

Executive – 5 April 2006

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

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Ms S Adam (Strategic Director), Ms J Sillifant (ISIS Project Manager), Mr J Lewis (Parking and Civil Contingencies Manager), Mr S Rutledge (Corporate Property Manager), Mr A Priest (Asset Holdings Manager), Mr S Kirkham (IS Manager), Mrs C Bramley (Corporate Support Services Manager) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Mr C Bilisland (Somerset County Council) and Mrs S Barnes (ISIS Programme Director).

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

28. Apologies

Councillors Cavill, Garner and Edwards.

29. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2006 were taken as read and were signed.

30. Public Question Time

- (i) Nigel Behan, Somerset County Council Unison, referred to the ISIS Project. Bearing in mind the forthcoming Local Government Review and the Lyons Inquiry he asked if the Council would guarantee that staff would be seconded. He also asked what exit strategy was in place should there be any problems with the contractor.

Councillor Williams replied that secondment was the preferred option. He was conscious of the need for an exit strategy but the detail of such a strategy would need to be negotiated with any supplier.

- (ii) Mr P Harris referred to the ongoing disputes between the Council and Mr S Robins. He asked if the Council agreed that progress had not been made because it was not taking the issues seriously.

Councillor Williams replied that all issues were being taken very seriously whether it be HIMOs, Council Tax or NNDR. If Mr Harris was alluding to an outstanding payment to Mr Robins he reaffirmed that the Council were still awaiting a detailed breakdown of the amount claimed. Once this was received the matter would be progressed.

31. Improving Services in Somerset (ISIS) Business Case Update

Further to Minute 88/2005 a report was submitted which updated the outline business case for this project and requested approval to proceed to the next stage of the procurement process.

Since September work had progressed on a number of areas details of which were submitted. A presentation was made which covered

- Overall progress to date
- An outline of the business case and its affordability
- Options Appraisal
- Financial Implications
- Next Steps

The presentation covered movements and developments in the outline business case and provided assurances that it was robust. In addition the Council's Financial Advisers KPMG were satisfied that the outline business case supported proceeding to the next step of the procurement process. A full copy of the latest outline business case which also contained the financial summary was submitted.

RESOLVED that the most recent outline business case be noted and the Council proceed with the procurement process to secure a private sector partner for a strategic service partnership.

32. Future of CCTV Monitoring

Submitted report which considered the medium term future of monitoring the Taunton and Wellington Town Centre CCTV systems.

The present monitoring was undertaken by Parking Services using Parking Attendants by day and other staff during late evening. Active monitoring took place during limited hours with recording from all cameras on a continuous basis. There were now a number of drivers to increase the active monitoring hours to 24 hours 7 days a week and to move to fully dedicated specialist operators. Two options existed to achieve this, one by employing specialist staff directly and one by entering into a partnership with Sedgemoor District Council. This matter had been considered in detail by the Community Leadership Review Panel and consultations had been carried out with stakeholders within the Crime and Disorder arena.

Details of the drivers for change were submitted which included an increased perception of crime, the requirement to comply with legislation and the need to provide an improved service to the Police.

Details of the options for the monitoring service which included leaving the service unchanged, employing dedicated CCTV operators within the existing level of service, employing dedicated CCTV operators to deliver an enhanced

level of service providing a 24 hour 7 day active coverage or entering into a partnership with another organisation to deliver a 24 hour 7 day service.

Consultation had taken place with the Police, Somerset County Council, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Taunton Town Centre Company, Taunton Retailers Against Crime, Pubwatch, Wellington Town Council, Parking Services Staff, Unison and the Staff Side. Details of the responses received were reported and it was noted that no formal response had been received from Somerset County Council, Wellington Town Council or the Staff Side.

The financial considerations in respect of each of the options were explained. If the option to enter into a partnership with Sedgemoor were to proceed it would be necessary to transmit the CCTV pictures from Taunton to Bridgwater. This would entail a one-off capital cost of £95 to £100,000 in addition to the overall cost of the scheme. Sedgemoor District Council had offered to meet up to 40% of this one-off capital cost of say 40K in return for a five year commitment from this Council. The Police had set aside a further 10K and the Crime and Disorder Partnership had already earmarked 20K of its Home Office grant money towards CCTV enhancements. The remaining 30K of this one-off capital cost would come from the Council's existing CCTV capital budget.

The need for moving to active 24/7 monitoring of the CCTV system by dedicated operators was clear to all the major partners and stakeholders. The question was how that was best achieved - by direct employment or by entering into a partnership with another organisation. It was emphasised that the proposal involving Sedgemoor was for a five year term and that there was no question of permanent transfer of this function.

The case for moving to a 24 7 day active monitoring service was well established. The operational issues arising from a transfer of the monitoring service to Sedgemoor were dealt with in a satisfactory manner. In revenue expenditure terms the figures clearly showed the Sedgemoor proposal delivered a better financial option.

RESOLVED that an agreement be entered into with Sedgemoor District Council for a period of five years for provision of CCTV monitoring on terms to be agreed by the Strategic Director in conjunction with the responsible Executive Members.

33. Information Management

Submitted report which gave an outline of the Council's Resourcing requirements to effectively manage and maintain information. The report suggested three new roles within the organisation.

Corporate Management Team had recently discussed "Information Management" and now had an agreed strategy on how this would progress within the Council. This strategy outlined the principles of managing records,

the Council's statutory obligations and improvements to the existing position. Information was the Council's corporate memory and effective management of that information was critical to the operation of a diverse organisation such as a Local Authority. Good information management practices would bring many benefits to the organisation.

One of the key areas of concern was the current organisational arrangements which did not support good records and information management practices. Currently there were a number of posts which could claim to have some responsibility in this area but there was no clearly established information manager at a corporate level. Discussions had identified three separate roles around management information.

- Information Management
- Information Support
- Marketing

These roles were quite distinct and the report set out details of the key functions and responsibilities of each position.

Information Management was intended to be a Strategic Management role whilst Information Support was a more operational level post. Marketing would develop and promote the use of the Council's website.

None of these posts were included in the Council's budget and extra funding would be required if they were to be progressed.

An opportunity had arisen to fill the information support role from within existing resources. The other two posts would require a bit more work prior to recruitment. The strategic role would be closely linked to the ISIS Project and work that the County Council were also doing in this area. It was suggested therefore that further work was done in this area jointly with the County Council before firm proposals were made. It was envisaged that the Marketing role would require new funding of approximately £30,000 per annum although it was hoped that over time it would secure sufficient efficiencies to make it self funding.

RESOLVED that

- (i) A Supervisor Role within Customer Services be developed to established the Information Support role (and the movement of existing budget to facilitate this) and
- (ii) The Council be recommended that a Supplementary Estimate be made of £30,000 ongoing revenue funding to fund the new role of Web Marketing Officer.
- (iii) The position be noted regarding the role of Information Manager and Officers progress this further with colleagues through the ISIS Project.

34. 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 9 of Schedule 12(a) of the Local Government Act 1972.

35. Proposed Industrial Development Scheme at Frobisher Way, Taunton

Reported that the Council owned land at Frobisher Way, Taunton which it intended to develop with light industrial units. Difficulties were being experienced in obtaining vacant possession of the site from the current tenant to enable the scheme to progress. Consideration was therefore given to exploring alternative courses of action from that already approved for the development of the site.

RESOLVED that the other options outlined in the report for the provision of this development be explored further.

(The meeting ended at 8.05 pm)

Executive – 11 April 2006

Present:- Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Bradley, Cavill and Garner

Officers:- Mrs P James (Chief Executive)
Mr M Western (Head of Housing)

Also Present:- Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Biscoe, Bowrah, Coles, Croad, Guerrier, Hayward, Henley, Lees, Lisgo, Murphy, Phillips, Stone, Stuart-Thorn, Wedderkopp and Mrs Whitmarsh.

(The meeting commenced at 7.46pm)

36. Apologies

Councillors Bishop, Edwards, Hall and Leighton.

37. Public Question Time

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

- (i) If a Conservative candidate for Blackbrook and Holway was elected, would his policies be respected?

Councillor Williams replied that anyone in the Conservative Group was able to take any issue forward.

- (ii) Would Councillor Williams rule out building houses on Holway Green? Could he give a yes or no answer?

Councillor Williams replied that no decision had yet been made, but that he would consider and properly examine any proposals.

Patricia Rowe, a Council tenant stated that in a survey carried out by Aldbourne Associates, only 6% of tenants said that they knew nothing about the transfer, but the report appeared to have spun the results.

Mrs James replied that the facts had been given and the report was available to everyone.

38. Review of Housing Transfer Project

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the recent review of the Housing Transfer Project by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC). This matter had been considered by the Housing Review Panel at an earlier meeting at which members of the Executive had been present.

The Council had previously made a decision to explore a new stand-alone Registered Social Landlord (RSL), as a result of stock option appraisal work that was commenced in 2002.

The Government had directed all Councils to carry out options appraisals of its stock by July 2005. This Council had been accepted on the stock transfer programme in May 2005 and had two years from that date to complete a transfer.

The Council was clear that stock transfer was the only option that would secure its housing priorities including Decent Homes and established the Housing Transfer Project to carry out work. Officers and external advisors supported the project and a Shadow Board for the potential new RSL had been set up.

The intention had been to ballot tenants in the Spring/Summer 2006, but a review of the project had suggested that the timetable should be increased and project management and governance arrangements refreshed.

Aldbourne Associates had undertaken some market testing of tenants which indicated that almost half of the tenants were undecided as to how to vote. However, tenants had not been through the consultation process and therefore, their choices were based on a lack of understanding.

The Government of the South West (GOSW) had made it clear that it was the Council's duty to ensure that all tenants were adequately informed and it would not be in everyone's interest to progress to a Spring/Summer ballot.

The Project Manager had recently left the Council and this had impacted on the project. A 'stock take' was commissioned by PWC and their findings were:-

- The timetable needed to be adjusted to devote more time to the informal consultation process with tenants and staff;
- The offer document required development ahead of further detailed consultation with tenants;
- Given the current resourcing difficulties, the project team needed to be restructured to include staff from the Housing Service;
- The Shadow Board development needed to continue and the relationship between the Board and the Council needed to be strengthened; and
- A revised ballot timetable would add costs to the process.

Extensive consultation had taken place over a short time frame and a common objective of all stakeholders was to enable an informed decision to be made by tenants and to ensure the process that the

Council undertook was sound and met criteria clearly set down by GOSW.

An increase in the level of face-to-face meetings with tenants was required, with clear, relevant and targeting consultation. The proposal was to extend the consultation period to at least over the summer period.

Detailed work programmes had to be developed to enable everyone involved to be clear on the implication of a Yes or No vote. The work programme would have four streams:-

- Programmed maintenance and improvement;
- Services;
- Elderly Services; and
- Anti-Social Behaviour/estates improvements.

The work would be lead by an existing Housing Manager, but needed to be prioritised. It would integrate the Savills work on stock condition and the work on tenants' priorities and would be completed before the intensive consultation in the summer.

It was felt that the project team needed to be integrated into mainstream business and the suggestions were:-

- The Project Director and Officer champion would be Shirlene Adam and the Member champion would be Councillor Garner;
- A Project Co-ordinator role would be integrated with the Head of Housing role and would be responsible for Project Co-ordination and delivery;
- A full-time Project Officer would support the Co-ordinator, the Housing Managers and the lead advisor on consultation;
- A full-time Project Administrator would support the Council and Shadow Board structure; and
- PWC would provide support to the Shadow Board for 2.5 days per month.

It was felt that Governance needed to be strengthened and a Project Board, consisting of Council, Shadow Board and Tenant representatives would be formed to steer the Project.

Also, an Elected Member Advisory Panel, consisting of cross-party Members would be formed. The Panel would:-

- Provide political direction to the project;
- Review project progress; and
- Ensure that the process was properly aligned at all stages to the corporate strategic outcomes required.

The Officer Steering Group would be supplemented with an Officer Working Group to complete the majority of the work.

It was suggested that the timetable be extended to allow for the Project management difficulties, the Offer Document work and the additional consultation required and it was anticipated that a ballot would take place at the end of the year, subject to soundings being taken in the Autumn.

The timetable had cost implications which reflected the additional work of officers and lead advisors.

Details of the costs for the Project Team, Advisors and Consultation were given.

The PWC report encouraged early debate by Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Members on:-

- The level of minimum capital receipt required;
- The use of that receipt;
- The corporate impact of transfer; and
- Outline decisions about the retention or transfer of Housing Revenue Account non-dwelling assets and other services, for example the DLO, Deane Helpline and Strategic Housing Services.

The residual capital receipt would be reinvested in furthering the Council's housing objectives which was in line with current guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

The Housing Transfer Project was a key priority for the Council and without transfer the Council believed that it could not deliver the standard and quality of service that tenants had previously enjoyed.

Savills stock condition survey showed a shortfall of £2 million per year until 2010, in order to meet the Decent Homes standard.

Affordable Housing was also a key corporate priority and the potential Capital receipt would enable the Council to continue to support this priority. The recent Ark survey had increased the number of Affordable Social Houses in the Deane from 131 to 256 and developers were required to provide 290 affordable homes per annum.

More work was required to enable tenants to make an informed choice. The timetable needed to be extended although this would mitigate additional costs of £180,000. Whilst the costs were significant the project had to go ahead in order that the Decent Homes standard could be achieved and a quality housing service and more affordable homes could be provided.

RESOLVED that the recommendations of the Housing Review Panel be agreed and :-

- The timetable for the project be extended to 31 December 2006;
- A transfer to the Stock Option Reserve of £180,000 be made from the Housing Revenue Account working balance;
- The revised project management arrangements be noted; and
- The revised governance arrangements be noted.

(The meeting ended at 8.15pm)