

Executive – 22 May 2008

Present: Councillor A Wedderkopp (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Councillors Brooks, R Lees, Mullins and Mrs Smith

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

Also present: Councillors Bishop, Edwards, Hall, Hayward, House, Meikle, Paul,
Mrs Waymouth and Williams.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm.)

156. Apologies

The Chairman (Councillor Henley) and Councillors Coles and Horsley.

157. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2008, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed, subject to Minute No 152 being amended to show that Councillor Brooks also declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council.

158. Public Question Time

Mr Paul Partington referred to a number of questions he had asked at the Council meeting in February 2008 concerning Public Rights of Way. He asked why he had still not had a reply to his questions?

The Vice-Chairman replied that he would contact Councillor Coles to ensure the promised response was sent to Mr Partington.

159. Declaration of Interests

Councillors Brooks and Paul declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Mrs Smith declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council.

160. Pioneer Somerset – Programme Initiation Document

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the progress made to date on the development of Pioneer Somerset.

The decision of the Government last year to retain the existing two-tier structure of County and District Councils in Somerset had not paved the way for the retention of the current methods of delivering services. To the contrary, the challenge had been set for the County and the five districts

(Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Taunton Deane and West Somerset) to radically change the way in which they:-

- Provided strategic leadership;
- Worked together to deliver services;
- Interacted at the local level with parish and town councils and local communities; and
- Delivered material efficiency and budget savings.

Correspondence received from the Government since July 2007 had made it very clear that there was an expectation that the Somerset Authorities would jointly deliver savings closely akin to those proposed in the Single Unitary, Two Unitary and Team Somerset submissions by 2012.

In response, the six Councils had been working together at Chief Executive and Leader level to develop a project brief that would deliver the results required. These were detailed in the Project Initiation Document (PID), a copy of which was submitted for the information of Members.

Noted that the Pioneer Somerset Programme did not make assumptions about the future and how the individual Authorities should or would work together. The Pioneer Programme was designed to establish what might be required, what the most positive options were and the means by which these could be implemented if approved.

Reported that the PID set out the vision and aspirations of Somerset's elected leaders and the outcomes they would ultimately like to see delivered through an enhanced system of two-tier Local Government.

It also concentrated on the Pioneer Somerset Programme by establishing:-

- The overall aims of the Programme;
- A high level Action Plan; and
- Programme delivery arrangements.

The vision for Pioneer Somerset was that:-

"By 2013, the County and five District Councils of Somerset would be working in a seamless and fully integrated way, delivering services of consistently high quality, generating substantial efficiency savings and making life better for our residents and diverse communities.

We would be recognised as a national leader, innovator and pioneer in enhanced multi-tier working."

It was anticipated that this vision would be delivered through the work programme to be developed through Pioneer Somerset resulting in the following three outcomes:-

Outcome 1 - Efficiency - To achieve annual revenue savings arising from enhanced two-tier working of £20m, by 2012/2013.

Outcome 2 - Customer satisfaction - For every principal local authority in Somerset to achieve levels of overall resident satisfaction in the national top quartile by 2013; and

Outcome 3 - Reputation and partnership working - To achieve a marked improvement in the perception, reputation and recognition of Somerset and each of its local authorities, including positive direction of travel and use of resources ratings in the new comprehensive area assessment of level three or above, by 2013.

Achievement of all outcomes had been timed to coincide with the end of the Pioneer Somerset Programme. The outcomes would be supported by the following underlying principles which had been agreed by the six Council Leaders:-

- (1) To work together effectively;
- (2) To reduce costs;
- (3) To increase value for money;
- (4) To establish governance arrangements when working in partnership; and
- (5) To devolve service delivery to the most appropriate level.

Interim targets for each of the above outcomes would be established early in the programme, alongside detailed and robust performance tracking and reporting procedures.

The work undertaken by the Pioneer Somerset Programme would link directly with the emerging Local Area Agreement and support the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Reported that there were significant financial implications in relation to the Pioneer Programme. A bid to LIFT South West (the Regional Improvement and Development Agency) had secured £311,000 in support of the first phase of work which had been allocated across the programme within the PID.

In addition, each authority would be required to make staff resources available to support the various work streams. Details of estimated partner support in kind had been provided within the PID, but would require refinement when the programme team had been established.

Submitted an assessment of the likely legal implications which could arise as the work programme developed and noted that a full equalities impact assessment would have to be undertaken if significant changes to the way services were delivered were proposed.

Asset management implications were also highlighted as were the risks associated with adopting the Pioneer approach or not. With regard to this latter issue, a high level risk log was appended to the PID.

The Pioneer Somerset Programme as outlined in the PID provided an opportunity to address the challenges faced by the County and District Councils across Somerset. The funding available from LIFT South West would support this programme of work and provided for the procurement of support in the achievement of the outcomes identified.

This was an exciting and challenging time for the region which provided an opportunity to develop a way of working that could demonstrate best practice in strategic political governance, local engagement and public service delivery.

In response to a number of questions relating to how savings of £20m were going to be achieved, the Chief Executive confirmed that at this stage the level of detail Members were demanding was simply not available. The figure quoted in the report was a notional target.

The purpose of the report was to approve the PID with the next step being the development of the programme in Year 1 of this five year process. This would detail precisely how the required savings would be made between 2009 and 2013.

Resolved that the Programme Initiation Document be approved.

(The meeting ended at 5.57 pm.)