4 In relation to reports to be considered a full Council or committee meetings or executive meetings held in public, a member of the Council has, subject to rule 5.5, the right to inspect any document that:-

5.4.1 contains material that relates to an item to be considered a full Council or committee meeting, or

5.4.2 is in the possession or under the control of the executive and contains material relating to any business to be transacted at an executive meeting held in public, whether or not he or she is a member of the particular committee or the executive.

and to receive copies of all reports to be considered at an executive meeting, including reports containing confidential or exempt information.”

“5.5. The right mentioned in rule 5.4 does not extend to a document or part of a document that in the opinion of the Assistant Director Legal Services:-

5.5.1 contains confidential or exempt information (please see the Appendix), except where the exempt material is included within reports to Cabinet which are to be

provided to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, the Chairs of Select Commissions and the leaders of the two largest opposition groups, or

5.5.2 discloses advice provided by a political adviser or assistant to the executive.”

but this rule 5.5 does not apply:-

5.5.2.1 to confidential or exempt information disclosed to members in accordance with rule 5.4.

5.5.2.2 to exempt information that falls within paragraph 3 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council)) of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, except to the extent that the information relates to any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the Council in the course of negotiations for a contract, or

5.5.2.3 to exempt information that falls within paragraph 6 (information which reveals that the Council proposes to serve a notice on a person or to make an order or direction under any enactment) of Schedule 12A.

Councillor Steele, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, welcomed these changes making the process more open and transparent and involving more Councillors.

(1) Resolved:- That the recommendations of the Members Governance Review Working Group be noted.

(2) Recommended:- That Council consider the amendments to the Constitution set out in the Appendices to this report with the inclusion of the amendments above.

65. ESTIMATED OUTTURN 2015/16

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budgeting, which set out the Estimated Revenue Outturn report for 2015/16 and showed an initial forecast outturn of £6.296m (+3.1%) above budget.

The forecast outturn position had improved by £2.519m since the December monitoring report largely due to additional income and reduced contract costs within Adult Care Services (c£1m), a forecast under-recovery on the voluntary severance budget (£900k) which could now be recognised based on the actual cost of releasing staff in year and the recognition of the reduced cost of levies than that budgeted (£310k).

Stuart Booth, Assistant Director for Financial Services, advised as in previous budget monitoring reports there was £5.326m one-off funding available to help mitigate the current forecast overspend. Using this £5.326m one-off funding significantly reduced the initial forecast overspend to £970k. In the event that by the end of March a residual pressure remained, this would be funded using the savings available through taking the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) holiday (the detail of which was included in the 2016/17 Budget Setting Report) with the remaining savings from this 'holiday' being transferred to specific earmarked reserves. This was set out in Section 3.34 to 3.40 of this report. The Council was, therefore, able to forecast a balanced outturn position for 2015/16.

Key pressures contributing to the initial forecast overspend (+£6.296m) were:-

- The continuing service demand and agency staffing cost pressures for safeguarding vulnerable children across the Borough and the strengthening of Social Work and management capacity.
- Demand pressures for Direct Payments within Older People and Physical and Sensory Disability clients and clients with Mental Health needs.

All Directorates would continue to closely manage spend until the end of March, 2016.

The aim was to provide Cabinet with the final 2015/16 Revenue Outturn report by the end of June 2016 aligned to the Council publishing its draft Statutory Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2016.

Looking at the Council Tax position at year end it was noted that the collection rate was 97.3% (1% up on last year's figures) with business rates at 98.5% (down 1% on last year's figures), but both within budgeted targets.

Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader, wished to congratulate officers on the outcome of the outturn report and the hard work that had gone in to the budget process and on the collection of the Council Tax which was significant better than the Council's statistical neighbours.

Resolved:- (1) That the forecast balanced outturn position for 2015/16 be noted and that continued close management of spend continue for the remainder of the financial year.

(2) That the intention for the final Revenue Outturn to be reported to Cabinet in June, 2016 be noted.

(3) That the proposed transfers to earmarked reserves as set out in Sections 3.34 to 3.40 of this report be approved.

66. APPROVAL OF CYPS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2016-2018

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader, which detailed the proposed Schools Capital Programme for the period 2016/17 to 2017/18. It referenced the Capital Strategy which informed the Programme, the amount of capital grant funding received or expected to be received and the individual projects which have been identified for approval to schools within Rotherham over the next two years.

Ian Thomas, Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services, and Caroline Bruce, Interim Strategic Director for Environment and Development Services, provided advice on the close working delegation arrangements to Strategic Directors should there be a need for the prudent reallocation funds to other priority projects and the asset strategy and in consultation with the relevant portfolio holders should unforeseen delays impact on individual project delivery during the year.

In offering his support to the Schools Capital Programme Councillor Roche wished to point out the national problem with traffic around schools and the need for clear health and safety guidelines when housing developments were proposed in close proximity to schools.

Resolved:- (1) That the outline Schools Capital Programme for the period 2016/17 and 2017/18 be approved along with the individual projects highlighted in 7.2 of the report, which were fully funded by grant, and therefore have no implications for the Council's revenue budget.

(2) That the Strategic Director Regeneration be delegated the authority, in consultation with the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services, to reallocate funds to other priority projects in accordance with need and the asset strategy and in consultation with the relevant portfolio holders should unforeseen delays impact on individual project delivery during the year.

67. REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION FROM CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS TO CONTINUE AND EXTEND THE CHILDREN'S CENTRE CONTRACTED PROVISION AT THE ARNOLD CENTRE, AUGHTON EARLY YEARS AND RAWMARSH CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader, which sought an exemption under Standing Order 38 from the provisions of Standing Order 48, to enable the extension of the three Children's Centre contracts for a further two years pending a full review of Early Help in 2017/2018.

The Local Authority had had annual contracts in place with the three Nursery schools since 2011. Prior to 2011 there was one contract per centre for the three year period 1st April, 2008 to 31st March, 2011. This was funded from the Sure Start Grant which was confirmed in advance for the three year period. The current contracts were revised in May, 2015 following updates to reference the impending move to the Early Help Service and to streamline the content. The current contracts expired on 31st March, 2016.

The extension of the current contracts would ensure consistency for vulnerable children and families and ensure that the Local Authority was able to meet its Statutory Duty in having sufficient numbers of centres for those most in need.

The Children's Centre portfolio transferred from the Education and Skills Service into the Early Help Service on the 1st October, 2015. The Early Help Service was currently engaged in a consultation with staff, partners and young people as part of the £422,000 savings to be made in 2016/17. The Children's Centre offer would be reviewed as part of the wider Early Help transformation and savings required in 2017/2018.

Annual challenge meetings were in place with the three Centres. In 2016/17 and 2017/2018 annual targets would be agreed with the school Head Teachers that met the requirements of the Local Authority and the populations the Centres serve.

Resolved:- (1) That the request for exemption of Standing Order 38 from the provisions of Standing Order 48 be approved.

(2) That the extension of the contracts for a further two years be approved, with an annual review. This would bring the Centres in line with the full Early Help review and transformation and enable a continued service for vulnerable children and families. It would also provide the Local Authority with the ability to respond effectively to Local and National targets; including budget demands and OFSTED.

68. REVIEW OF FAIRGROUND LOCALITIES AND CHARGING POLICY

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Caroline Bruce, Interim Strategic Director of Environment and Development Services, which sought approval of the Fairs and Charges Report 2016 for the Borough in accordance with RMBC Audit requirements, which had no proposed charge changes for operating a fair during 2016/17 financial year.

In addition, three additional fairs applications had been received and the report set out in detail the resident and RMBC Green Spaces objections.

Commissioner Kenny Resolved:- (1) That the 2016 fairs schedule as detailed in Section 4.1 be approved.

(2) That the three additional fairs applications be rejected due to objections received.

(3) That all the charges for 2016/17 be held at current levels.

(As this was a Commissioner decision, it is not subject to 'call in')

69. RIVERSIDE HOUSE LED LIGHTING UPGRADE

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Caroline Bruce, Interim Strategic Director of Environment and Development Services, which detailed the feasibility of replacing the existing Riverside House lighting with more energy efficient LED technology lighting, resulting in an estimated 69% reduction in lighting consumption, saving approximately £68,000 per year on electricity costs.

Commissioner Kenny Resolved:- (1) That the inclusion of the Riverside House LED lighting upgrade in the Capital Programme (2016-2021) be approved.

(2) That the funding of the project through a combination of £262,000 prudential borrowing, over a period of 20 years and a loan of £78,000 from the Salix Local Authority Energy Financing (LAEF) fund be approved.

(3) That the investment, which would achieve savings of £863,924 over this period (£47,748 per year from 2019/20), be noted.

(As this was a Commissioner decision, it is not subject to 'call in')

70. PETITION - BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Yasseen, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Working and Cultural Services, which detailed the receipt of a petition containing 102 signatories expressing opposition to a proposal to cease hosting the Rotherham Biological Records Centre from April, 2017.

The importance of the Centre was recognised and it is proposed to continue to be funded throughout 2016-17, prior to the implementation of the saving in 2017-18, to allow sufficient time for proper investigation by officers of options for future delivery of the service.

Options that deliver savings whilst minimising disruption to service users, volunteers, partner organisations and other stakeholders would need to be given full consideration.

Councillor Roche confirmed this proposal had been considered by the Budget Working Group where it had been confirmed this was not a statutory function to host, but that this be fully considered as part of the proposals for 2017/18 going forward.

Commissioner Kenny Resolved:- That the receipt of the petition be noted and it be referred to officers for consideration as part of the proposals developed for 2017/18 and beyond.

(As this was a Commissioner decision, it is not subject to 'call in')

71. FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT FOR SUPPORT WORKERS - LEARNING DISABILITY SERVICES

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Roche, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, which described a commissioning process to establish a framework agreement that would have within it a list of accredited providers to provide support services over a four year period, as Supported Living Schemes were developed. The support provider would provide a service that reflected people's choices in a variety of supported living settings, such as:-

- Individual tenancies.
- Small group settings.
- Shared accommodation.

This report, therefore, sought approval to commence the commissioning process for a framework agreement to supply a range of support services for people with a learning disability, who have been assessed as suitable for Supported Living.

The framework agreement would be for two years with an option to extend for a further two years one year at a time (2+1+1).

Commissioner Sir Derek Myers Resolved:- (1) That the information covered in the report be received and noted.

(2) That a tender process to establish a framework agreement to supply a range of support services for people with a learning disability be approved.

(As this was a Commissioner decision, it is not subject to 'call in')

72. IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE THROUGH THE USE OF MODERN HOUSING INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Wallis, Cabinet Member for Housing, which sought approval for proposed improvements to RMBC's Integrated Housing Management Systems (IHMS) which was currently under implementation.

The IHMS project had already delivered significant improved customer outcomes through the capture of all customer interactions in one place, enabling the Council to respond to customers' needs quickly and efficiently.

Dave Richmond, Assistant Director of Housing, Asset Management and Neighbourhood Services, explained that these enhancements would ensure the Housing Department's IT systems included the latest advances in technology, providing real time interactions with customers and suppliers, specifically in relation to Asset Management and Property Maintenance, which in turn would lead to improved efficiency.

Councillor Wallis suggested that this contract had raised questions about the appropriate balance between contract flexibility and value for money, and requested that these were explored as part of the Strategic Review of ICT, which also featured at Minute No 57.

Resolved:- (1) That the proposed enhancements to the IHMS project implementation be approved and any contract revisions/flexibilities be incorporated into the strategic review of ICT.

(2) That the additional spend of £139,315 from the £353,000 available Housing Revenue Account Capital Investment Programme budget be approved.

73. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That under Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the 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 1 of Schedule 12(A) of such Act indicated, as now amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 (information relates to finance and business affairs).

74. ADULT CARE CONTRACT AND PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Roche, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, which sought approval to extend contract periods for a number of services outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. This would ensure that there was uninterrupted service provision beyond 31st March, 2016 and allow sufficient time in which to manage and undertake a strategic review and tender exercise. The strategic review would ensure that informed commissioning decisions were made and implemented, to support the personalisation agenda and the Rotherham Model.

The report also sought further approval, due to the complexity and volume of the services to be reviewed, to commence a series of tender processes across the themes, to have new providers or contracts in place no later than 31st March, 2017

Graeme Betts, Interim Director of Adult Care and Housing, outlined the current position with regards to contracts and how this would be addressed.

Commissioner Sir Derek Myers Resolved:- (1) That pursuant to Standing Order 38, the contracts referred to in Appendix 1 be approved for exemption (for a period nine to twelve months) from the provisions of Standing Order 43, that would ordinarily require that tenders for particular contracts were to be obtained by inviting tenders for the contract on the open market.

(2) That the proposal to extend the contracts named in Appendix 1 for periods up to twelve months, from 31 March 2016 to 31 March 2017 for the reasons identified in this report be approved.

(As this was a Commissioner decision, it is not subject to 'call in')

75. RISK BASED VERIFICATION AND ELECTRONIC CLAIMS

Consideration was given to a report introduced by Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budgeting, which sought the adoption of a Risk Based Verification Policy and Electronic Communications Policy so that the Council could streamline the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction claims.

Currently when a resident applied for these benefits and/or reported a change in their circumstances, they must complete a paper application form and provide a substantial amount of original evidence. The same level of verification was applied to all customers, irrespective of their circumstances and this was both costly and inefficient.

Rachel O'Neil, Service Manager, advised on the streamlining of the process and how customers would be encouraged to submit their applications for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction electronically alongside the existing telephone and face to face contact that was currently available.

It was also proposed that the Council adopt a Risk Based Verification Policy and Risk Based Verification, which was a method of applying different levels of checks to different claims according to the risk associated with them. This targeted approach had shown to be more effective at identifying fraud and error, whilst also reducing costs and improving the customer journey.

Resolved:- That the adoption of the Risk Based Verification Policy and Electronic Claims Policy set out in this report be approved, so that the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction claims process became more efficient, streamlined and customer friendly.