

Executive – 13 January 2010

Present: Councillor Henley (Chairman)
Councillors Coles, R Lees, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith,
A Wedderkopp and Mrs Wilson

Officers: Penny James (Chief Executive), Joy Wishlade (Strategic Director),
James Barrah (Community Services Manager), Judith Jackson (Legal
Services Manager), Maggie Hammond (Strategic Finance Officer),
Paul Fitzgerald (Financial Services Manager), Adrian Priest (Asset
Holdings Manager) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services
Manager)

Also present: Councillors Cavill, Hayward, Morrell, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stuart-
Thorn and Mrs Waymouth

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 30 November 2009 and 2 December 2009, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Henley, Paul and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Coles declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Mrs Smith declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor Slattery declared personal interests both as a Member of the Somerset Waste Board and as an employee of Sedgemoor District Council.

3. Pest Control Service

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the current in-house Pest Control Service and the feasibility of contracting the service to an external provider as part of the Core Council Review.

Taunton Deane Borough Council currently operated the Pest Control Service at the cost of £109,620 for the 2008/2009 financial year. The cost included two full time Pest Control Officers, two vans, one store and an office at the DLO depot, pest control equipment and chemicals. Income for the service during 2008/2009 was £35,950, which gave a net cost to the Council for the year of £73,670.

The service was also supported by a part time (0.6 FTE) Environmental Health Support Assistant who carried out the administration at a cost of around £13,000.

The potential savings from contracting out the service made a contribution to, and was therefore included within, the £450,000 savings identified in the Core Council Review for Themes 2 and 4. The estimated potential savings arising from contracting out the service were estimated at £46,000.

The Council's statutory duty under The Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, was to take steps to ensure that Taunton Deane was kept free from rats and mice, and in particular to:-

- Carry out inspections from time to time;
- Destroy rats and mice on Council occupied land and otherwise keep such land free from rats and mice where practicable; and
- Enforce the duties of owners and occupiers of land under the provisions of the Act.

The current service provision and the cost to users was reported. High levels of satisfaction were reflected in the continuing customer satisfaction survey.

The Council currently charged £15 for the treatment of rodents in domestic residential properties. This included three visits by a Pest Control Officer, a survey, placing baits and advice. It was proposed to increase the charge to £25, in line with neighbouring Local Authorities.

This new fee would still remain significantly cheaper than the private sector but would also appreciably reduce the cost of any potential contract.

The Council currently operated a subsidy system for residents on specified benefits where they would pay half the cost of all treatments other than rodents. Unless the Council actually specified the requirement in the contract, it was possible the appointed contractor might not continue to offer subsidised treatments.

As all neighbouring Authorities continued to offer subsidies to customers on specified benefits it was recommended that Taunton Deane should do the same in the future even though this would have an impact on the cost of the contract.

As a social landlord, the Council paid the cost for all rodent treatments required in Council accommodation. Discussions had been undertaken with Housing Management and the Portfolio Holder concerning the proposed increase in cost of treating rodents and it had been agreed that the full cost should continue to be met from the Housing Revenue Account.

Details of a number of commercial and domestic contracts currently operated by the Pest Control Service were submitted. It was suggested that any future contractor should continue to honour these contracts until expiry, when customers would have the option of negotiating new contracts with the appointed contractor directly.

Approximate costs to the Council of contracting the service were estimated to be between £7,000 and £15,000, plus additional TUPE (The Transfer of Undertakings Protection Employment Regulations 2006) costs for staff transferring across to the new service provider.

Reported that operating a reduced in-house service with only one Pest Control Officer was unlikely to produce the appropriate savings required for the detailed reasons set out in the report.

The potential contract would include the following:-

- Provision of a front line customer contact centre 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- Booking appointments;
- Payments made by telephone;
- Guaranteed emergency next day appointments;
- Inclusion of all existing subsidies; and
- Free service for all surveys on Council premises, thereby discharging Taunton Deane's statutory duty.

The provision of a contracted Pest Control Service was unlikely to have an increased detrimental impact on public health. The increased charge to the customer for rodent control might receive criticism, but it remained significantly lower than the same service offered in the private sector. It was possible that Environmental Health could receive an increased number of complaints about rats and mice, but enquiries with neighbouring Local Authorities suggested that this would not be the case.

The Council's Dog Warden Service was operated by SDK and it might be possible for the Pest Control Service to be bolted on to the existing contact. This could have advantages, as a number of SDK operatives were competent as both Dog Wardens and Pest Control Officers and fewer officers could cover the area and possibly reduce costs.

It was also possible that the Somerset Districts might, in the future, be able to offer a Pest Control Service operated by a single contract. Alternatively, it could be agreed with the preferred contractor to arrange a joint contract before the natural expiry of existing contracts.

The procurement process was being discussed with the Southwest One Procurement Team and it was anticipated that an initial three year contract would be undertaken and would take between two and three months to complete.

Consultations had been undertaken with the Unison Change Forum and the staff affected had been contacted directly about the potential implications for the service and themselves.

The Community Scrutiny Committee had considered the matter at its meeting on 15 December 2009 and its comments were noted.

Resolved that a procurement process and tenders for an externalised Pest Control Service be instigated which would incorporate the principals of the Draft Specification documents and would include the following features:-

- To increase the charge for rodent treatment from £15 to £25;
- The Council (via the Housing Revenue Account) to pay the cost of £25 for all rodent treatments on behalf of Taunton Deane Borough Council residential tenants in Council property;
- The Council to continue to offer subsidies to all customers on specified benefits; and
- Any future contractor would be expected to honour all current Taunton Deane Pest Control contracts until expiry. At the point of contract expiry, the customer would then have the option of negotiating and arranging any new contract with the appointed contractor directly.

4. **Proposed Compulsory Purchase of land at Victoria Gate, Taunton**

Reference Minute No. 80/2009, considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed issue of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) in order to facilitate redevelopment and the provision of affordable housing.

Reported that an area of land at Victoria Gate, Taunton, to the rear of 56 to 59 East Reach, had lain unused and neglected for many years and it was now required to achieve the overall redevelopment of the area. Knightstone Housing had expressed an interest in acquiring the land for affordable housing and would fund the ultimate acquisition costs.

Although the Executive had previously agreed to support the scheme, a formal resolution to take CPO action was required to meet the statutory requirements.

Extensive inquiries had been made since 2003 to establish ownership of the land but without success. In such circumstances, there was provision for a CPO to be made subject to a valuation being carried out by the Lands Tribunal and the amount of the valuation being paid into Court, prior to the transfer of title.

It had originally been envisaged that the compensation would be paid directly by Knightstone Housing with a "back to back" transfer of the land. However, since the monies had to be paid into Court before the transfer of the title could

take place, it was likely that the Council would have to fund the compensation for the period between the paying of the monies into Court and the “back to back” transfer to the Knightstone Housing.

A valuation carried out by Knightstone Housing had put the value at £150,000 and it had been confirmed that this amount could be made available from the Enabling Budget to cover that period of time.

Resolved that the making of a Compulsory Purchase Order in respect of the area of land at Victoria Gate, Taunton, to the rear of 56 to 59 East Reach, for the purpose of facilitating the development of the land for the provision affordable housing by Knightstone Housing or other appropriate body, be authorised.

5. **Council Tax Base 2010/2011**

Reported that the Council Tax Base, which was calculated annually, had to be set between 1 December and 31 January each year.

The Council Tax Base was the “Band D” equivalent of the properties included in the Valuation Officer’s banding list as at 15 October 2009, as adjusted for voids, appeals and new properties and the provision for non-collection.

The Band D equivalent was arrived at by taking the laid down proportion of each Band as compared to Band D, and aggregating the total. The approved base had to be notified to the County Council, the Police Authority, the Fire Authority and to each of the Parishes.

Adjustments had also been included for new dwellings and for initial void exemptions for empty properties.

The Council Tax Base also had to reflect the provision for losses on collection. The rate for 2010/2011 was 0.8%, as in the previous year, giving an anticipated collection rate of 99.2%.

The Council Tax Base for 2009/2010 was 40,399.85 and the recommended base for 2010/2011 of 40,384.49 represented a decrease of 15.36 or 0.04%. This marginal reduction reflected the economic conditions of the past year.

Resolved that:-

- (a) the report of the Financial Services Manager for the calculation of the Council Tax base for the whole and parts of the area for 2010/2011 be approved; and
- (b) pursuant to the Financial Services Manager’s report, and in accordance with the Local Authority (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by Taunton Deane Borough Council as its Tax Base for the whole area for the year 2010/2011 shall be 40,384.49 and for the parts of the area listed below shall, for 2010/2011 be: -

Ash Priors	76.05
Ashbrittle	97.07
Bathealton	84.57
Bishops Hull	1,072.38
Bishops Lydeard/Cothelstone	1,937.47
Bradford on Tone	283.61
Burrowbridge	204.78
Cheddon Fitzpaine	648.71
Chipstable	124.72
Churchstanton	331.27
Combe Florey	122.01
Comeytrowe	2,086.27
Corfe	134.15
Creech St Michael	950.07
Durston	59.02
Fitzhead	121.87
Halse	144.75
Hatch Beauchamp	261.29
Kingston St Mary	446.32
Langford Budville	238.40
Lydeard St Lawrence/Tolland	200.64
Milverton	600.46
Neroche	255.85
North Curry	742.96
Norton Fitzwarren	826.06
Nynehead	156.55
Oake	333.46
Otterford	168.39
Pitminster	459.04
Ruishton/Thornfalcon	615.34
Sampford Arundel	131.90
Staplegrove	714.77
Stawley	131.00
Stoke St Gregory	387.38
Stoke St Mary	206.72
Taunton	16,087.45
Trull	1,025.28
Wellington	4,631.59
Wellington (Without)	304.46
West Bagborough	163.62
West Buckland	446.17
West Hatch	143.28
West Monkton	1,115.05

Wiveliscombe

1,112.28

40,384.49

6. Executive Forward Plan

Submitted for information the Forward Plan of the Executive over the next few months.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

7. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

8. Potential Purchase of Capital Asset, Taunton

Reference Minute Nos. 55 and 89/2009, submitted report previously circulated, which detailed the negotiations that had been undertaken with the current leaseholder of the asset in Taunton since the meeting of the Executive in October 2009.

The report also set out the reasons why the other action considered previously would be of no advantage to the Council.

Reported that despite there being a possibility of part of the asset being sub-let, the opportunity to purchase it still remained. Members received a presentation from the Asset Holdings Manager on the likely costs involved and what income could perhaps be generated from the asset in the future.

Before any final decision was taken, Members asked for a full assessment of the asset's employment potential to be undertaken.

Resolved that subject to the provision of funding:-

(a) approval to seek to purchase the asset as an investment as outlined in the report be given; and

(b) Southwest One be authorised to proceed with negotiations accordingly.

(The meeting ended at 7.41 p.m.)