

Executive – 24 August 2005

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley, N. Cavill, Edwards, Garner, Hall and Leighton

Officers: Mr J J Thornberry (Strategic Director), Ms S Adam (Strategic Director), Ms J Wishlade (Strategic Director), Mrs J Sillifant (Joint Venture Project Manager), Mr K Toller (Head of Resources), Mr C Brazier (Housing Transfer Manager), Mr N T Noall (Head of Development), Ms E Watkin (Joint Venture Project Accountant) and Mrs D Durham (Review Support Officer)

Also Present: Councillors Croad, Henley, House, Morrell, Prior-Sankey, Stuart-Thorn and Wedderkopp and Didar Dhillon (Pinsent Masons) for Minute No 82 only.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

77. Apology

Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris.

78. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 July 2005 were taken as read and were signed.

79. Public Question Time

Councillor Henley, as a member of the public, asked the following questions:-

- (1) With reference to the debacle over the cancellation of this year's "Proms in the Park", he was very concerned that the warnings about ticket prices had not been heeded by the Executive Councillor. What was the future for this very popular event?
- (2) Turning to proposals to charge for the use of Vivary Park, he had noted recent comments that "the days of subsidy were over". However, should a charge really be imposed on the Flower Show? How was it the Executive supported the provision of a Christmas ice rink in Taunton which might need to be subsidised? What was the latest as far as sponsorship for the ice rink was concerned?
- (3) Was it correct that a private company would run the new market if it was relocated to Chelston? How much tax-payers money would be needed in bringing the new market forward?

In response:-

- (1) Councillor Mrs Bradley suggested that as Chairman of the Review Board, Councillor Henley might wish to look at what had happened regarding “Proms in the Park” as part of the scrutiny process.

The Chairman (Councillor Williams) added that the event was no longer run by the Council and that its cancellation was due to the demise of the company promoting it. The Council could not be responsible for what had happened.

- (2) Councillor Mrs Bradley reported that extensive consultation had taken place as to what was wanted in Vivary Park, even though no extra money would be available from the Council to fund particular events. This meant that some form of charging would be necessary.

The Chairman added that the detailed charging proposals had still to be considered by the Health and Leisure Review Panel. He also informed Councillor Henley that the Marketing Director of the Flower Show (Mr. A. Prior-Sankey) totally agreed with charging for the use of the park. As far as the Flower Show itself was concerned, they needed to decide whether this event was commercial or charitable.

Councillor Prior-Sankey (in declaring a personal interest in this matter) clarified that the Marketing Director had actually said that he was “in favour of charging for commercial activities”.

Councillor Cavill reported that a main sponsor for the ice rink had not yet been identified although discussions were continuing. Some limited financial assistance had been offered towards what would be the only ice rink in the South West during the Christmas period.

- (3) Councillor Cavill reported that full details as to how the new market at Chelston would be brought forward had not yet been fully agreed. There was a need for the existing market site to be valued and this was due to be undertaken by the Regional Development Agency.

Councillor Wedderkopp, as a member of the public, referred to the public toilets in Taunton Deane which were now fewer in number, but certainly cleaner – although those at the Taunton Bus Station smelt very strongly of ammonia. He asked whether Deane DLO were now cleaning all the toilets? If so, what specification was given regarding cleansing and were all the cleaning staff adequately trained?

Councillor Edwards confirmed that the cleaning contract had been taken over by Deane DLO leading to a significant improvement in the standard of cleaning. He promised to make some enquiries about the other points raised and would inform Councillor Wedderkopp of the outcome.

Councillor Prior-Sankey, referring to the development of the Council’s Travel Plan was concerned that the press release issued after the Review

Board's consideration of this topic earlier in the month did not reflect the discussion that had taken place. She reminded the Executive of the Communications Protocol which asked Councillors to ensure that articles released to the press were balanced.

The Chairman reported that Councillor Prior-Sankey's point had been taken up by the Monitoring Officer and a response had now been issued.

Mr Harris asked a series of questions on behalf of Mr S Robins with regard to a number of issues.

The Chairman responded as follows:-

- (a) Attendance figures of Councillors attending meetings were on the website;
- (b) Minutes of party meetings were not available to the public;
- (c) Scrutiny was beginning to work well with items of concern being referred to the appropriate Review Panel for consideration. He did not accept that he "stifled" scrutiny;
- (d) He also did not accept that basic courtesies had been removed from Mr Robins. The extra measures implemented had been put in place to protect staff. Mr Robins still had the means to communicate with the Council by way of the dedicated answerphone that had been made available to him;
- (e) He would speak to the Chief Executive about unanswered questions although the Council would decline to answer those that had repeatedly been dealt with in the past;
- (f) A reasonable approach from Mr Robins would receive a reasonable response from the Council.

80. Customer Access Strategy

Submitted report previously circulated, which considered the adoption of a Customer Access Strategy.

A Customer Access Strategy should set out the Council's aspirations for the way in which it wanted to relate to its customers in the future. As the Council potentially moved towards a Joint Venture approach to delivering some of its services and increasing the number of partnerships that it worked with, it became increasingly important to have this clarity.

Submitted details of a draft Strategy that had been developed following informal discussions between the Executive and members of the Corporate Management Team. Subsequently workshops had been run with the Review Board, staff and managers to help influence the development of the Strategy. The Review Board had considered the draft Strategy at its meeting on 4 August 2005.

RESOLVED that the Customer Access Strategy as set out in the report be adopted.

(Councillor Prior-Sankey, as a County Councillor, declared a personal interest in the item covered by Minute No. 81 below.)

81. Joint Venture Arrangements for Corporate Services

Reference Minute No 76/2005 which built on the first two drafts of the outline business case submitted to the Executive at its meetings on 22 June and 20 July 2005. It concluded the initial thinking about which services were proposed to be “in scope”, and outlined the financial case to support the overall business case. It was acknowledged that this needed to be considered alongside the Council’s emerging Customer Strategy. A further report setting out this Council’s and Somerset County Council’s Joint Vision and ambitions for the project was to be presented to the Executive at a special meeting on 5 September 2005.

Since the last report on 20 July 2005 significant progress had been made to take the work of the potential Joint Venture arrangement forward.

- (1) The Officers Steering Group had concluded its work to determine which services should be “in scope” details of which were submitted;
- (2) The Governance and Project Management arrangements agreed with the County Council were in place and working well;
- (3) The Strategic Director responsible for this project had held a number of further staff briefing sessions which had been well attended;
- (4) A communications action plan had been implemented including publication of the first “Briefing” update and the establishment of a Staff Consultation Group;
- (5) The Corporate Management Team had endorsed the risk management register produced by the Steering Group;
- (6) Work had been undertaken to produce outline costings for the proposed model of a Joint Venture arrangement;
- (7) Work had similarly been undertaken to produce outline costings for the different business models discussed in Draft 1 that could also potentially achieve the business objectives the Council had specified.

The point had now been reached when a decision needed to be made as to whether the overall business case was sufficiently robust to go ahead with the procurement process to select the private sector partner. The key aspect of the report was the outline financial case to support the overall business case. Also included was the estimated cost of procuring external legal and financial advice for the project.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) The Outline Business Case (draft free) for the potential Joint Venture arrangement as submitted be noted and, in particular, the affordability

model work which set out the comparative financial cases for all the business model options be also noted;

- (2) The continuation of the ISIS project be agreed and Council be recommended to approve a supplementary estimate from General Fund Reserves of £120,000 to fund the cost of the external advisors for the next phase of this project.
- (3) The involvement of Taunton Deane Borough Council in the procurement process seek a private sector partner be agreed.
- (4) A "joint vision and ambitions statement" continue to be developed with Somerset County Council for consideration by the Executive and Council at its special meetings on 5 September 2005.

82. Housing Stock Transfer Consultation

Progress reports had been provided on a number of occasions in the past to outline the work undertaken on the Housing Stock Transfer Consultation. This further update included details of the Communication Log, Project Reporting Arrangements and a briefing on the role and responsibilities of the Shadow Board.

This matter had been considered by the Tenants Forum and the Housing Review Panel. Apart from one minor change recommended by the Tenants Forum both the Review Panel and the Forum had agreed with the recommendations included in the report.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The project reporting arrangements detailed in Appendix 2 to the report be agreed, subject to the membership of the Elected Member Advisory Group detailed in Annex 2 being altered from "Group Leaders and Portfolio Holder" to a Group reflecting the political proportionality of the Council, that is seven Councillors comprising four Conservatives, two Liberal Democrats and one from either the Independent or Labour Groups;
2. The following proposals with regard to the formation of a Shadow Board be agreed:-
 - (a) A Shadow Board of 12 members equally split between four Council nominees, four tenants and four independent persons from the community.
 - (b) The Council nominees comprise two from the Conservatives, one Liberal Democrat and one to represent both the Labour and the Independent Groups. It was recognised that the political leaders would decide whether the nominees would be Councillors or other persons.

- (c) The recommendations set out in the report regarding the appointment of tenant and independent Shadow Board Members be agreed.

83. Allocation of the Governments Planning Delivery Grant 2005/2006

Reported that the Council had been awarded a Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) of £545,353 in recognition of planning performance over the year ending 30 September 2004. The grant was slightly more than last years award and compared favourably with other authorities in the region.

Following discussions with Officers and Executive Councillors it was proposed to combine this years grant with the carried over funds from last year and to budget for service improvements over two years in three main areas - Development Control, Forward Planning and The Vision for Taunton.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) The priority bids for the allocation of the Planning Delivery Grant for 2005/2006 as set out in the appendix to the report (Notes 1-16) be agreed;
- (2) An additional Development Control Case Officer funded by the PDG for two years as a "non priority bid" be agreed as set out in the appendix to the report (Note 17); and
- (3) An additional 0.45 FTE clerical/administrative support officer in Forward Planning funded by the PDG for one year as a "non priority bid" be agreed as set out in the appendix to the report (Note 18).

(Councillor Leighton left the meeting at 8.15 p.m. during the discussion of Minute No. 83.)

84. Taunton Deane Borough Council and the Brewhouse Theatre

Reported that the Council had an ongoing commitment to the Brewhouse Theatre and its work which went well beyond just putting on productions and included education and the wider visual arts. It was recognised as an important agent in delivering culture in its wider sense and provided a central location for the arts. In this way it made a major contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities.

The Council currently managed its relationship via a joint Service Level Agreement with the County Council which was monitored by the Brewhouse Panel. The Brewhouse Panel was set up in 1983 in order to consider the future workings and needs of the Brewhouse Theatre. The terms of reference of the panel were revised in 1998 to better fit the requirements of that time. The main purpose of those revised terms of reference was to monitor the management of the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre and to consider proposals for future developments which might affect the Council.

Two of its main responsibilities were to approve the release of the Council's grant on a periodic basis and to ensure that the funding provided by the Council was effectively used and to agree with the theatre management any development and business plans and to monitor their achievement.

In fact the current Panel met only twice a year with monthly finance reports being submitted to officers and the Executive Councillor making the decision about releasing the grant money. A good working relationship had been developed between the Council's Arts Officer and the General Manager of the Brewhouse Theatre.

It was recognised that the current terms of reference and the agreed working arrangements of the Brewhouse Panel were in need of review and updating. They were no longer being fully followed as circumstances had changed.

In addition, the Brewhouse was also going through a fundamental review of its role and was planning to develop its business in line with this merging role. The Theatre now sought to work in a modernised partnership relationship with the Council - one which gave them access to Senior Officers and a structured and formalised route to report to Members via the mainstream Review Panel arrangement. This change would also fit in with the Council's plans to improve scrutiny following the review of this function.

It was proposed that the Brewhouse Panel be disbanded and a partnership arrangement similar to that used with Tone Leisure be introduced for managing the relationship of the Brewhouse. A funding agreement was already in place and would continue to be monitored by officers on a monthly basis. Formal accounts would be presented on a quarterly basis to the partnership meeting. The Business Plan and relevant performance monitoring arrangements would be agreed with the Brewhouse as part of this funding agreement and would take the place of the current Service Level Agreement. Reports on these would be made to the partnership meeting on a quarterly basis.

The day to day relationship with the Brewhouse would continue to operate through the Council's Arts Officer. A quarterly partnership meeting would be chaired by one of the Council's Strategic Directors and would be held with the Chair of the Trustees and the new General Manager of the Brewhouse plus relevant other senior staff from both organisations. A report to the Health and Leisure Review Panel would be submitted on a quarterly basis and there would be elected member representation on the Brewhouse Board of Trustees.

The Review Board had discussed these proposals and had recommended that they be agreed.

RESOLVED that the Brewhouse Panel be disbanded and a partnering arrangement be introduced with effect from October 2005 to coincide with the

new business planning process of the Brewhouse and the imminent introduction of updated scrutiny arrangements for the Council.

85. Travel Plan Development

It was reported that improving transport and travel within Taunton Deane was a priority of the Council and it therefore had a community leadership role to ensure it was doing all that it could to support the management of congestion in the area both through implementation of policy and through the travel of its own workforce.

Other key large organisations in Taunton already had Travel Plans and when working with new businesses wishing to locate to Taunton the Council included travel planning as part of the planning process. Car parking charges within the town centre had risen and Taunton Deane had been criticised for asking other workers in town to pay increased rates whilst continuing to offer unrestricted free parking to a large proportion of employees.

A Travel Plan was a package of measures individually tailored to efficiently manage the transport impact of an organisation and was aimed at promoting sustainable travel choices.

A Travel Plan Working Group had been set up and a series of actions and targets based on the reduction in available free parking for staff and the encouragement of cycling, walking, car sharing, public transport and home working had been considered. Targets would be set around a reduction in car use and growth in use of other forms of transport. The action taken so far had focussed on the travel to and from work journeys. In the future the Travel Plan would develop to include business trips and the Council fleet.

It was considered that capital finance would be required in the following areas:-

- Increased shower provision;
- Increased cycle storage;
- Wet weather storage/drying areas;
- Purchase of two further staff pool bikes;
- Umbrellas;
- Personal alarms; and
- Changes required to make the car parking scheme work.

A grant of 50% of the total capital spend up to a limit of £4000 was available from Somerset County Council. A small amount of revenue funding was required for public relations activities but it was felt that this could be found from within current budgets.

A staff survey showed that 240 staff currently worked at The Deane House or Flook House and travelled by car. If all 240 were to pay £1 a week for car

parking a potential income was £12,480. This income would be ringfenced for improvements to facilities to support the Travel Plan.

It was felt that some of the support measures listed above should be introduced before proposed changes to staff car parking were introduced. This would require some funding to make the capital improvements to the premises prior to the revenue stream coming on line.

The Review Board had considered this matter at a recent meeting and supported the Travel Plan and details of its discussions and points raised were submitted.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) The actions and priorities identified within the Travel Plan be agreed;
and
- (2) Capital expenditure of approximately £12000 be agreed in advance of this matter being considered further together with charging for car parking.

(The meeting closed at 8.40 p.m.)