



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
THE CABINET**

**TUESDAY 12 APRIL 2016
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar
Councillor T Day
Councillor D Grant
Councillor D Hampshire
Councillor W Innes (Convener)
Councillor J McMillan
Councillor M Veitch

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor S Brown
Councillor S Currie
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor F McAllister
Councillor J Williamson

Council Officials Present:

Ms M Patterson, Depute Chief Executive – Partnerships and Community Services
Mr A McCrorie, Depute Chief Executive – Resources and People Services
Mr J Lamond, Head of Council Resources
Mr D Proudfoot, Head of Development
Mr T Shearer, Head of Communities and Partnerships
Mrs M Ferguson, Service Manager – Legal and Procurement
Mr A Fitzgerald, Records Manager
Ms C McCorry, Service Manager – Community Housing
Ms E Morrison, Service Manager – Customer Services
Mr I Patterson, Homeslessness Manager

Clerk:

Mrs L Gillingwater

Apologies:

None

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL – CABINET 8 MARCH 2016

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of 8 March 2016 were approved.

Matter arising, Item 3 – Councillor Currie asked for an update on Area Partnership funding. Tom Shearer, Head of Communities and Partnerships, advised that a report on this matter would be presented to Council on 26 April.

2. MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services) advising Cabinet of a re-provision of the mobile library service within East Lothian.

Prior to the presentation of this report, Councillor Currie asked if consideration could be given to submitting the report to Council, in order to provide Members with an opportunity to put forward amendments or express a view on the matter. Having taken legal advice from Morag Ferguson, Service Manager – Legal and Procurement, Councillor Innes advised that as this was an operational matter, a decision had been taken by officers under delegated powers and was now being implemented, hence it coming to Cabinet only for noting. Councillor Currie observed that reports for noting would normally be lodged in the Members' Library, and reiterated his request for the matter to be brought before Council. Councillor Hampshire explained that the report had only been submitted to Cabinet as it was a matter of public interest. He added that the decision on the mobile library service had been taken following approval of the Council's budget, and that Councillor Currie could have put forward proposals on this issue at that time. Councillor Currie asked for confirmation that the decision taken did not preclude Members bringing forward proposals to change the position within six months. Mrs Ferguson confirmed that to be the case, noting that the approval of two-thirds of Members to directly rescind a decision taken within the previous six months did not apply to decisions made by officers under delegated authority.

Eileen Morrison, Service Manager – Customer Services, presented the report, advising Members of recent challenges facing the mobile library service, which had resulted in her taking a decision to cease the service in December 2015. She drew attention to the statistics within the report, which showed a significant reduction in mobile library users over the past five years. She advised that a survey had been undertaken with mobile library service users to gain their views about what their preference would be if a mobile library service could no longer be provided. She also pointed out the capital and revenue costs associated with replacing a mobile library vehicle. Ms Morrison informed Members of discussions with Midlothian Council and the Scottish Borders – Live Borders – Trust Library Service and of the proposed mobile library service that they could provide in East Lothian, commencing in April/May 2016. She also advised of other proposed initiatives, such as pop-up libraries in villages where a mobile library service would no longer be provided, and noted that the home delivery service would continue and could be used by anyone who wished to have books delivered to them.

In response to questions from Councillor Currie, Ms Morrison advised that all primary schools had a library resource and Library HQ also provided books and resources to all primary schools. She advised of an increase in class visits to branch libraries. She referred to a review of school library services which would conclude in August, where all primary and secondary students were being asked about reading and what they thought about their school library services. As regards consideration given to replacing the vehicle, Ms Morrison reported that all service managers had been advised that the Capital Plan was fully committed and that there were a number of other priorities within Customer Services, such as IT system upgrades/replacements to meet PSN requirements. She added that a case for replacing the vehicle would not have met the criteria given to managers for capital funding.

Concerning the impact of the changes, Ms Morrison advised that it was mainly older people and pre-school children that would be affected, but that she was continuing to provide a service at a time when use for that service was reducing and budgets were under significant pressure. She also made reference to a recent increase in the staffing resource for secondary school library services.

Ms Morrison confirmed that savings identified for the library service had been included in the budget papers.

Councillor McMillan asked how a pop-up library service would work. Ms Morrison advised that a selection of books, based on data from the library management system, would be made available for borrowers in a community centre or village hall.

Councillor McAllister questioned whether Ms Morrison had discussed her proposal with Cabinet members prior to making her decision. She advised that she had raised the matter with the Council Leader, but that he had not endorsed her proposal to cease the existing mobile library service just before Christmas 2015. As she could not continue to provide a mobile library service without staff or a reliable vehicle and the purchase of a new vehicle did not meet the criteria for capital funding, she had advised the Council Leader that she was in discussion with neighbouring authorities as regards providing a service on behalf of the Council.

Following questions, Ms Morrison provided further information on library-related initiatives taking place for pre-school children, school-age children, and older users, as well as explaining how the home-delivery system worked. She advised that it was important that older users made use of the branch libraries and the desire was for them to come to the library where there were a number of activities and other people using the library.

Councillor Day welcomed the report and the work undertaken by Ms Morrison. He also spoke in support of the partnership working between the three councils, and of the initiatives taking place in branch libraries. His comments were supported by Councillor Veitch, who commended the approach being taken and the savings being made, and by Councillor McMillan, who praised the work of volunteers involved in the home delivery service.

Councillor MacKenzie welcomed library-based activities for older people. However, he voiced his concern that the removal of the mobile library service in some areas may contribute to older people feeling socially isolated.

Councillor Currie expressed surprise at the support for the report, remarking that the change was a budget cut and there would be no improvement to the service. He argued that this decision should have been taken by Councillors, rather than officers. Referring to the Integrated Impact Assessment, he spoke of his concern about the impact the change would have on certain user groups. He indicated that a future SNP-led Administration would reinstate a Council-run mobile library service.

Councillor Akhtar expressed her disappointment in the views of the SNP Group and commended Ms Morrison for finding a way to continue providing a mobile library service and implementing other initiatives, in spite of funding reductions.

Councillor Hampshire pointed out that every area of the Council had to find ways of reducing the costs of providing services. He argued that the SNP Group's budget proposals for library services would have been insufficient to cover the cost of providing a mobile library service, and that the solution put forward by Ms Morrison would allow the Council to protect this service. He praised officers for their work on this issue.

Referring to comments made by Councillor MacKenzie, Councillor McAllister agreed that the change to the mobile library service would affect vulnerable groups. He expressed concern that the change had been implemented even though the Council Leader had not supported it, and questioned why Members had not had the opportunity to debate the issue. He also made reference to a feasibility study on the future of Musselburgh Library and claimed that library space would be significantly reduced should it be moved to Brunton Hall.

Councillor Innes concluded the debate by recognising that the use of library services was changing and that it was important that officers should look at providing services in new ways, especially in the current financial climate.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed to note the re-provision of a proposed new mobile library service within East Lothian by Midlothian Council Library Service and the new Scottish Borders Trust – Live Borders – Library Service.

3. PROVISION OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services) seeking approval to increase the number of properties used to provide temporary accommodation to allow the Council to more effectively meet its statutory requirements under the homelessness legislation.

Ian Patterson, Homelessness Manager, presented the report, advising that this report was the second of a three-stage approach to the provision of accommodation for homeless families. He referred to the growth in demand for temporary accommodation and proposed that provision across all tenures should be increased. He added that a further report would be presented to Cabinet in due course on housing options.

Responding to questions from Councillor Goodfellow, Mr Patterson advised that the Council's main priority was to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, and that there was a success rate of 75% in allocating accommodation within the applicant's broad area of choice. He appreciated that there were difficulties for people who were located outwith their area of choice; however, the Council was required to meet its statutory obligations.

As regards the Council's recent breach of homelessness legislation (as set out in Section 3.8 of the report), Mr Patterson explained that a family with a child or a pregnant women should not be accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation except in emergency circumstances. However, pressure in the system and a shortage of temporary accommodation had resulted in the breach.

Councillor Williamson asked about the number of people presenting themselves as homeless. Mr Patterson advised that the introduction of the housing options service in 2010/11 had led to a reduction of 30–40%. However, there had been an increase in the number of people requiring temporary accommodation and using bed and breakfast accommodation, hence the report on this particular issue. He provided further information on the success of the housing options service.

In response to a question from Councillor Currie on welfare changes, Mr Patterson advised that this had affected smaller households in particular, especially as there was a shortage of one-bedroom accommodation in East Lothian. He advised of action being taken to mitigate the impact, including working with housing associations and looking at new housing models,

such as flat shares and mid-market rental, etc. He anticipated that the introduction of Universal Credit may lead to further difficulties in relation to the payment of housing benefit.

Councillor Hampshire reported that the Council was delivering as many housing units as possible. He welcomed the range of options being considered, including an increase in temporary accommodation, and recognised the need for further investment from central government to meet the challenges facing the Council.

Councillor Currie called for the Council to meet with all other stakeholders to devise a housing plan for the next 5–10 years. He estimated that it would cost £250 million to build the affordable housing required in East Lothian and questioned how this would be paid for. He paid tribute to Mr Patterson and his team for their work in tackling homelessness.

Councillor Goodfellow suggested that a more flexible approach should be adopted as regards relocating families housed outwith their support network. Mr Patterson advised that the current pressures and legal requirements were such that the Council did not have this flexibility; however, his team would seek to place families appropriately should there be more flexibility in the system.

Councillor Innes accepted that the provision of temporary accommodation had always been challenging for the Council, and suggested that this matter should be continually reviewed. He also proposed that when the Council tenders for the private sector contract later in 2016, some flexibility should be built into that contract to increase capacity if required.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

- i. to approve the proposal to increase the provision of temporary accommodation across all tenures;
- ii. that within the increase, the property level within the contract for the provision of private sector leased temporary accommodation be increased to 200 properties, subject to a further financial review of the impact of Universal Credit on the financial viability of the contract; and
- iii. to continue the current housing allocation targets until the Cabinet has the opportunity to review these for the financial year 2016/17.

4. ARCHIVE ACQUISITION POLICY

A report was submitted by the Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services) seeking Cabinet approval of the Archive Acquisition Policy in order that the Council has a clear set of parameters for the collection and disposal of archival and local history materials.

The Head of Council Resources, Jim Lamond, presented the report, reminding Members of the approval in 2015 of the Records Management Plan, a mandatory requirement of the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011. He advised that the Keeper of the Records considered an archive acquisition policy to be a mandatory requirement of the Records Management Plan. This policy would form the basis for the internal transfer of materials from active use into the Archive Service, and would also outline the process for transferring materials identified in the Retention Schedule for permanent preservation, as well as supporting the Council in the proper handling of archive materials. Mr Lamond also noted that the report author, Alex Fitzgerald, had recently been nominated for Professional of the Year by the Information and Records Management Society.

A number of Members commented positively on the archival material being made available by the Council, and congratulated Mr Fitzgerald on his nomination for Professional of the Year.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed to approve the Archive Acquisition Policy, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

5. MINUTES FOR NOTING

The approved minutes of the Resilient People Partnership held on 18 November 2015 and the Safe & Vibrant Communities Partnership held on 23 November 2015 were noted.

Signed

Councillor Willie Innes
Council Leader and Convener of the Cabinet