

CABINET

**Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 2 December 2021
at 10.00 am in Telford Room, Third Floor, Addenbrooke House,
Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT**

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2021

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: MONDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2021)

Present: Councillors R A Overton (Vice-Chair), A J Burford, E M Callear,
L D Carter, R C Evans, C Healy, S A W Reynolds and P Watling.

Also Present: Cllr N A Dugmore (Conservative Group Leader)

Apologies: Councillor D Wright and S Davies

CAB- Declarations of Interest 115

None.

CAB- Minutes of the Previous Meeting 116

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on the 4 November be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CAB- Leader's Announcements 117

The Deputy Leader expressed that as the Borough headed towards the winter pressures he encouraged everyone to take up the flu and covid vaccines to keep themselves and others safe and the help prevent pressure on the NHS.

CAB- First Homes - Local Criteria 118

The Deputy Leader reported that the Council had an excellent record of delivering new homes in the borough with around a third of these being homes available for affordable rent, social rent or shared ownership. This clearly demonstrated the Council's commitment and performance in delivering quality homes for all residents.

In the last 10 years, the supply of affordable housing had increased significantly to over 300 homes per annum with the Council securing around 40% of the Borough's affordable housing supply through section 106 Agreements with the remaining 60% secured through other routes such as

100% affordable housing schemes delivered by Registered Providers or sites that benefited from grant funding through Homes England.

First Homes was a Government initiative to introduce a new form of discounted market housing available for first time buyers but it was felt that this scheme did not positively meet the needs of local residents in the Borough. From 28th December 2021, Government policy would require Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to set aside 25% of the affordable homes that they would secure through section 106 Agreements as First Homes. It was projected that around 30 affordable homes per annum locally (10% of total delivery) would be delivered by First Homes and would replace shared ownership properties which were a better means of meeting local affordable needs on developments where First Homes would now be required.

The Council recognised that the national criteria did not meet the delivery of affordable homes for residents in Telford & Wrekin and, in accordance with the legislation, a local criteria would be introduced that would better reflect the housing needs of local residents including increasing the minimum discount applicable to First Homes from 30% to 40% making homes more affordable for those most in need. Decreasing the price cap from £250,000 to £180,000 would help target more affordable one to three bedroomed properties. Decreasing the joint income cap from £80,000 to £60,000 would help prioritise the needs of key workers and allow joint households to purchase first homes. The introduction of a local connections test would ensure that First Homes were targeted to meet the needs of local residents, as well as meeting the needs of those relocating to the Borough to provide care for relatives. The 40% discount, income cap, local connection test and priority for key workers would also apply to all future resales of First Homes.

The Council was committed to increasing the supply of affordable homes to residents of the Borough and maintain its excellent track record of delivery.

Members felt that the national scheme was a missed opportunity but welcomed the local eligibility criteria to help meet local housing needs.

The Leader of the Conservative Group commented that the scheme would help low paid local residents and key workers get on the property ladder and reduce the pressure on the rental market. He mentioned that affordable homes were not always delivered as part of a planning application due to affordable housing requirements being waived or reduced

In response, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Green Spaces, Natural and Historic Environment expressed that the Council supported housing needs but the rules concerning viability on development had an impact on affordable housing. Investment in social housing, a house for life and good quality rented accommodation was what really made a difference.

The Deputy Leader stated that the Council would do its best to deliver and support key workers, the Council was passionate about housing and residents having access to better properties.

RESOLVED – that Cabinet

- a) Note the impact of First Homes on the supply of local affordable housing; and
- b) Approve the introduction of the local First Homes Criteria contained in the Policy Position Statement.

CAB-119 **Tibberton & Cherrington Neighbourhood Development Plan**
– Proceed to Making the NDP

The Deputy Leader explained that the Localism Act 2011 introduced legislation which allowed Parish and Town Councils to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) for their administrative area. This report recommended that the Tibberton & Cherrington Parish NDP became the sixth NDP in the Borough to be adopted, reflecting the Council's commitment to engage local communities further in planning for development in their local areas.

The purpose of this report was to recommend that Cabinet 'make' Tibberton & Cherrington Parish NDP following the outcome of the local referendum on 11th November with 90% of those people who voted supporting the Neighbourhood Plan. This would mean that the policies within the Tibberton & Cherrington Parish NDP would become part of the Development Plan for Telford & Wrekin and would be considered in the determination of planning applications in the Tibberton & Cherrington Parish NDP area alongside national and borough-wide planning policy.

The Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed the response to the public consultation which showed the Council was listening to local residents.

The Deputy Leader welcomed residents positively getting involved with the planning process.

RESOLVED – that

- a) Cabinet agrees to make the Tibberton & Cherrington Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan; and
- b) Cabinet authorises the Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure to exercise all of the Council's relevant powers and duties and undertake all necessary procedural arrangements relating to the making of the Tibberton & Cherrington Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan.

CAB-120 **Draft Equality and Diversity Strategy**

The Cabinet Member for Cooperative Communities, Engagement and Partnerships presented the draft Equality and Diversity Strategy which followed on from the Equality and Diversity Progress Update report (October 2021), which highlighted positive steps that the Council had made in improving access to services, co-ordinating community response to hate crime incidents, celebrating diversity through a range of events and activities, and increasing training and guidance for Council employees.

Cabinet also recognised that despite the good progress that had been made, there was more that the organisation wanted to achieve, and so pledged to bring forward a new draft Equality & Diversity Strategy, which accompanied the report.

The draft strategy set out the Council's revised approach to equality and diversity through a new 4-year strategy. This replaced the existing Equality Policy. It took account of the legal duties and responsibilities and the type of culture the Council wished to promote throughout its workforce and in the way that local residents and customers were treated.

The strategy was currently in draft form but included a clear commitment and vision with meaningful and realistic objectives, together with a new set of objectives all of which would be driven by a supporting action plan that the Council would report against on an annual basis.

It was the intention for this strategy to inform and complement other strategies, many of which focussed on reducing inequality.

The draft strategy included four main areas of focus:

- Leading our organisation and communities;
- Supporting our workforce and elected members;
- Serving our customers;
- Celebrating and promoting diversity

External advice had been sought with the Equality and Diversity Steering Group continuing to be kept informed. More engagement was required to ensure that the strategy truly reflected the needs of the community, partners and workforce with engagement workshops taking place, the results of which would be considered in February/March 2022 and brought back to Cabinet in 2022.

Members welcomed the report and felt that this would lead into an expansive policy which had been developed with input from different voices and community sectors. The strength of work in achieving the objectives was pleasing to see as well as ensuring there would be monitoring of progress. This showed determination to deliver on the commitment.

The Leader of the Conservative Group fully supported the strategy and hoped it achieved its aims.

RESOLVED – that Cabinet

- a) notes the new draft Equality & Diversity Strategy and approve the draft as the basis for further community engagement;**
- b) endorses the approach to public accountability by agreeing to publish the new equality objectives in the revised Council Plan once finalised;**
- c) agrees to annual progress reporting against the Strategy and Action Plan; and**
- d) agrees to the Council appointing an independent facilitator to carry out further engagement within our communities before the strategy was finalised.**

CAB-121 Progress update on recommendations from the Customer & Digital Peer Review and Key Actions from the Customer Strategy

The Deputy Leader presented the progress update on recommendations from the Customer & Digital Peer Review and the key actions identified in the customer strategy.

The Council was committed to learning from best practice, both from across local government and other sectors. In May 2021, it invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out a Customer Services and Digital Peer Challenge. A report on the findings and recommended actions was previously approved by Cabinet on the 8th July 2021, and this report provided an update on progress in delivering the agreed actions.

Customers were at the heart of everything the Council did and, to ensure that it delivered the best customer experience, the Council had introduced the 'Everything Speaks' approach. The aims and priorities were set out in the Customer Strategy, and the report provided an update on how this was being embedded across the Council. It highlighted examples of positive steps that had been taken to improve customer experience. It had introduced "Ask Tom" a chatbot facility which had received positive feedback, replaced the "Everyday Telford App" with the "My Telford App" with improved and expanded functionality, the contact centre had achieved a 95% customer satisfaction score and the introduction of real time feedback in physical locations by the use of QR codes. Further developments were due to be delivered before March 2022

In order to build on the learning from the LGA Peer Challenge, this report also included a proposal that the Council became a member of the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) for a three year period in order to access a wide range of benefits and, in particular, this would enable the Council to benchmark its customer service performance against other organisations within the sector (and other sectors) on an ongoing basis. It would enable the

Council to work towards attaining the ICS Service Mark, an independently and rigorously assessed accreditation of commitment to, and achievement of, customer service standards to drive improvement which was synonymous with customer service excellence.

Members welcomed and noted the progress made to date and the satisfaction rates from residents who came to the Council for a number of reasons in times of need. Every effort had been put in place to enable the public to gain access online and this helped to support Ward Members with their case work.

The Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed the digital strategy but reminded Cabinet of the need to ensure other methods of access were available and asked that residents without access to digital services were encouraged to use facilities available in libraries and community centres.. In response the Deputy Leader expressed that he understood the digital divide and the Council was doing all it could to alleviate the issues. There were many channels that residents could access and the current channels would not be changing as the Council had excellent statistics in relation to the Corporate Contact Centre.

RESOLVED – that Cabinet

- a) notes progress in delivering actions in the Customer Strategy and in responding to the feedback and recommendations from the Local Government Association Customer Services and Digital Peer Challenge; and**
- b) approves the recommendation that the Council sign up to a three year “Discovery Roadmap” membership of the Institute of Customer Services, the benefits of which were set out the report.**

The meeting ended at 10.23 am

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Anthea Lowe
Associate Director: Policy & Governance
Date: **Wednesday, 8 DECEMBER 2021**

Signed

Date: Thursday, 6 January 2022