

Cabinet

9 February 2015

Present: Councillor CB Pickard (Deputy Mayor) (in the Chair)
Councillors CA Burdis, EN Darke, R Glindon, I Grayson,
JLL Harrison, LA Spillard and JJ Stirling.

In Attendance: A Caldwell (Age UK North Tyneside)
P Clow (North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group)
R Layton (North Tyneside JTUC)
A Oghene (Young Mayor)
D Rose (Business Sector)

Councillor P Earley

CAB137/02/15 Apologies

Apologies were received from N Redfearn (Elected Mayor) and Councillor F Lott, M Almond (Voluntary and Community Sector) and M Cushlow (North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group)

CAB138/02/15 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

CAB139/02/15 Minutes

Resolved that the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting held on 12 January 2015 and the Extraordinary meetings held on 15 and 28 January 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CAB140/02/15 Report of the Young Mayor

The Young Mayor explained that this would be his final meeting as his term of office was coming to a close. He had enjoyed his year as Young Mayor and had achieved most of what he had set out to do. He would be continuing as a member of the Youth Council to progress his pledges further. There was still work to be completed in making the promotional film for the Pop card which linked to his pledge of having affordable public transport for young people. He would also continue working with the Safe to Learn Coordinator on introducing anti-bullying quality standards in schools and colleges. One of his other pledges had been to increase opportunities for young people to do fun sport through school and as part of this pledge he had organised the Young Mayor's Winter Games, which he hoped would become an annual event.

The Young Mayor informed Cabinet that the final stage of voting had started for the election of the next Young Mayor. The result would be announced on 13 February 2015 and they would take up their role on 16 February 2015.

The Young Mayor reported on the following activities in which he and/or Young Cabinet members had been involved:

- Holocaust Memorial Day event on 27 January 2015.
- Met with an international delegation from France, Germany and Italy, who were developing a two year programme with Tyne and Wear Museums sharing their practice of engaging hard to reach young people.

- Launch event for the film 'YES'. This was a short film produced by the Young Carers Group based at North Shields YMCA. The film highlighted how, as young carers, they were not always able to spend time with friends or do the usual things in life that young people do because of caring responsibilities at home.

The Young Mayor thanked everyone for their support during his time in Office and conveyed his best wishes to all present and also to the new Young Mayor who would take up their role on 16 February 2015.

The Deputy Mayor conveyed the Elected Mayor's regards and sincere thanks to the Young Mayor for the excellent work he had undertaken throughout his term of office and his many achievements. The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Members associated themselves with the sentiments and wished the Young Mayor every success for the future.

CAB141/02/15 Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Report – Review of Library Provision Across the Borough by the Library Review Study Group (All Wards)

Cabinet received a report from the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee in relation to a review of Library provision across the Borough undertaken by the Library Review Study Group. Councillor P Earley, a Member of the Study Group, was in attendance to present the report.

As part of the Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee Work Programme for 2014/15, Members had agreed to carry out a review in relation to Library provision across the Borough. The main objective was to examine the ability of the Authority to meet its obligation to provide a Library Service, as defined by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, which made public library services a statutory duty for local authorities, stating that Authorities must:

- i) Provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons in the area that want to make use of it.
- ii) Lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area.

These obligations were considered in the context of:

- a shrinking financial envelope to meet service delivery;
- the wider review of Authority accommodation and its use;
- changing patterns of consumer behaviour in relation to print and published media;
- greater expectations for partnership working arising from the Authority's change programme.

During the review Members of the Study Group had identified several areas that they wanted to investigate in more detail. These included the number and type of buildings required, how engaged the local community were in the library network, partnership working, and the changing pattern of use of books in particular. Members had also been keen to explore the breadth of service on offer, including the extent of the use of new technologies and the potential for new innovation.

Members had held a series of evidence gathering meetings with expert witnesses between September and December 2014.

It had become apparent during the review that the Study Group were looking at a complex service, a popular service and a service very much in a process of transformation from its traditional image.

Therefore consideration on how the service needed to be developed in the current financial climate and in the context of the Authority's change programme was seen as essential.

As a result of the study the Study Group had identified six recommendations. These were:-

1. That Cabinet does not proceed with any immediate library closures as part of the budget setting process for 2015/16.
2. That Cabinet examines the sustainability of library building assets in the context of the wider accommodation review being undertaken as part of the Authority's change programme;
3. That Cabinet as part of the accommodation review considers how community facilities can be best used on an area basis.
4. That Cabinet explores the feasibility of expanding alternative delivery models for library services utilising mobile facilities and electronic media.
5. That Cabinet examines the financial model and revenue structure of Customer First Centres.
6. That Cabinet ask the Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee to work with officers to review progress on the above recommendations in the coming year.

The full report outlining the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the review was attached as Appendix 1 to the report

Cabinet was asked to consider the recommendations and was required to provide a response to the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee within 2 months.

The Mayor thanked the Committee for the report and looked forward to providing a detailed response to Cabinet.

Resolved that the report of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee be noted and a detailed response to the recommendations be provided at a future Cabinet meeting, no later than April 2015.

(Reason for decision – to respond to the recommendations made by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee.)

CAB142/02/15 Rechargeable Repairs Policy (All Wards)

Cabinet considered a report which requested approval of a revised draft Rechargeable Repairs Policy.

Tenants were responsible for any damage they caused to their homes under the terms of their tenancy agreement. This covered accidental, wilful or negligent damage caused by them, their family members or visitors.

Members and tenants had made it clear that the Authority must have a robust policy and procedure in place to make sure that the Authority identified and dealt with all rechargeable repairs efficiently and appropriately to promote a fair and equitable service and to ensure the Authority recovered the cost for making good any damage caused. To achieve these aims the right balance needed to be struck between enforcement and support for those who were vulnerable.

The Rechargeable Repairs Policy aimed to ensure that there were mechanisms in place to recharge for damage caused, whilst ensuring that any special circumstances were taken into account.

Examples of work proposed to be charged for were detailed in the report. Rechargeable repairs could occur during a tenancy or when a tenancy was terminated and the Authority had to carry out works to the property to make it ready for the next tenant.

The number and value of invoices raised in the last 3 years, along with the number and value of payments received were set out in the report.

An officer led review of the Policy had been carried out with a view to increasing collection rates and ensuring clarity around the process of managing rechargeable repairs. A review of the current working procedure and documentation had also been carried out. This included consultation with staff, Kier North Tyneside and involved customers.

The following had been taken into account during the review process:

- The Welfare Reform Act 2012.
- Feedback from consultation with Members, customers, partners and key stakeholders.
- A scrutiny review by Economic Prosperity and Housing Sub-Committee.

The review process had confirmed the issues and changes had been incorporated into the revised Policy.

The proposed Rechargeable Repairs Policy aimed to ensure that there were robust mechanisms in place to recharge for damage caused, whilst ensuring that any exceptional circumstances and vulnerabilities were taken into account.

The Policy had been produced as a separate document to the Rechargeable Repairs procedure document to ensure improved clarity for Members, Officers, tenants, other customers and partners. It had been amended to ensure special circumstances would be taken into account and also the maximisation of debt collection. The scope, aims and objectives of the Policy remained the same.

The review had highlighted that blanket policies should be avoided and individual circumstances should be taken into account when deciding whether to levy a charge. The report detailed instances when a charge may not be made, depending on individual circumstances.

When deciding whether to charge, account would be taken of the cause, history and level of damage, any care or support plan in place and the impact on the tenant. An assessment of these factors was undertaken by North Tyneside Homes. Tenants were also advised to take out contents insurance when they signed up for their tenancy. The Authority offered low cost home contents insurance for Council tenants.

The Policy had also been changed to confirm that the Authority would raise the invoice for payment as soon as the repair was completed. This reflected proposed changes to the procedure for invoicing and debt management.

A review of procedures and working practices had led to improvements being implemented to the IT systems to make the production of invoices more efficient and timely. This would ensure that the procedure was more robust and aligned with corporate debt management processes as well as bringing the responsibility for raising and recovering monies together under one service area.

Consultation had taken place with the Economic Prosperity and Housing Sub-Committee in July and September 2012. The Sub-Committee had highlighted the need for a more robust and clear Policy and procedure for rechargeable repairs, and that the process for administering recharges and debt recovery should be reviewed to improve efficiency. The Sub-Committee had also highlighted the need to review the management of rechargeable repairs taking into account a person's vulnerability.

Kier North Tyneside had been a key part of the review to ensure that the process management was robust and efficient.

Consultation with tenants had indicated that:

- They wanted the Authority to charge tenants who caused damage to Authority property; and
- Vulnerable customers' circumstances should be considered before deciding to proceed with a charge, but that it was not appropriate to simply waive all recharges if a tenant was vulnerable. Vulnerability did not remove the tenants' responsibilities as set out in the tenancy agreement.

During discussion reference was made to the current Tenancy Agreement document which was attached as Appendix 3 to the report and the following was highlighted:

1. Paragraph 2.5 in Section 2 (Secure Tenants – Right to Improve) was not consistent with paragraph 4.5 Section 4 (Rights of Secure and Introductory Tenants) – for consistency both paragraphs needed to state that written permission had to be given before any home improvements were undertaken. This requirement was currently omitted from Section 4.
2. Consideration needed to be given to reviewing Paragraph 5.2 of Section 5 (Joint Tenancies), to include a sentence advising that although a remaining tenant would not automatically be entitled to a sole tenancy or another joint tenancy, any requests from remaining tenants would be considered on their own merits.

Officers advised they would consider the suggested amendments when the Tenancy Agreement was reviewed later in the year.

Resolved that the revised Rechargeable Repairs Policy, detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

(Reason for decision - It will ensure that the processes for administering rechargeable repairs invoices and the debt recovery procedures are more cost effective, timely and efficient. It will also ensure that special circumstances are taken into account.)

CAB143/02/15 Date and Time of Next Meeting

6.00pm on Monday 9 March 2015 (Ordinary Meeting).

Minutes published on Thursday 12 February 2015.

The decisions contained within these Minutes may be implemented (unless called in by 3 Non-Executive Members for consideration by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee) immediately following the expiry of the call-in period; i.e. 5.00pm on 19 February 2015.