

Executive – 12 January 2005

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

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Ms S Adam (Head of Resources),
Mr C Brazier (Head of Housing), Mr P Weaver (Head of Environment and Leisure), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mrs P Potter (Elderly Services Manager) Mr A Priest (Senior Valuer) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Bowrah, Henley, Hindley, Lees, Lisgo, Stuart-Thorn and Weston

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

1. Apologies

Councillor Edwards

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 8 December 2004 were taken as read and were signed.

3. Public Question Time

- (a) Mr S Robins asked why the Council would not identify the alarm system required at 47 South Street.

Councillor Williams replied that Mr Robins had been consistently invited to allow the Council to re-inspect this properly. The Council were not responsible for the detailed specification of work. An inspection would be made of the system in place. It was incumbent on Mr Robins to meet the appropriate Regulations. Mr Robins had chosen not to accept the offer to re-inspect. Experts were available in the private sector to give a clear specification of what was required. All Mr Robins had to do to resolve this issue was to provide an appropriate electrical certificate or accept the offer of re-inspection.

Mr Robins made a supplementary statement that a previous letter was not relevant or factual and this situation had been created by the Council.

- (b) Councillor Williams declined to accept a question from Daniella Robins in view of an outstanding issue that had arisen during a previous Public Question Time.
- (c) Councillor Henley, as a member of the public, asked if the debate on Sheltered Housing could not have been dealt with with more sensitivity and greater clarity and communication with the public.

Councillor Garner replied that this issue had initially appeared disjointed. Reports had appeared in the Press prior to any detailed consultation.

However, he was now satisfied with the level of consultation which had been greater than originally planned.

- (d) Councillor Henley, as a member of the public, asked if the decision of the Council to delete Longforth Farm from the Local Plan and allocate land at Cades Farm had directly resulted in the submission of a planning application and made it inevitable.

Councillor Bishop agreed that the submission of the planning application was inevitable. The Council had allocated Cades Farm and deleted Longforth Farm from the Local Plan following the Planning Inspector's report. The reasons were self evident – to continue with the allocations of Longforth Farm would have resulted in great cost to the Council and failure to adopt the Local Plan.

4. Somerset Waste Partnership Contract Integration

Further to Minute 73/2004 considered further the proposal to integrate Taunton Deane's waste collection contract with other Somerset waste collection authorities and to delegate responsibility for waste management services to a Waste Board made up of political representatives from all the authorities involved.

Eunomia Research and Consulting had recently undertaken work on behalf on the Somerset Waste Partnership investigating the business case for the integration of waste collection contract across Somerset. This had been seen as the logical next steps following on from previous collaborations. Such developments would take the partnership into a more formalised joint working arrangement and as such necessitated the commitment of participating authorities.

Details were submitted of the key potential advantages that might accrue to Somerset Waste Authorities through further collaboration, together with any potential disadvantages and the key risks as identified in the consultants report. It was noted that the key driver for the current consideration of this subject was the procurement cycle for waste collection services and details were submitted of the length and nature of waste collection contracts being operated by all the Somerset districts.

It was felt that there would be significant opportunities for efficiency savings as a result of contract integration both in terms of reducing contractor costs, improving the efficiency of the administration of Waste Management Services and in the procurement process. Needs would be most significant if all five districts, together with the County Council, participated fully, but would still be apparent if a smaller number of districts agreed to participate. It was acknowledged that there were also risks to be considered, but taking into consideration current government policy and the current market conditions, the potential advantages outweighed the risks as they were understood at the moment.

This matter had also received detailed consideration by the Health and Leisure Review Panel at its meeting on 11 January 2005 and details of its recommendations were submitted.

RESOLVED that subject to the consideration of detailed constitutional and management arrangements by the Health and Leisure Review Panel and the approval of the Executive, it be agreed in principle that:-

1. this Council participate in cross County contracts for the collection of waste for recycling and disposal;
2. decisions on specific waste collection matters be delegated to the Somerset Waste Board (SWB);
3. a single client management structure reporting to the SWB be established;
4. Waste disposal, collection and recycling budgets be pooled across the six partner Councils of the SWB;
5. the portfolio holder for Environmental Services be authorised to represent this Council in the detailed discussions and negotiations.

5. Housing Stock Options

Further to Minute 72/2004. Submitted a report which provided an update on the work that had, or was being undertaken in relation to Housing Stock Options. The following issues were addressed:-

- a. PWC (Pricewaterhouse Coopers) to provide financial guidance on the difference between a stand alone versus a group structure.
- b. PWC to update members on the Prudential Code and its use to Taunton Deane.
- c. To note the ITA's final report which took into consideration the insite groups recommendation.
- d. To note the views of partners, members and staff.
- e. To update members on the work being undertaken to gain a place on the stock transfer programme.

The report and its appendices provided members with a good overview of the current position. The preferred choice of landlord by all parties concerned, including tenants, was that of a newly established free standing Registered Social Landlord (RSL) – a Stand Alone. It was noted that the report and the information submitted with it had been considered and endorsed by both the Tenants' Forum and the Housing Review Panel.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be endorsed and a free standing Registered Social Landlord (RSL) – a Stand Alone be formed in the event of a transfer taking place.

6. Housing Restructure

Reported that at it's meeting on 6 October 2004, the Housing Review Panel considered a proposed restructure of the Housing Service. The Tenants' Forum had also discussed the proposals, which had been supported both by the forum and the panel.

Further detailed consideration which included an update on the formal consultation work with staff, more detailed financial costings, and a final proposed structure were considered by both the tenants forum on 20 December 2004 and the Housing Review Panel on 21 December 2004. The Forum and the Panel unanimously supported the proposed restructuring. It was felt that the proposed restructure would enable the Housing Service to move forward from what was already a strong position. As part of the restructure there would be an emphasis on empowering staff and enabling them to take ownership for their area of work, with support, guidance and encouragement from their line managers.

RESOLVED that

1. the contents of the report be endorsed;
2. Council be recommended to approve the changes to the base budget of the Council to reflect the new structure, namely:-
 - (i) An increase to the General Fund base budget of £24,393.
 - (ii) An increase to the Housing Revenue Account base budget of £146,982.
 - (iii) An increase to the base budget of the Building Maintenance DLO of £8580;
3. Council be recommended to approve the inclusion in the 2005/06 Housing Revenue Account budget, a budget of £200,000 for redundancy costs arising from the restructure which was to be funded from the working balance.
4. Council be recommended to approve the funding of the General Fund share of redundancy costs of approximately £45,000 from the General Fund Reserve.

7. Review of Sheltered Housing

Submitted report, which reflected on the services that had historically been provided to tenants living in sheltered housing by way of a resident scheme manager. Consideration was given to how these should be provided now and in the future.

The Housing Review Panel, at its meeting on 4 August 2004 had considered a report which advised on the current position on the activities and issues affecting the elderly services unit, part of which was about the development of the Sheltered Housing Service. Further details were submitted which explained the current position, gave details of staff consultation of tenants needs assessment and the feedback from a tenants questionnaire. The financial implications of the proposal were also submitted.

The service currently provided by a mobile team was more flexible to the needs of the service user and had been welcomed in areas where it had been provided. With staff being so readily available there was a risk that tenants could become dependant on one person for tasks that were not appropriate.

The warden call system had reached the end of its anticipated life and would need replacing at an estimated cost of £20,000 to £30,000 per scheme. There were limited facilities at some of the schemes and with limited opportunity to provide additional meeting halls or other facilities in the future. There was a growing demand for extra care housing.

The Review of Sheltered Housing had been considered and endorsed by the Housing Review Panel and the tenants' forum at their meeting in November 2004.

RESOLVED that:-

1. Staff be no longer required to occupy accommodation as part of their terms and conditions of employment and should be offered alternative accommodation in accordance with the criteria, details of which were submitted with the report.
2. The current and future vacant properties be allocated to applicants from the Housing waiting list.
3. A programme of change in the existing warden call equipment be prepared and implemented.

4. The upgrading of those schemes identified in the report as being sheltered/extra care schemes be investigated further.

8. Treasury Management Update 2004/05

Submitted report previously circulated which set out the current position for Treasury Management activities in 2004/05 with details of any issues regarding the remainder of the current financial year and into the next financial year.

RESOLVED that the treasury management position to date and for 2004/05 be noted.

9. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item numbered 9 on the agenda 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).

10. Proposed Sale of Bedford House, Park Street, Taunton

Reported that the national "Efficiencies Agenda" encouraged all authorities to challenge how their assets were currently used and were performing, not only in financial terms, but in their impact in delivering the Councils corporate priorities. Submitted report previously circulated which gave consideration to selling a 999 year leasehold interest in Bedford House, Park Street, Taunton and reinvesting the proceeds of sale into economic development schemes to provide affordable workspace in line with the Council's corporate priorities.

It was considered that the sale of Bedford House would provide a significant capital receipt and with this be reinvested into economical development projects, it would assist the Council in fulfilling a key corporate priority. The sale would provide an opportunity for the Council to increase revenue from its property assets, although it was acknowledged that risk and management costs would be slightly greater in order to achieve this.

Selling a 999 year lease hold interest in Bedford House would not necessarily provide the best capital receipt, but would allow the Council to retain some degree of control over the future use of a very prominent building within the town centre. It was therefore considered reasonable to proceed on this basis.

RESOLVED that Bedford House, Park Street, Taunton be disposed of on a 999 year leasehold basis for a premium and a peppercorn rent with the proceeds being reinvested directly into economic development projects to provide affordable workspace.

(The meeting ended at 8.20 pm)