

## **Executive – 24 May 2005**

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

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Ms S Adam (Strategic Director), Ms J Wishlade (Strategic Director), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mrs L Ball (Town Centre Manager), Mr K Toller (Head of Resources), Mr S Rutledge (Chief Architect), Mr B Yates (Chief Building Control Officer) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Coles, Henley, Lisgo, Slattery, Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh and Mrs Wilson

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

### 54. Apologies

Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley and Cavill.

### 55. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 6 April 2005 were taken as read and were signed.

### 56. Public Question Time

Mr P Harris asked a series of questions in connection with the Council's dealings with Mr S Robins. Many of the questions related to various "billing" issues. Others related to a visit by a Council officer and the remainder referred to Mr Robins dealings with other officers of the Council.

Councillor Williams replied that the alleged problems in relation to the billing had been caused by Mr Robins not providing information that he had been requested to provide. If the information was provided in a timely and efficient manner it might be possible to resolve the situation. There were letters on record to this effect.

It was unreasonable that Mr Robins should lay charges against Council officers who were discharging the duties of the Council. If Mr Robins would cooperate the Council could help him to assist himself.

Councillor Williams undertook to investigate further the question relating to a visit by a particular Council officer.

### 57. Potential Hire of Skating Rink

Reported that in recent years the Town Centre Partnership had hired a small artificial skating rink in the run up to Christmas. The rink had been located at

Goodland Gardens and High Street and had been used to boost the Christmas shopping experience within Taunton Town Centre.

The Town Centre Manager had recently investigated the potential for the Council and the Town Centre Partnership to jointly fund a real ice rink in Taunton during the Christmas shopping period. A financial and risk appraisal of this potential scheme had been undertaken and details were submitted.

It was proposed to hire the facility for four weeks commencing on 10 December. The expected hire and running costs were approximately £77,000 for this period. Income levels were dependent on the price per person and the expected usage. It was estimated that income could be in the region of £41,000 for the four week period which would leave a shortfall of around £36,000. However the Town Centre Partnership would try and attract sponsorship and income from catering concessions which would lower the anticipated overall deficit. The level of the deficit was such that the Town Centre Partnership had asked the Council to underwrite all or part of any loss of the venture.

Whilst there were uncertainties regarding the overall level of deficit it was felt that the existing artificial facility had proved very popular and therefore the attraction of a real ice-skating rink within Taunton would considerably enhance the Christmas shopping experience. If publicised widely and adequately this would bring additional shoppers to Taunton in the run up to Christmas. It was anticipated that the cost of providing this facility would be funded from within existing budgets.

RESOLVED that:

1. subject to planning permission being granted it be agreed in principle that the Town Centre Partnership pursue the hire of a real skating rink prior to Christmas;
2. any funding deficit be met from within existing budgets;
3. the possibility of funding, sponsorship and income sharing be investigated further;
4. the proposal be referred to the next meeting of the Health and Leisure Review Panel for further consideration, unless previously "called in".

#### 58. Joint Venture Arrangements for Corporate Services

Considered report previously circulated regarding the future direction of the Council with regard to two interlinked business areas, customer access to services and service improvement, and Corporate Services (including Revenues and Housing Benefits).

With regard to customer access significant progress had been made in implementing Somerset Direct and developing customer services. At present Taunton Deane was in the top quartile of all English District Council's for service satisfaction. However it was now necessary to position this performance within a wider vision for customer access to services. This

would ensure that the Council were clear on what it wanted its service delivery to look like in the future, how and when customers want services delivered and the technology requirements for enhanced customer access and service delivery.

It did not appear that the Council had the capacity, skills or resources to take full advantage of the technology available now or that which would become available in future to transform customer access and other Corporate Services itself. It for that reason that it was felt that a joint venture/strategic partnering arrangement for Corporate Services was an appropriate way forward. Research had shown that the following common benefits appeared to accrue to Councils' involved in such a project:

- Improved access to and delivery of services.
- Services configured in a way which best meets the needs of customers.
- Streamlined and improved support services.
- Maximised resources being directed to fund the customer access strategy and frontline service delivery.
- Creation of investment in staff and their working environment.
- Creation of employment and development opportunities.

These issues had already been informally debated by all of the Somerset Council Chief Executives and Leaders. The County Council had approved a report in April 2005 which paved the way for the County to enter into a comprehensive procurement process for the appointment of an external strategic partner to help them establish a joint venture. This joint venture would make provision for the inclusion of District Councils' either now or at some point in the future. It was felt that this Council should seek to be part of these joint venture arrangements immediately. There were many benefits of being a founder partner and these benefits far outweighed the risk of taking a watching brief.

If an in principle decision was taken now then an outline business case would be presented to the Executive in June, a firm business case would be presented in July and a final decision required in August. At the same time the vision for customer access to services would be developed through the scrutiny process for final adoption in August.

RESOLVED that:

1. the vision for customer access to services be developed and adopted through debate and engagement of members, partners and customers;
2. the Executive agree in principle to this Council joining the County Council (and any other interested District Council) in exploring a joint venture solution for the future delivery of Corporate Services.

## 59. Annual Efficiency Statements

Reported that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had recently issued its guidance on the reporting requirements for Annual Efficiency Statements.

The Annual Efficiency Statement was a summary of efficiencies achieved by the Council each year. The Council had met all the targets set for 2004/05 and 2005/06. The forward looking 2005/06 Annual Efficiency Statement had recently been forwarded to the ODPM and the 2004/05 backward looking statement would be submitted in June.

It was clear that the efficiency agenda was continuing to gain momentum within central government. The targets set for the Council had not been particularly challenging, however it was necessary to ensure that the Council continued to monitor its progress against its planned efficiencies. It was suggested that the monitoring of the Annual Efficiency Statements be a function of the Review Board in future.

RESOLVED that:

1. the contents of the forward and backward looking Annual Efficiency Statements submissions be noted;
2. monitoring of the Annual Efficiency Statements be carried out in future by the Review Board.

60. Formation of a Building Control Partnership

Consideration was given to the principle of providing the Building Control Service in partnership with neighbour Local Authorities. Firm interest in participating in such an arrangement had been expressed by West Somerset District Council and expressions of interest had also been received from Sedgemoor District Council. Details of a draft Memorandum of Understanding to establish a building control partnership in Somerset were submitted. It was felt that the formation of such a partnership would result in service improvement and increased efficiency and full details were submitted of the reasons for the suggested change, the benefits of partnering and the partnership proposal itself.

Whilst there appeared to be no objection in principle to this proposal, it was felt that the Memorandum of Understanding as submitted was too vague for any kind of formal approval.

RESOLVED that:

1. the partnering of the Building Control Service be agreed in principle initially with West Somerset District Council but allowing for the inclusion of other Authorities expressing an interest;
2. the progress of work necessary for the setting up of a partnership arrangement be authorised; and
3. the Chairman together with Councillor Bishop, the Chief Executive and the appropriate Strategic Director be authorised to agree a detailed Memorandum of Understanding.

(Councillor Williams declared a personal interest in this item as his firm used the Building Control Service).

61. Performance Monitoring of Contracts Supervised by Deane Building Design Group

Reported that the Council's Standing Orders required details to be published to the Executive of the progress of all works contracts in excess of £50,000 on a quarterly basis for all those contracts supervised by Deane Building Design Group.

The appropriate performance reports were submitted. It was noted that the Deane Building Design Group would now form part of the Property Group. In future therefore any works contracts let by the new group in excess of £50,000 would be reported by the Council's Corporate Property Manager to Corporate Management Team and the Executive.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

62. 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 1 of Schedule 12 (a) of the Local Government Act 1972.

63. Property Services Restructure

Submitted report previously circulated regarding the restructure of current property management functions which would bring them all into one team. The proposal changed the current care taking arrangements and dedicated skilled resources to delivering a land strategy for the Council.

It was intended that the new amalgamated Property Services Team would be structured into three teams covering maintenance, asset holdings and facilities management.

Details of the financial implications of the proposals were submitted and it was noted that the result would be to eventually release £102,000 per annum of efficiency savings for the Council. Due to the timing of the payments this proposal would require the use of reserves of £234,764 during 2005/06 and 2006/07. This would be fully repaid to reserves by early 2009/10 (Invest to Save bid).

The proposal would mean five posts being made redundant but would deliver ongoing savings once the one off costs of redundancy and retirement had been paid back. All staff affected by this proposal have been consulted on the changes and Unison and the Staffside had also been kept fully informed.

RESOLVED that:

1. the proposals to restructure Property Services as set out in the report be agreed; and

2. a Supplementary Estimate of £249,764 be made from General Fund Reserves under the Invest to Save Policy.

(The meeting ended at 8.50 pm).

(No members of the press were present).