

Executive – 2 April 2008

Present: Councillor Henley (Chairman)
Councillors Brooks, Horsley, R Lees, Mullins, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Smith
and A Wedderkopp.

Officers: Penny James (Chief Executive), Shirlene Adam (Strategic Director)
Brendan Cleere (Strategic Director), Tonya Meers (Legal and
Democratic Services Manager) and Richard Bryant (Democratic
Services Manager)

Also present: Councillors Brockwell, Morrell and Williams.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

150. Tonya Meers

The Chairman (Councillor Henley) welcomed the Council's new Legal and Democratic Services Manager, Tonya Meers, to her first meeting of the Executive.

151. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2008, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

152. Declaration of Interest

The Chairman declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council.

153. Review of Earmarked Reserves

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a review that had recently been undertaken into the earmarked reserves, with a view to returning as many as possible to the General Fund Reserve.

The review had highlighted several earmarked reserves that had been set up many years ago, had remained unused, were no longer required and could therefore be taken back to the Council's General Fund Reserve. Details of these reserves and the amounts which were being returned were submitted

Reported that a total of £583,000 could be returned, bringing the General Fund Balance up to £1,277,000.

Resolved that the findings of the review of earmarked reserves be supported and that £583,000 be returned to the General Fund Reserve.

154. Exclusion of 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 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

155. Review of Highways and Horticultural Service – Deane DLO

Submitted report previously circulated, concerning a proposal to restructure the management of the Highways and Horticulture service within the Council's Direct Labour Organisation (Deane DLO).

The need to review the current structural and working arrangements for this service was driven by a number of factors including:-

- Efficiency – Although it was generally accepted that public services had to be provided to an acceptable standard at a reasonable cost, this efficiency imperative was now stronger following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and resultant squeeze on public spending;
- Collaborative Working – Following the Government's rejection of unitary local government for Somerset, the six principal local authorities had agreed to work together to improve levels of service, reduce duplication and generate greater efficiency savings; and
- Competition – Approximately half of the Deane DLO (Highways and Horticulture) workload was undertaken for external clients, which made continued success increasingly dependent on a highly efficient and effective operation.

Reported that Deane DLO had to adapt and change to the challenges it faced. Work had already started, with the following initiatives under way:-

- (1) DLO Partnership Project – A project called "Clean Surroundings" had been in operation with Sedgemoor Districts Council's DLO for several months. The aim of the project was to explore the potential for generating efficiency savings through collaborative working. This arrangement was already yielding cash savings for the Council and was making useful connections between the two organisations that would enable further shared working opportunities to be identified and taken;
- (2) Nursery relocation - The new Highfields site would enable Deane DLO to take on additional growing contracts that had, in the past, been turned away due to limited space at the current site (Mount Street). The development of the Mount Street site would also yield a significant capital receipt for the Council.
- (3) Public conveniences savings - The DLO maintained 24 public conveniences across the district. A review of these facilities had been undertaken by Deane DLO, leading to an Executive decision to close four toilets and enter into discussions with outside bodies to reduce running costs at others. This activity would generate substantial savings.

- (4) Management Capacity - Significant investment had been made in management staff at Deane DLO over the past year, with additional responsibilities given particularly to the Parks Manager and the Highways and Cleansing Manager. Also as part of “workforce planning”, a trainee manager was in place within the Highways/Cleansing group who was being trained in general management as well as specialist skills. Whilst the Parks/Grounds group did not have a specific trainee all of the supervisors were being given responsibilities and training to develop their skills and support their manager.

In addition to the above initiatives, it was felt that there were now more fundamental opportunities to restructure the management of the DLO in a way that would not only generate efficiency savings but would also position the service better to respond to the challenges of the future.

It was therefore proposed:-

- To delete the post of Highways Works Manager.
- To give day-to-day management responsibility of the Deane DLO to the Parks Manager and Highways and Cleansing Manager respectively. These post holders would continue to oversee the staff and functions they currently had responsibility for. Certain functions currently undertaken solely by the Highways Works Manager (such as operation of a Waste Transfer License) would be redistributed between the two management posts remaining.
- To undertake a further ‘wave 2’ review of the whole DLO Highways and Horticulture service during 2008/2009 – This would form part of the planned review of the entire ‘Core Council’ during 2008/2009, but would also take account of outcomes from the DLO Partnership Project, the nursery relocation and other challenges facing the service into the future.

Submitted for the information of Members the detailed financial implications of the above proposals which would require £35,079 of one off funding and would release £38,640 per annum of savings for the Council from 2012/2013 onwards. The costs of the restructure would be paid back in 1.7 years.

Resolved that:-

1. the restructure of Deane DLO Highways and Horticulture service, as set out in the report, be approved; and
2. Council be recommended to agree a Supplementary Estimate of £35,079 from reserves (being funded from the General Fund and Deane DLO reserves).

(The meeting ended at 6.40 pm.)