

## **Executive – 13 November 2006**

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)  
Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Cavill, Clark, Garner, Hall, Leighton  
and Mrs Lewin-Harris

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Mr J J Thornberry (Strategic Director),  
Mr M Western (Head of Housing (Housing Transfer Consultation  
Coordinator)) and Mr G P Dyke (Democratic Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Beaven, Croad, Edwards, Hayward, Henley, The Mayor  
(Councillor Hindley), Lees, Lisgo, Meikle, Morrell, Paul, Stone, Stuart-  
Thorn, Watson, Wedderkopp and Wilson

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm.)

### **86. Public Question Time**

- (i) Nigel Behan, Branch Secretary, Somerset Branch, UNISON, asked what measures the Council would take to secure Council housing being maintained if it was decided not to proceed with the tenant's ballot.
- (ii) Patricia Rowe, representing Taunton Deane's Tenant's Against Transfer, made a statement regarding information that had been published by the Council in support of a Stock Transfer. She also submitted a petition signed by persons who were opposed to the transfer of Council housing.

### **87. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2006 were taken as read and were signed.

### **88. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor N Cavill declared a personal but not prejudicial interest as a member of the Shadow Housing Board.

### **89. Proceeding to Housing Transfer Ballot**

Submitted report which drew attention to the present position now that the end of the formal consultation period with the Council's tenants regarding Stock Transfer had been reached. Now that this consultation period had ended it was for the Council to decide as to whether or not to proceed to Stage Two, the ballot of tenants as to the transfer of housing to Deane Housing Limited.

A subsequent addendum report was also submitted which was read alongside the main report to the Executive. The report contained a further update as to the results of the telephone survey carried out on behalf of the Council. Details were submitted of the results of that survey together with an assessment of what its implications were for the Council.

The telephone survey had been carried out on behalf of the Council by SMSR, an independent market research organisation, so that these results could be taken in to account when deciding whether the Council should proceed to Stage Two (ballot of all tenants).

One of the major objectives of the Stock Transfer project had been to raise awareness of what Stock Transfer was and what it would mean to tenants. A survey had indicated that the aim of ensuring that sufficient tenants were fully aware of the issue before them had been properly met.

Until this point, voting intentions had also shown a steady trend with a reducing level of “don't knows/won't reveals” and consistent majority of those who were in favour of transfer over those who were not. However, that trend had now sharply reversed with the recent SMSR opinion testing. The telephone sample had shown a sizable majority opposed to the transfer and with an increased number of respondents unprepared to give their voting intentions. This unexpected reversal in a firm trend presented the Council with a real dilemma as to whether it should now proceed to the formal tenant ballot under Stage Two.

The unanimous view of the Councils' advisors and the Government Office of the South West was that:

- The survey results pointed to the near certainty that the tenant body would reject the Stock Transfer.
- The work done in raising the level of awareness amongst tenants as to the process and its implications for tenants had been successful and had reached an acceptable level.
- Their advice consequently was that the Council did not proceed to Stage Two ballot.

The cost of employing the Electoral Reform Society to carry out a ballot on the Council's behalf was £14,000. If the Council did not proceed to Stage Two then that £14,000 would be saved. However, the tenants had always been told that it would be they who would make the final decision as to the future management of their homes. This had been emphasised by the use of the “You Decide” logo and by the commitments made by the Council throughout this project. In view of the promise that had been consistently made to tenants that it would be them that would decide the future of Council housing stock it was;

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to proceed to Stage Two of the formal Housing Stock Transfer by carrying out a ballot of its tenants on

whether Taunton Deane Borough Council transfer its homes to Deane Housing Ltd.

(The meeting ended at 6.55 pm.)

## **Executive – 15 November 2006**

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

Officers: Ms J Wishlade (Strategic Director), Mr S Hughes (Sports Services Manager), Mr G P Dyke (Democratic Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Henley, Phillips and Mrs Wilson

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

### **90. Apologies**

Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris.

### **91 Public Question Time**

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

- (i) Following the Council meeting held on 13 November 2006 regarding the Housing Stock Transfer ballot, no mention had been made in the subsequent press release of the opportunity to vote by telephone. Had this proposal now been dropped?

Councillor Garner confirmed that it had not.

- (ii) Councillor Henley referred to the possibility of VAT on Council house service charges and said that, despite raising this matter previously, he had not yet received a reply.

Councillor Garner confirmed that there were no VAT implications on service charges.

- (iii) It had been reported that Mid Devon District Council had agreed to withdraw from its countywide concessionary travel scheme. Were there any proposals by this Council to consider withdrawing from this scheme also?

Councillor Bishop confirmed that the Council had no such proposal.

- (iv) As the Halcon Ward Councillors had heard nothing recently, regarding the future of the former South West Eggs site, Councillor Henley asked for the present position.

Councillor Williams replied that this particular situation was difficult to resolve. Negotiations were currently taking place regarding the future of the land and as soon as there was something to report the Ward Members would be notified.

- (v) Councillor Henley referred to the non-attendance at the Review Board of Councillor Cavill when the decision regarding Highfields, Stoke St Mary had been called in and was discussed. He asked why Councillor Cavill, as the appropriate Executive Councillor, had not been able to attend.

Councillor Williams confirmed that Councillor Cavill had submitted his apologies but he had failed to pass them on. Councillor Cavill replied that he took this issue particularly seriously and unfortunately he had an unavoidable prior commitment.

## 92. **French Weir Park Match Funding for Lottery Bid**

Reported that it might be possible to secure a Lottery grant to add to Section 106 funds for improving French Weir Park. A development project with the community over the last year had resulted in an active Friends Group being established and a preliminary development plan being prepared. This work might be funded by the Lottery and an application for such a Project Planning Grant was to be made in November subject to Council approval.

French Weir Park was in need of updating to meet the needs of its community and to play its part in aspirations to develop the river frontage for public use throughout the town. The development plan had been considered by the Health and Leisure Panel at its meeting in February 2006.

The Lottery bid would be for funds to improve and update the park's infrastructure, extend the range of facilities provided, increase the number and types of park users and increase the involvement of the community in its management.

Details were submitted of the main elements of the project.

In order to make this initial application, the Lottery required assurance that the Council would be able to fund its share of the costs of both the project planning costs and final project costs. The total cost of the scheme (project planning plus capital works) was estimated at £900,000. The total share for the Council was estimated to be £225,000 (25%). The implementation project would probably start in 2009 so not all of the funding would need to be made available at the outset.

Full details of the Revenue and Capital implications to the Council were submitted. At present the Council did not have sufficient capital resources of its own to proceed with this scheme independently. It was therefore entirely reliant upon Section 106 monies and an application to the Lottery for funding.

Should the Lottery application be unsuccessful then the works would only be carried out to the value of the available secured Section 106 monies.

The inclusion of a new scheme, within the capital programme, was a Supplementary Estimate and as such required approval from the Council.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the submission of an application for a Project Planning Grant for French Weir Park, followed by Stage One and Stage Two applications for full project funding be agreed;
- (2) the allocation of the Section 106 sums arising in the vicinity of the park for its development and improvement be agreed; and
- (3) Council be recommended that, subject to a successful bid to the Lottery, this project be added to the approved capital programme (project costs of £900,000) it being noted that this was funded entirely from external sources, including Section 106 monies already held.

**93. Providing Sports Pavilions in Taunton**

Reported that the Council needed to replace the wooden sports pavilions on Hamilton Gault and Galmington Playing Fields. They were in poor condition and no longer provided fitting facilities for sport in the 21st Century.

There was a possibility of securing significant funds from the Football Foundation to replace these facilities with the balance being found from Section 106 agreements for sport.

The Football Association supported replacing these pavilions particularly when aligned to the Clubs that used them adopting the FA Charter Standard Award.

Details were submitted of the Council's existing football pitch pricing policy and its link with the FA Charter Standard Award.

The Football Foundation managed substantial funds in partnership with the FA. It had historically been difficult for a Council to access these funds, as the user of the facilities in question were required to prepare football development plans and to date clubs had had no incentive to do so.

The Sports Services Manager together with the Somerset Football Development Manager had met with Clubs that used the sites and had outlined the benefit of the Charter Standard. Clubs were eager to improve and to develop and would receive support to apply for Charter Standard. Because of this the Football Foundation had suggested that they would consider an application for up to 75% of the cost of providing new pavilions at Hamilton Gault and Galmington Playing Fields.

The English Football Association viewed this initiative with much interest and saw it as a model of good practice. The link between pricing, Charter Standard and improved facilities was clear. The FA were encouraged that those Clubs who would be willing to commit to developing for the benefit of the game stood to be rewarded through improved facilities and reduced prices.

The estimated cost of providing each of the two pavilions would be approximately £400,000. It was hoped and expected to secure up to £300,000 through the Football Foundation for each facility.

The Council did not have enough capital resources to continue with these schemes without external help. It was reliant on funding from the Football Foundation.

The balance needed would be taken from Section 106 agreements relating to sport in the Taunton area.

The inclusion of a new scheme within the capital programme was a Supplementary Estimate and as such required Council approval. This would be the case even though the project would be entirely funded through external sources.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the work undertaken to date and the future proposals to progress this project be noted;
- (2) the use of Section 106 sums for playing fields and sport to match fund the applications be agreed; and
- (3) Council be recommended that, subject to a successful bid to the Football Foundation, this project be added to the approved capital programme (project costs of £800,000) and note that this was funded entirely from external sources, including Section 106 monies already held.

**94. Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item numbered 6 on the Agenda as it contained exempt information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A 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.

**95. RDA Funding for Project Taunton**

Reported that the South West Regional Development Agency had offered financial support for Project Taunton in the following areas:

- Purchase of land for flood alleviation purposes to enable the development of Firepool;
- Purchase of properties to enable the development of Somerset County Cricket Club;
- Purchase of land to enable the Northern Inner Distributor Road to be built and thus enable the full development of the Firepool site;
- Purchase of properties in third party ownership to enable the development of the Firepool site.

Details were submitted of the heads of terms for each of these proposals. Consideration was given to the various terms before granting authority to Officers to finalise the legal agreements.

RESOLVED that the recommendations contained in the report be agreed, the offers of funding from South West Regional Development Agency be accepted and Officers be authorised to complete the required legal agreements based on the terms contained in the report.

(Councillor Hall left the meeting at 7.15 pm and Councillor Mrs Bradley at 7.30 pm.)

(The meeting ended at 7.35 pm.)