

Executive - 10 December 2003

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

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Mr P Weaver (Director of Community Services - Acting), Ms S Adam (Head of Finance), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mr R Sealy (Revenues Manager), Mr C Brazier (Head of Housing) Mrs N Heal (Public Relations Officer), Miss L Wyatt (Employee Relations Manager) and Mr G P Dyke (Members Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Bowrah, Gill, Henley, Hindley, Mrs Smith, Stuart-Thorn, Trollope and Wedderkopp

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm).

59. Apologies

Councillor Edwards

60. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 19 November 2003 were taken as read and were signed.

61. Public Question Time

Mr Bob Cudlipp asked if the Council had received a letter from Sedgemoor District Council inviting the Council to join a scheme to provide an Agricultural Business Centre on land adjacent to Junction 24. He also asked how much funding Taunton Deane were likely to contribute to any new Centre at Junction 26.

Councillor Williams replied that as far as he was aware, no such invitation had yet been received from Sedgemoor. He explained that this Council were committed to working with its partners to provide an Agricultural Business Centre at Junction 26. No detailed scheme had yet been finalised and therefore it was not possible, at this stage, to give any indication regarding funding. Although the Council felt that a facility at Junction 26 would best serve the Region, any letter or invitation received from Sedgemoor would be given careful consideration.

(Councillor Mrs Bryant declared an interest in this matter and left the meeting during its consideration)

62. The Prudential Code - An Introduction

Submitted report previously circulated which set out the main changes to the capital finance regime that was contained within the new Prudential Code.

The Code had been developed by CIPFA following a lengthy consultation process and had been established to ensure that all local authority capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable. All decisions on capital spending had to be linked to option appraisal, asset management planning, strategic planning and the achievability of any forward plan.

The Code would become effective on 1 April 2004 and included indicators which would need to be considered as part of the 2004/05 budget setting process. Whilst the Code gave greater freedom for borrowing, it required the following matters to be taken into account when making capital investment decisions:-

- (a) value for money - option - appraisal for all projects;
- (b) stewardship of assets - asset management planning;
- (c) service objectives - strategic planning for the Authority;
- (d) practicality - achievability of the Forward Plan;
- (e) prudence - implications for external borrowing;
- (f) affordability - implications for council tax.

The indicators would help the Council to ensure that these principles were complied with.

It was noted that in order to provide further information to members, the Council's Treasury Management Advisors, Sector, would attend the next meeting of the Executive to give their view on what the Code meant for this council.

RESOLVED that the introduction of the Prudential Code, together with the work being carried out on the Prudential indicators, be noted.

63. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the items numbered 5 and 6 on the agenda because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to clauses 1 and 7 of Schedule 12(a) of the Local Government Act 1972.

64. Cashiering Options for the Deane House and Wellington Community Office

Submitted report previously circulated which reviewed the provision of the cashiering service at both the Deane House and Wellington Community Office, and examined options for change.

A detailed study had been undertaken which analysed the functions currently undertaken by the cashiering staff at the Taunton and Wellington offices. Details were submitted of the current position, the effects of ceasing to provide the service and the options that there were available to the Council. It was concluded that it

would be feasible to discontinue face-to-face cashiering services at both offices but only as part of a policy to actively discourage direct payments. If it was decided to implement this option then a phased reduction of the counter service and the introduction of cash deposit machines would be required.

RESOLVED that

- i) the existing face to face cashiering facilities at The Deane House and Wellington Community Office be discontinued;
- ii) payment deposit machines be provided at both offices;
- iii) the possibility of leasing any cash deposit machines be fully investigated;
- iv) the introduction of payment deposit machines be fully publicised and phased in over a six month transitional period.

65. Council Housing Stock Options Appraisal

Submitted report which updated members on the work being undertaken on the Stock Options Appraisal.

A further report on this matter had been presented to both the Tenants Forum and the Housing Review Panel on 9 December and an executive summary to the Stock Options Steering Group on 26 November 2003.

Since the beginning of October a great deal of work on this matter had been undertaken by staff, the Tenants Forum, Councillors, DOME (who were the tenants' independent advisors) and Pricewaterhouse Cooper who were the Council's specialist help.

Pricewaterhouse Cooper had completed a report on the options available to the Council. Details of the reports were submitted. There was an executive summary and a main report. The main report provided a detailed analysis of the first phase of the Stock Options Appraisal, that of providing a new financial base position and assessing the Council's ability to deliver on all of its housing priorities through four main options. These options were:-

1. continued ownership and management of the housing stock;
2. arms length management;
3. private finance initiative; and
4. stock transfer.

The reports produced by Pricewaterhouse Cooper and the work to date had completed Phase A of the Stock Options Appraisal. The next phase was to inform tenants, key stakeholders and partners and obtain their views. It would also be important to implement the recommendations made by Pricewaterhouse Cooper to move towards a more sound and firm understanding of what was the most viable option for the future

management of the Housing Service. It was felt to be prudent to move the completion of Phase B of the Stock Options Appraisal from April to July's Council meeting. This would enable a fuller assessment to be undertaken of the findings of the Housing Best Value in April and the comprehensive performance assessment in May.

RESOLVED that:-

- i). the report be noted.
- ii). the report by Pricewaterhouse Cooper be noted and their recommendations for Taunton Deane to undertake a stock condition validation survey be implemented.
- iii). the completion of the Stock Options Appraisal be extended until the meeting of Council on 20 July 2004.

(The meeting ended at 7.36pm).