

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 2ND APRIL 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors R. Hollingworth (Leader), M. A. Sherrey (Deputy Leader),
D. W. P. Booth, M. A. Bullivant, C. B. Taylor and M. J. A. Webb

Observers: Councillors C. J. Bloore, L.C. R. Mallett and E. J. Murray

Officers: Ms J. Pickering, Mrs S. Sellers, Mr D. Allen and Ms R. Cole

103/13 **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence.

104/13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor M. A. Sherrey declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in item 7 - Homelessness Grant Funding as a Trustee of Citizens' Advice Bureau and Basement. Councillor Sherrey left the room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor R. Hollingworth declared an Other Disclosable Interest in item 12 – Nomination of an Asset of Community Value as a Member of Alvechurch Sports and Social Club.

105/13 **BROMSGROVE MUSEUM**

The Cabinet considered a detailed report updating Members in relation to the Bromsgrove Museum Building in Birmingham Road, Bromsgrove. The report also set out a number of options available to the Authority for the potential sale or alternative use of the Museum Building.

Members were reminded of the extensive background to this matter dating back over a number of years. Since the closure of the Museum in 2008 various options to reopen the Museum had been pursued by the former donor of the Collection, by the Friends of the Norton Charitable Trust which was now known as the Norton Collection Museum Trust. This had culminated in Cabinet approval in July 2013 of an offer from the Trust to purchase the Museum Building for the sum of £200,000 to include completion of the sale within 6 months.

It was noted that since that decision officers had continued to negotiate with the Solicitors acting for the former donor of the Norton Collection and the Norton Collection Museum Trust to reach an agreed position regarding the status of the

artefacts and the historic terms of the Trust Deed. In addition, since July 2013, officers had been informed on two occasions that the Trust were attempting to secure an alternative site for the Museum firstly at the former United Reformed Church and then Steps House. In the event these efforts proved to be unsuccessful and therefore the Trust were now putting forward further proposals to secure the use of the Birmingham Road site.

The report set out in full the two options put forward by the Trust. In essence these were:

- (a) the grant to the Trust of a long term lease (at least 25 years) at a peppercorn or substantially discounted rent. The Trust would be responsible for repair and upkeep of the building and had offered to provide a Tourist Information Service (with a grant payable towards this by this Council); and
- (b) the purchase the building for the sum of £150,000 with half to be paid on completion and the other half to be paid over a 25 year period. It was clarified that this would result in a £75,000 loss of capital receipt to the Council.

Officers explained that if Members wished to pursue option (a) above this proposal would need to be amended to refer to the payment of a commercial rent and the payment of a grant by the Council to the Trust. It was confirmed that no budget provision had been made in this regard.

Members considered the options and the detailed information contained within the report. The Section 151 Officer confirmed that the Asset Management Group had considered these two options and were concerned that the proposals would not support the delivery of value for money in relation to the management of the Council's assets. The Asset Management Group had also suggested an alternative option of sale of the building on the open market following confirmation of the position regarding the artefacts and the legal considerations. A further option, as the Town Centre redevelopment progresses, would be to consider leasing the building on a commercial basis.

Officers confirmed that it was still open to the Trust to make an approach to either lease or purchase the building but this would need to be at market value and would be considered alongside any other expressions of interest. The Museum Trust had previously been given an option to purchase the building but had failed to raise the requisite funding during the relevant time period and the option had therefore expired.

The Cabinet fully acknowledged the work which had been undertaken by the former donor of the Museum and by the Trust to attempt to generate the funding required for this project including the recent open day where members of the public had been able to visit the Museum for free. Members also referred to the extensive work undertaken by officers over a long period to attempt to meet the requests and requirements of the Trust and to enable the Museum to reopen.

The Cabinet considered the options set out in the report in the light of the Council's duty to obtain best value from the Council's assets, and the need to ensure that

there was wider community benefit from the presence of a Museum in Bromsgrove in a time of significant financial restraint. It was

RESOLVED:

- (a) that officers be instructed to explore the dual options of either leasing the building on a commercial basis or disposal of the building to generate the best return for the Authority; and
- (b) that authority be delegated to the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) and the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to determine the precise terms for dealing with the Museum Building going forward in an arrangement for either lease or sale.

APPENDIX