

Executive - 9 March 2005

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

Officers: Ms J Wislade (Strategic Director - Operations), Ms S Adam (Head of Resources), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mr T Noall (Head of Development), Mr R Willoughby-Foster (Forward Plan Manager), Mr R Mitchinson (Senior Policy Officer) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Bowrah, Henley, Phillips, Watson and Wedderkopp.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

16. Apologies

Councillors Hall and Mrs Lewin Harris.

17. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 9 February 2005 were taken as read and were signed.

18. Public Question Time

Alan Debenham asked how much revenue had been lost whilst certain parking meters in the town centre were out of action.

Councillor Williams explained that the machines were out of action because the appropriate spares were not readily available. The amount of revenue lost was not known, but he would provide Mr Debenham with a written answer.

19. Review of Public Conveniences

Submitted report, previously circulated, regarding the implementation of the outcome of the Review of Public Conveniences.

Executive Councillor Mark Edwards had previously endorsed the recommendation of the Health and Leisure Review Panel to carry out a series of investments and disinvestments in public conveniences. The principle behind the decision was to use funds raised from the sale of some sites to improve the quality of the remaining facilities and generate ongoing revenue savings.

Details were submitted of the report considered by Health and Leisure Review Panel, however, a number of changes had subsequently occurred that now needed to be considered.

There was consensus amongst the North Taunton Councillors that fitting out the shell of a public convenience, built as part of the Surestart project was not part of the solution. Research was therefore being carried out on the provision of a community facility within existing premises in the vicinity of Priorswood Place. The forecasted costs of developing the Vivary Hub had increased and for supervised toilets to be provided this project required further financial assistance.

Tenders had been received for the rebuilding of North Street Car Park toilets in Wellington. These were however, in excess of the current budget allocation.

The revised potential financial costs and benefits of the Review, after taking these factors into account, were considered.

RESOLVED that the changes that had occurred since submission of the report to the Health and Leisure Review Panel be noted and Council be recommended that the implementation plan and necessary changes to the approved capital programme be agreed.

20. Treasury Management and Investments Strategy for 2005/2006

Reported that the Council was required to consider an annual Treasury Management Strategy. The key points of the 2005/06 Strategy were as follows:

- This year's documentation incorporated the annual investment strategy.
- External borrowing remained relatively static at £19.5m, with average costs reducing due to refinancing. The possibility existed for further reductions in 2005/06.
- Return on investments up from 3.85% last year, to 4.21% currently. Expectation of small reduction on 2005/2006 or no change.
- Uncertainty over precise timing of peak and then decline in short term interest rates, but consensus was downward expectation.
- Borrowing/refinancing and investment strategy based on seeking out favourable (temporary) movements in interest rates due to market reaction to economic data.
- Summaries on Prudential Indicators, economic data and approach to investments submitted with the report.

The Council had customarily considered an annual Treasury Strategy Statement under 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. The suggested strategy for 2005/06 in respect of the following aspects of the Treasury Management function was based upon the Treasury Officer's views on interest rates, supplemented with market forecasts provided by the Council's Treasury Advisor. The strategy covered the current treasury position, prospects for interest rates, the borrowing strategy, the investment strategy and the Prudential Indicators.

RESOLVED that the proposed Treasury Management Strategy, as outlined in the report, be agreed.

21. Internal Audit Partnership

Reported that this Council, together with South Somerset District Council and Mendip District Council, had proposed the creation of a partnership to operate their Internal Audit Services. This would bring significant benefits to all partners in terms of quality, sustainability and resources. The partnership was to be formed using the Joint Committee model outlined in Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972. Provided that all necessary steps could be concluded on time it was proposed that Taunton Deane and South Somerset would establish an Internal Audit Partnership with effect from 1 April 2005. It was further proposed that Mendip join the partnership on the expiration of their current contract with Capita on 1 July 2005.

Detailed consideration was given to the principles of how the partnership would operate. The report had also been considered by the Council's Corporate Governance Committee who had recommended that the proposals be agreed.

There were clear advantages to entering into an Internal Audit Partnership including quality, sustainability and resource issues.

RESOLVED that:

1. An Internal Audit Partnership (initially between Taunton Deane Borough Council, South Somerset District Council, and Mendip District Council) be established under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972.
2. The Internal Audit Partnership commence on 4 April 2005 between Taunton Deane Borough Council and South Somerset District Council, with Mendip District Council joining on 1 July 2005.

3. The initial contribution of £20,000 be found from existing approved budgets and be repaid over five years.
4. The final agreement of the Partnership Business Plan, host authority arrangements, legal agreement and working practices be delegated to the Head of Resources (subject to the Partnership demonstrating a break-even position within 5 years).
5. Two Councillors be appointed as representatives of this Council on the Partnership Oversight Board. The Members Services Manager to liaise with the Group Leaders on the most appropriate method of filling these posts.
6. Council be recommended that the arrangements outlined above be confirmed.

22. ODPM Consultation Paper on Three-Year Revenue and Capital Settlements

Reported that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had issued a consultation paper which set out proposals for three-year revenue and capital settlements. The system was due for implementation from 2006/07 with a view to announcing local authority finance settlements for 2006/07 and 2007/08 during 2005. The report outlined the proposals, and set out proposed responses to the consultation paper.

RESOLVED that the proposals in the consultation paper be noted and the Head of Resources respond in accordance with the details contained in the report on behalf of the Council.

23. The Local Development Framework - The Local Development Scheme

The Local Development Scheme (LDS) was a public statement of the Local Planning Authority's three year programme for the intended preparation and delivery of its Local Development Documents (LDDs) which formed part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF itself would provide a folder of interrelated documents setting out overall spatial planning strategy for the Borough to period up until 2021.

The Local Planning Authority was required to submit its LDS to the Secretary of State before 28 March 2005. Details of the Council's LDS were submitted.

RESOLVED that the Local Development Scheme be approved and formally submitted to the Secretary of State (represented by The Government Office for the South West) for consideration and approval.

24. Taunton Sub Area Strategy

Following a special meeting of the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel held on 3 March 2005 it was reported

that it was felt that the future regional strategy for the Taunton area should be based on:

- The continued role of Taunton within the region as a PUA;
- The level of growth should be based on the employment prospects, not housing, and the economic potential is considered to be closer to the RPG10 level rather than RPG10 + 50%;
- The roles of Bridgwater and Wellington are complementary to Taunton. The three towns are closely spaced in the M5 corridor with a combined population of 110,000, acting as a mini-conurbation;
- It is essential that Bridgwater and Wellington maintain their role and function, with balanced growth of homes and jobs, maximising the opportunities for regeneration, development to fund necessary infrastructure and economic diversification;
- Both Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrove are suitable locations for urban extensions in the longer term;
- Although Monkton Heathfield is the most sustainable and would build on the proposals in the local plan, it can be argued that the differences between it and Comeytrove are marginal;
- Smaller developments around the town will be necessary to deliver Outer Distributor Roads and radical improvements to the public transport services will be required to reduce the growth in congestion, and
- Development to the east of the Motorway would be divorced from the town and should be resisted.

Submitted letter from Wellington Town Council asking that specific reference be made in the Strategy to the Longforth farm proposals. This would then give clear and unequivocal backing to the scheme.

Also reported that a special meeting of the Executive had been arranged to take place on 22 March 2005 to discuss further the Taunton Sub Area Strategy document before it was presented to the Regional Assembly.

RESOLVED that the bullet points set out above be agreed subject to the addition of the following:

"That Taunton Deane Borough Council supports a mixed use scheme for Longforth Farm, Wellington to include the relief road for Wellington."

(The meeting ended at 7.50 pm.)