

Executive - 7 April 2004

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

Officers: Mr J J Thornberry (Director of Corporate Resources), Mr P Weaver (Director of Community Services - Acting), Mr C Brazier (Head of Housing), Ms S Adam (Head of Finance), Ms K Dyson (Leisure Development Manager), Mr M Western (Housing Manager) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Gill, Henley, Lisgo and Stuart-Thorn.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

13. Apologies

Councillors Edwards and Garner.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 10 and 23 March 2004 were taken as read and were signed.

15. Public Question Time

Councillor Henley, as a member of the public, asked for clarification of the proposed siting of the Skateboard Park at Wellington.

Councillor Williams replied that as soon as the plans of the proposed siting of the facilities were received from the Town Council, they would be fully examined. Although the decision as to the final location of the equipment would be made by the appropriate Executive Councillor after considering all the issues, he hoped that the views of the Town Council and the local community would be taken into consideration.

16. Development of a Green Spaces Strategy for the Borough

The green spaces in the Borough were a valuable asset for the Council in addressing its priorities of environment, economy and health. A strategic approach to their provision and management was vital if this role was to be maximised.

Submitted report, previously circulated, which gave details of the methodology used for the development of a Green Spaces Strategy for the Borough, the key findings and the draft recommendations that had arisen. The Council had commissioned consultants and they submitted a presentation on the draft Strategy.

This was a matter that had previously been considered by the Health and Leisure Panel in some detail and they had recommended that the Strategy be approved in principle. There had been discussion regarding the allocation of priorities to the recommendations and, as a result, the officers would develop a draft action plan based on the recommendations with a time schedule which would be further discussed by the panel. The final action plan would be submitted to the appropriate Executive Councillor for approval.

It was intended that if all the recommendations in the Strategy were implemented there would be no additional costs to the Council. This would be achieved by refocusing existing resources, seeking external funding and combining activities with other resource activities within the Council. If it was subsequently found that additional resources were required then this would be presented as a development bid. It is important to note that the Strategy was not seen as an automatic permission to incur additional expenditure.

RESOLVED that the Strategy for Green Spaces be adopted and an action plan to deliver the recommendations be prepared.

17. Financial Strategy

Reported that the majority of local authorities were struggling to match their spending plans to resources available. This was a national issue and not unique to Taunton Deane Borough Council.

Based on current financial forecasts, this Council was facing a funding gap of around £700,000 per annum (before considering development items). This was unsustainable and it was felt that the Council must have a strategy for resolving the underlying budget gap.

Submitted report, previously circulated, which set out a financial strategy that would allow the Council to break out of the annual cycle of budget saving rounds to produce a clear and sustainable financial plan over the medium term. It was intended that this would be achieved through a series of service reviews where there would be a fundamental appraisal of the work of each service. It was anticipated that difficult choices would need to be made and existing methods and practices fully challenged. All Members would be involved in the process.

The Financial Strategy would be a key link between the Corporate Strategy which set the aims and ambitions of the Council and the medium term financial plan which set out the costs of what the Council was currently providing. It would also link in other corporate plans, such as the Capital Strategy and the Asset Management Plan and, longer term, develop to include HRA Services as well. Details of the proposed Financial Strategy were submitted.

RESOLVED that (a) the Financial Strategy as submitted be agreed; (b) Council be recommended that responsibility for approving Supplementary Estimates during this review period be delegated to the Executive.

18. Wellsprings Partial Exemption Update

Reported that at the Special Council meeting, held on 22 December 2003, it was decided to defer the formation of a Leisure Trust. A consequence of this was that the Council would become liable for the repayment to H M Customs and Excise of £330,000 of irrecoverable VAT. Council had also approved a supplementary estimate for this payment.

It was noted that since that time, discussions with H M Customs and Excise had resulted in the Council not now being required to pay the expected VAT that related to 2002/03. This amounted to £133,500.

RESOLVED that it be noted that H M Customs and Excise no longer required repayment of £133,500 of VAT and these monies be returned to unallocated capital resources.

19. Energy Efficiency Review

Submitted details of the Energy Efficiency Review that had been considered by the Housing Review Panel at its meeting on 25 February 2004.

The report was for information on progress of the Home Energy Conservation Act targets. The Housing Review Panel has recommended that the report be accepted.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

20. Review of Taunton Deane's Homeless Strategy "Planning Out Homelessness"

Submitted report on the update of the Homeless Strategy that had been considered by the Housing Review Panel at its meeting on 25 February 2004. The report was for information on the progress of the update of the Homeless Strategy. The Housing Review Panel had considered the report in detail and has recommended that it be accepted.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.)