

DEPUTY LEADER
Monday, 10th September, 2012

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Gosling.

N19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 2ND JULY, 2012

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July, 2012 be approved as a correct record.

N20. ANNUAL FRAUD REPORT 2011/12

Consideration was given to a report presented by Stuart Booth, Director of Finance, which detailed how the Annual Fraud Report 2011/12 was to bring together in one document a summary of the work which had taken place in the period to prevent and detect fraud and corruption. By publicising the report it was aimed to show the Council's commitment to minimising the risk of fraud and deter any would-be fraudsters.

It should be noted that the incidence of fraud remained very low in overall terms, taking into account the Council's activities and spending. General fraud cases (excluding benefits) exceeding £10,000 were required to be reported to the Audit Commission and there were none of these in 2011/12.

The Council investigated 1,393 potentially fraudulent Housing and Council Tax Benefit cases, obtained 32 prosecutions and issued 201 cautions and penalties.

The Council recovered £2.52m overpayments of benefits (£2.45m in 2010/11). These were mainly as a result of changes in circumstances, but also included fraudulent claims. Amounts recovered were used in delivering front line services for the benefit of Rotherham residents.

The report was presented to the Audit Committee in July and received support.

The Deputy Leader welcomed this report, but suggested that the timeframes for press releases be brought into line with the agenda publication.

Resolved:- That the production of the Annual Fraud Report 2011/12 be supported.

{2} That appropriate publicity be produced to highlight the outcomes from the Council's anti-fraud activity and to act as a deterrent to fraud.

N21. EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Consideration was given to a report presented by Simon Cooper, Human Resources Manager, which provided information regarding the introduction of an employee voluntary benefit scheme.

The range of benefits currently provided by the Council and those typically popular both in the private and public sectors were referred to and set out in detail as part of the report.

The Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO), a local authority purchasing consortium operating through the Midlands and East of England, had established a framework agreement which allowed local authorities to introduce a variety of employee benefits without the need for any lengthy EU procurement procedures.

Benefits currently on offer through the agreement branded as 'Wider Wallet' included discounts in respect of major high street chains and entertainment providers such as Argos 6%, ASDA 4%, BHS 8%, M&S 5%, WH Smith 8%, Cineworld 10%, Disney on Ice 20% and iTunes 5%, . These savings were delivered in a variety of ways such as voucher purchase, cash back on purchases or charge cards which could be topped up by employees on an as and when basis.

Childcare Vouchers were a core element of the framework and the designated provider of this service within the agreement was Kiddivouchers. This company was the Council's existing Childcare Voucher provider. Any signatory to the agreement would be offered a reduced administrative charge by Kiddivouchers. Currently the Council pays Kiddivouchers a 2.1% administrative charge, but this would be reduced by them to just 1% effective from the date of entering into the framework agreement.

It was, therefore, proposed that the launch of the framework would provide an opportunity to publicise existing employee benefits and help to offset any negative perceptions generated by ongoing pay restraint and local measures such as the increment freeze.

The Deputy Leader welcomed the opportunity for a voluntary benefit scheme for both employees and Elected Members and suggested that further information be provided so he could raise awareness to the new combined scheme.

Resolved:- That the consolidation of the Council's employee benefit offerings in a new combined scheme using the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation framework be approved.

N22. LOCALISM ACT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Matt Gladstone, Director of Commissioning, Policy and Performance, which provided an update, detailing the commencement of the Act to date; highlighting key issues arising from specific provisions in the Act; and the process of engagement of Members in addressing the issues identified and determining ways forward for the Council.

Since the passing of the Act, there had continued to be a whole Council approach, facilitating detailed reports and briefings being made, particularly around the four key areas of the Act that required the Council's attention and which were set out in detail as part of the report.

Many of the provisions of the Act have now been implemented, but there

remained some risk, mainly around planning, community right to challenge and assets of community value. Some coverage in the media, including Government statements may confuse the provisions of this Act with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Bill, currently before Parliament, especially around statements covering business rates.

The programme of reporting would mitigate any risks arising from the uncertainties by ensuring that full detailed reports for decision were made in a timely manner and would be closely monitored.

Discussion ensued on the provisions of the Act, particularly around the Community Right to Challenge, which provided for expressions of interest in taking over the running of a Council service. It was noted that a published "Future Contracts Opportunities" list and very clear procurement pathways for interested providers would satisfy some of the conditions imposed on Councils by the Act and would hopefully avoid inappropriate Expressions of Interest's coming through to the Council, needing responses within mandatory timeframes.

A preferred way forward would be to open up for expressions of interest in a three month period rather than to a strict timetable which related to the commissioning process as this would create serious administrative difficulties.

Some local authorities have adopted a wait and see approach, while others were publishing some information on their procurement timetables with a caveat that they would consider all Expression of Interests as contracts were renewed.

Further information was also provided on the assumption that the trigger threshold would be set again at 3.5% in the coming budget round. However, it should also be recognised that the proposals for Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes to replace Council Tax Benefit would reduce the Council Tax Base and consequently the yield of any percentage increase in Council Tax. The Council would need to be aware of the trigger percentage for a referendum set by the Government when setting the Council Tax level next year.

Resolved:- That the implications of the Localism Act 2011, be noted in particular:-

- Council Tax referendum trigger as part of the broader changes to Local Government finance.
- Preferred approach to consider "right to challenge" submissions.
- Neighbourhood planning in the context of the Council's local plan.
- Approaches to tenure reform as part of developing the Council's Tenancy Strategy.
- Any opportunities arising from "assets of community value".

N23. BENCHMARKING REVIEW

Matt Gladstone, Director of Commissioning, Policy and Performance, gave a verbal report on the current position of the Benchmarking Review for Commissioning, Policy and Performance. A report was to be presented to the Strategic Leadership Team by the end of the month and it was also suggested

that the information be shared with the Deputy Leader.

Resolved:- That a briefing note be provided to the Deputy Leader for information in due course.

N24. PROCUREMENT

Matt Gladstone, Director of Commissioning, Policy and Performance, gave a verbal report on the new e-procurement system that the Council would be adopting with a new supplier from January, 2013.

Resolved:- That the information be noted.

N25. CABINET REPORTS

Consideration was given to the agenda which had been circulated for the meeting of the Cabinet on the 19th September, 2012 and the contents noted.

Reference was also made to the forthcoming Council meeting and the three reports that were to be presented for approval.

Resolved:- That the information be noted.

N26. MEMBERS' ISSUES

Stuart Booth, Director of Finance, provided updates on the following:-

- The 2011/12 Statement of Accounts was in the process of being externally audited. A positive outcome was anticipated and a report was to be progressed to the Audit Committee in due course.
- A report was to be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on the 19th September, 2012 on Localisation of Support for Council Tax (Council Tax Benefit) and Council Tax Technical Changes.
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy was currently being updated.
- A budget monitoring report was to be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on the 3rd October, 2012, which would be the first for the 2012/13 financial year.
- An update was also to be provided to the next meeting of the Deputy Leader on the provisional outcomes from the review of Council Tax single person's discounts..

Richard Copley, Corporate I.T. Manager, provided an update on the "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) Initiative, which allowed access to email, the internet, intranet, calendar and contacts for verified RMBC personnel via an app "Good For Enterprise".

Subject to relevant approvals it was proposed that the BYOD initiative be publicised to Elected Members and that BYOD would allow for a greater variety of device to be offered for use by Elected Members. Further information was to

be provided on this in due course. It was suggested that further information be provided to Elected Members in the form of a drop in session/interactive workshop on or around the morning of the 31st October, 2012.

Resolved:- That the information and the arrangements for the workshop be noted.

N27. 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)].

N28. RELOCATION AND RE-PROCUREMENT OF NETWORK LINKS - EXEMPTION FROM STANDING ORDERS

Consideration was given to a report presented by Richard Copley, Corporate I.T. Manager, which detailed the Council's use of network circuits for the provision of ICT services to schools, libraries and outlying offices. These were currently terminated in the Civic Building and needed to be moved to Riverside House as part of the decommissioning of the Civic Building.

It had been established through investigation that the provision and relocation of 14 of these circuits could only be done by one organisation and that the funding for these circuits could be accommodated through existing budgets to cover both set-up and rental charges.

Legal and Financial Services have been consulted and they have confirmed their agreement with the proposals

Resolved:- [1] That the contract for the set-up of 14 network circuits be exempt from the provisions of Standing Order 48.1 (requirement to invite between three and six tenders for contracts with an estimated value of £50k or more) and the contract be awarded to the company named in the report.

[2] That the contract for the rental of 14 network circuits be exempt from the provisions of Standing Order 48.1 (requirement to invite between three and six tenders for contracts with an estimated value of £50k or more) and the contract be awarded to the company named in the report.

N29. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Monday, 8th October, 2012 at 9.30 a.m.