

Executive - 10 March 2004

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

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Mr J J Thornberry (Director of Corporate Resources), Mr P Weaver (Director of Community Services - Acting), Ms S Adam (Head of Finance), Mr J Seabrook (Housing Manager - Property Services) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Henley, Mullins, Prior-Sankey, Stuart-Thorn, Wedderkopp and Mrs Wilson.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 February 2004 were taken as read and were signed.

2. Public Question Time

- (a) Councillor Mrs Wilson, as a member of the public, expressed concern about incidents of vandalism and litter at Rockwell Green Pavilion and asked what steps were being taken to resolve the problem.

In the absence of Councillor Edwards, the appropriate portfolio holder, Councillor Williams replied that Council Mrs Wilson would receive a written answer.

- (b) Councillor Henley, as a member of the public, referred to the Wellington Skateboard Park. It had been his, and others, understanding that new equipment should have been provided at the site adjoining Wellington Sports Centre as soon as the old equipment had been moved to Wiveliscombe. He was concerned that this had not happened and asked why the equipment had not been replaced.

Councillor Williams replied that the current administration were committed to replacing the equipment and that alternative equipment would be provided in the future.

Councillor Mrs Bradley confirmed that Council were committed to skateboarding in Wellington. She explained the reasons why the equipment could not be replaced until after the landscaping of the ski slope had been completed and why the opportunity to move the equipment to Wiveliscombe, free of charge, had had to be taken quickly.

- (c) Councillor Henley also expressed concern regarding the future of Vivary Park Golf Course. He drew attention to recent unconfirmed press reports which indicated that the future of the Golf Course looked bleak. He also drew attention to the fact that the Golf Pavilion, destroyed by fire, had not yet been replaced. The appropriate portfolio holder had been quoted in the press as saying that it was not yet known if the Pavilion would be replaced or if its replacement was justified. User had also expressed concern and he asked if the position could be clarified. Councillor Henley also stated that he would consider having this issue looked at formally through the Review process.

Councillor Williams replied that the Council were committed to Vivary Park Golf Course. It was a valuable leisure facility. Insufficient funds had been received from the insurance on the Pavilion to enable it to be rebuilt. Negotiations were continuing regarding a replacement facility for the Pavilion.

3. Communications Strategy

Submitted report previously circulated regarding the Communications Strategy 2004-2007. This Strategy which had been developed with staff and Members, and in particular the Review Board, had been developed over the past few months. The Strategy now had five key areas:

- The management of communications
- Marketing
- Public relations
- E-communications
- Internal communications.

The action plans associated with each key area listed new areas of work which were not currently resourced. Some of the staffing issues would be dealt with in the Corporate Restructuring report but it was recognised that there were new resources required to deliver some of the actions. The finance for these actions would have to be found from within existing budgets or as a development bid.

The Strategy was an opportunity to improve how the Council worked and delivered its services. The aim was to enable the delivery of excellent customer focused services which met the corporate priorities and the needs of the local community.

RESOLVED that the Communications Strategy 2004-2007 be adopted and that the delivery of the Strategy be supported.

4. Corporate Debt Management Policy

Submitted report which introduced the draft Corporate Debt Management Policy.

The Policy originated from recommendations contained within the Revenues Best Value Review and the Audit Commission's Local Collection of Taxes and other Revenue report. It set out the Council's general principles for managing debts and incorporated the nationally agreed standards relating to debt collection.

The Policy stressed the need to approach debt management in a corporate way in order to maximise collection rates whilst ensuring that debt collection was carried out in a consistent, fair and transparent manner. It had previously been considered by both the Resources Review Panel and the Housing Review Panel and had been endorsed by both.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Debt Management Policy be agreed.

5. Treasury Management Strategy 2004/2005

Reported that the Council were required to consider an annual Treasury Management Strategy. The key points of the 2004/2005 Strategy were as follows:

- Current portfolio (30/1/04) consists of £20m debt (6.18% average) and £16.5m investments (3.85% average).
- Short term interest rates were forecast to reach 4.5% by March 2005. Long term rates were forecast to peak at 5%.
- Debt redemption was highly unlikely in the short term but rescheduling opportunities would be continually sought.
- Where short term cash flows permitted, advantage would be taken at the higher rates currently available from the market for longer term investments. The Treasury Management Team would constantly revise this Strategy as conditions in the money markets changed.

In the past the Council had considered an annual Treasury Strategy statement under the requirement of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management. The 2003 Prudential Code for Capital Finance in local authorities had introduced new requirements for the manner in which capital spending plans were to be considered and approved and in conjunction with this, the development of an integrated Treasury Management Strategy.

The Prudential Code required the Council to set a number of Prudential Indicators over the forthcoming three year period. These were considered and approved by Council on 24 February 2004 as part of the budget setting process. In future years a combined strategy encompassing treasury management, investments, borrowing and the prudential indicators would be submitted as part of the annual budget approval process.

RESOLVED that the Treasury Management Strategy, as submitted, be agreed.

6. Introduction of Partnering Arrangements with DLO

Reported that the compulsory competitive tendering legislation which required a local authority to expose its contracts to open competition had now been superseded by the Best Value/Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime. This gave local authorities the opportunity to explore more flexible and effective means of service delivery.

Partnering was a method of working which had recently become popular in both the public and private sectors. Instead of signing up to a rigid contract both parties agreed broad objectives and worked together to achieve them whilst sharing risks and benefits. In this way, a more integrated and flexible approach was taken based on what needed to be done rather than just doing what the contract stipulated. Partnering was based on the four principles of mutuality, commitment, clarity and openness.

There were three areas where increased efficiency and effectiveness could be achieved by entering into a partnering arrangement with the DLO. These were grounds maintenance (including parks and open spaces and housing land), street cleaning and housing responsive repairs. Submitted report which dealt in detail with grounds maintenance and street cleaning and explained the measures which would be put in place to ensure that the Council continued to be reassured over both cost and quality. The report also provided similar information in regard to housing responsive repairs and also made proposals regarding the gas servicing and repair contract which was currently held by a private contractor.

If this proposed partnering option were agreed the financial implications would be as follows:

- A saving of approximately £60k through the dismantling of the client side.
- A reduction in the service budget 2003/04 of £63k was achieved with no loss of quality by rationalising the annual bedding strategy.
- A further reduction in the service budget 2004/05 of £23k.
- Increase in DLO profits.

There would be financial implications to the re-tendering option that would include the cost of contract production and letting and possible reformation of the client side.

The Council's Standing Orders allowed this more modern way of working and the Audit Commission had raised no objection to this course of action provided that the Council continued to monitor quality and cost.

RESOLVED that:

1. the move towards a partnering agreement with the DLO for the provision of the grounds maintenance service and the street cleaning service be agreed;
2. a partnering responsive repair contract with Deane DLO be agreed from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2008. Such contract to incorporate an annual uplift based on the building cost indices as published by the Building Cost Information Services. The contract to have break clauses built into it in order to address poor performance, the eventual outcome of the Best Value Review and outcomes relating to the Housing Stock Options;
3. the extension of the existing gas servicing and repairs contract with MJT to the 31 March 2005 be agreed. Such contract to incorporate an annual uplift based on the building cost indices as published by the Building Cost Information Services. From 1 April 2005 a new contract would be granted to

a contractor after the completion of a tender exercise adopting a Best Value approach and including the option to adopt a partnering arrangement.

7. Proposed reduction in play area grants awarded to Parish Councils

Submitted report on the outcome of the call-in concerning the proposed alteration to the level of play area grants awarded to Parish Councils which had been considered at a recent meeting of the Review Board.

At a meeting of the Health and Leisure Review Panel in November 2003 a review of various grant schemes administered by the Leisure Development Team had taken place. Two of the recommended changes, namely the priority to be given to funding young people's facilities ahead of children's play equipment and the level of future play area grants awards had not been supported by the Review Panel.

As a result, these matters were referred to the last meeting of the Executive where it was agreed that the proposed changes should be implemented. This would mean that from April 2005 the capital grant for play equipment would be reduced from 85% of the project cost to 33%.

This decision was called-in on the basis that the cut in the level of grants proposed would have a detrimental effect on the rural areas of Taunton Deane. The call-in was considered at the Review Board at its meeting on 26 February 2004, when it was resolved that the Executive be recommended to reduce the capital grant payable to Parish Councils for play equipment from 85% to 66%. Any such reduction would be for a period of two years to enable the implications to be assessed and to determine how accessible other sources of funding were. The Review Board did however accept that priority should be given to older children's/youth facilities. Proposals to increase the playground budget from £21,000 to £31,000 from 2005/2006 were also supported and the Executive were requested to consider the recommendations of the Review Board.

The Executive considered, in detail, the request of the Review Board but saw no reason to change its original decision.

RESOLVED that the decision made by Executive at its meeting on 11 February 2004 (Minute 3/2004) be confirmed.

8. Exclusion of press and public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item numbered 10 on the Agenda because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 1 of Schedule 12(a) of the Local Government Act 1972.

9. Corporate review and restructure proposals

Submitted detailed report which set out proposals which sought to address the issues within the Council's structure and its ability to ensure focus on the delivery of the Council's priorities.

The proposals reduced the number of Directors from three to two and to focus those remaining posts on strategic issues. It was also intended to complete the layer of Head of Services, to review and recommend changes to the functions deployed at the centre, to transfer certain functions between the Heads and to alter some Heads' responsibilities accordingly. The proposals would strengthen corporate working and provide additional support to overview and scrutiny. It was recognised that further work would be necessary to address the Council's underlying budget position. It was noted that the proposals were effectively cost neutral and would provide longer term savings.

RESOLVED that:

1. the proposals set out in the report be agreed;
2. the new post of Strategic Director - Operations be created and the external advertisement of the post forthwith be agreed;
3. two new Heads of Service posts, Head of Policy and Performance and Head of Development, be created and the internal advertisement for these posts be placed immediately;
4. the Head of Corporate Services post be funded from the savings generated by the proposal and the post be advertised internally forthwith;
5. Council be recommended that the early retirement of the Head of Performance on the terms set out in detail in the report be agreed;
6. Reserves be used to fund the one off costs associated with the redundancy and early retirement of the Head of Performance; and
7. the posts effectively made 'redundant' by these proposals be deleted from the establishment (these posts were all currently vacant).

(The meeting ended at 7.30 pm.)

Executive – 23 March 2004

Present: Councillor Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Edwards and Hall.

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Mr R Willoughby-Foster (Forward Plan and Regeneration Manager), Mr I Ayre (Principal Officer – Forward Plan), Mr M Leeman (Senior Policy Officer – Forward Planning), Mr P Bisatt (Senior Planner – Forward Planning), Mr P Anelay (Planning Assistant) and Mr A Melhuish (Review Support Officer).

Also Present: Councillors Hindley and Meikle, County Councillor Wolverson.

(The meeting started at 7.40pm.)

10. Apologies

Councillors Williams, Lewin-Harris, Mrs Bryant, Cavill and Garner.

11. Appointment of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Bishop be elected as Chairman of the Executive for the duration of the meeting.

12. Taunton Deane Local Plan – Proposed Modifications

Reported that at its meeting on 23 March 2004, the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel had considered the proposed modifications to the Taunton Deane Local Plan, following the receipt of the Local Plan Inspector's Report.

After careful consideration, the Review Panel had agreed to recommend the Executive to accept the proposed modifications prior to requesting Council approval to place the modifications on deposit for public consultation.

The Executive felt it was important that proposals for the development of land at Longforth Farm, Wellington should be considered as part of the Local Development Framework that would have to be produced by the Council shortly.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the proposed modifications, as agreed by the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel, be supported;
- (2) the intention to consider the allocation of Longforth Farm, Wellington in the preparation of the Local Development Framework be approved; and
- (3) the Council be recommended to approve the proposed modifications to the Taunton Deane Local Plan and that they be placed on deposit for public consultation.

(The meeting ended at 7.47pm.)

CALL-IN REQUEST

To: Greg Dyke

Decision being challenged

By

As to

Detailed reasons for challenge:-

Signed

Dated

As and when two completed requests are received

Then:-

1. The decision will be “frozen”
2. The requests and the reasons given will be first on the next agenda for the Review Board
3. You will be invited to attend that meeting and to further explain your reasons for calling-in the decision
4. The decision will remain “frozen” until:-
 - the Board decides not to support the call-in; or
 - the Board’s proposed alternative has been decided; or
 - the “Council’s referral” mechanism has been triggered by the Board

The right of call-in will expire at 12 noon on the fifth working day after the decision has been made.

Please Note:-

A successful “call-in” means the decision cannot be carried out.

A Councillor can instead request that the decision is reviewed, that is, subsequently revisited without seeking to delay the decision.