

Executive – 6 April 2005

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

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Ms S Adam (Strategic Director),
Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager and Mr R Bryant (Review Support Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Croad and Lisgo

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

29. Apologies

Councillors N Cavill and Leighton.

30. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 22 March 2005 were taken as read and were signed.

31. Public Question Time

The Chairman mentioned that, prior to the meeting commencing, a list of questions covering various issues Mr Robins had with the Council had been handed in by Miss D Robins and Mr P Harris.

32. Budget Monitoring 2004/2005 – Use of expected underspend

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed use of the expected underspend which had arisen during the 2004/2005 financial year.

The Quarter 3 Performance Report to the Review Board in February had identified an underspend within the General Fund of £51,580. The report had also indicated the following service areas where the Executive wished to use this underspend:-

Service	Amount £	Comments
On Street Car Parking	5,000	To progress further locations where the residents parking scheme is in operation
Brewhouse Grant	25,000	A one off grant to assist the Brewhouse manage an agreed phased reduction in ongoing funding over the next 3 years
Economic Development	5,000	To assist with the development of a Business Improvement District

Various	16,580	To assist services with the "Crisp & Clean" agenda
Total	51,580	

Noted that the £5000 identified for residents parking would be used to create a new zone within the Haines Hill area of Taunton.

As far as the one off grant to the Brewhouse Theatre was concerned, this was proposed in connection with the phased reduction in the Council's annual grant to the theatre over the medium term.

Negotiations had been taking place over several months and the proposed level of grant for the next three years would be:-

2005/2006 - £168,000
2006/2007 - £152,000
2007/2008 - £137,000

As part of the negotiations, the Executive wished to provide the Brewhouse with a one off grant of £25,000 from the 2004/2005 underspend. This would be used to enable the theatre to both build up working capital and to finance a restructure.

RESOLVED that the 2004/2005 expected General Fund underspend be used as proposed above.

53. The Old Municipal Buildings, Corporation Street, Taunton – Proposed lease to Somerset County Council for use by the Registrar

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed use of the Old Municipal Buildings (OMB) by the Registrar.

The OMB which was owned by Taunton Deane, was a grade 2* listed building within an area of the town identified for cultural development within the Vision for Taunton proposals.

Approximately half of the property, which was identified as a poor performing building in the Asset Management Plan, was let as office accommodation largely to voluntary sector organisations. The remainder of the building comprised the Municipal Hall, the Committee Room, the Mayor's Parlour and allied accommodation.

The building was very important in respect of Taunton's history in relation to civic use, and civic functions occasionally still took place at the OMB. More recently, despite the limited range of facilities available, the Committee Room and the Municipal Hall had been used for hire for a mix of social and business functions, including weddings.

Reported that the Somerset County Council had identified the ground floor and first floor of the OMB as a suitable location for the Registrar's offices, as

greater accommodation was now required than that currently offered at Flook House. Both the Hall and the Committee Room were considered as particularly good venues for wedding ceremonies.

The County Council's architects were currently in discussions with the Council regarding suitable adaptations to the buildings to provide suitable disabled access and satisfactory means of escape in case of fire for large numbers of people.

Noted that if the Registrar's service did relocate to the OMB, the Council would need to find alternative accommodation for the Council for Voluntary Services, the other voluntary sector tenants and the Town Centre Manager. The Registrar would also require some car parking spaces adjacent to the building.

With regard to this latter issue, members felt that if parking was provided this should not form part of any lease negotiated, but should be arranged separately to ensure that any proposed alternative use of the Castle Green Car Park was not affected.

A limited amount of second floor office accommodation would still be available and Taunton Deane would retain the use of the Mayor's Parlour. The building (including the Hall and the Committee Room) would still be available for certain civic functions by arrangement with the County Council.

It was proposed to grant the County Council an internal repairing lease of the building for a term of probably 21 years or thereabouts, retaining a sub-lease of the Mayor's Parlour, on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Chief Valuer. It was intended to commence the lease on 1 April 2006, if possible.

Further reported that considerable cost savings would arise if the lease was agreed, although Taunton Deane would continue to be responsible for expenses incurred in respect of the future maintenance of the main structure. There would also be a cost in respect of relocating the existing tenants.

Income for use of the OMB was derived from two sources; rental payments from the tenants which amounted to approximately £19,000 per annum, and Hall and Committee Room bookings which would normally amount to approximately £21,000 per annum.

However, against this the annual budget for normal maintenance and running costs was £30,000, with direct employee costs in the region of £20,000 with considerable internal recharges on top. Details of the staffing implications if the lease was eventually agreed were submitted.

Works costing £16,700 to address a number of serious defects identified following a Fire Risk Assessment had recently been completed. Also reported that possible future maintenance over the next 20 years could amount to £350,000. This figure included £50,000 of backlog maintenance and £83,000

which would need to be spent to bring the building in practical compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Despite this continuing financial liability, it was felt that the proposal to lease the building to the Somerset County Council would help to enhance the development of the cultural quarter in relation to the Vision for Taunton proposals. This would make a significant contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities.

RESOLVED that it be agreed in principal that the Somerset County Council be granted an internal repairing lease of the Old Municipal Buildings as proposed in the report, subject to the provision of additional financial information, on terms to be agreed by the Chief Valuer in consultation with the Leader of the Council, members of the Executive, the other Group Leaders and the Strategic Director.

(Councillor Garner arrived at the meeting at 6.26pm during the discussion of Minute No 33).

(The meeting ended at 7.56pm).