

Executive – 16 November 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 (Strategic Director), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mr R Sealy (Revenues Manager), Mr C Brazier (Housing Transfer Consultation Manager) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Coles, Henley, Wedderkopp and Mr G Wheeler, Savills.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

104. Apologies

Councillor Edwards.

105. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 5 and 21 September and 19 October 2005 were taken as read and were signed.

106. Public Question Time

1. Councillor Henley as a member of the public asked the following questions.

- (i) Customer Services had recently not been performing well. Complaints have been made regarding the length of time and difficulties experienced in making contact with the Council by telephone. When would a further report on this matter be submitted to the appropriate Review Panel.

Councillor Hall replied that considerable improvements had been made in recent days. The abandonment rate was now 7% and the average time taken to answer a call was now 1 minute 2 seconds. Extra staff had been recruited, the Sort-It campaign which had had a considerable impact on the service was now coming to an end and it was hoped that a satisfactory standard of service would now be maintained.

Councillor Williams added that it had been recognised that the service had slipped to a less than satisfactory position and therefore steps had been taken to address the problems.

- (ii) Councillor Leighton Executive Councillor with responsibility for Communications had intended submitting a report regarding Council identity to a recent meeting of the Review Board. The report had been withdrawn before the Agenda was published. When was it intended to submit the report to the Board.

Councillor Leighton explained that more work needed to be done before the report could be put to the Board. It would be submitted at some time in the future.

- 2. Councillor Coles as a member of the public asked the following questions.

- (i) With regard to the proposed ice rink what level of sponsorship had been reached and how much was anticipated.

Councillor Cavill replied that the situation had not changed since Councillor Henley asked this question at the last meeting of the Executive. The scheme continued to be without a major sponsor although it was hoped that some sponsorship would be achieved. Banners around the rink were being sold certain subsidies had been received and income would be forthcoming from a food franchise but no definite figures were currently available.

Councillor Williams added that it would be best to await the final outcome. The purpose of this scheme was to provide an amenity. Allowance had been made within the budget to cover any shortfall. A report would be submitted to the relevant Review Panel once the scheme had taken place.

- (ii) How many empty properties were there in Taunton Deane and of those how many had remained empty for six months or more.

Councillor Garner replied that there were approximately 1,500 plus 400 business premises currently empty. When accurate information was available it would be circulated to Members.

- 3. Patricia Rowe asked if Taunton Deane Borough Council would honour the decision of the Tenants Ballot. She also drew attention to a related rally which would take place in London and asked if the Council had any plans to help tenants to attend by helping with transport or subsidising transport costs.

Councillor Garner replied that there would be a single ballot and the result would be definitive. There were no plans to subsidise any costs of attending the rally in London.

- 4. Nigel Behan drew attention to a tenants ballot in Sefton when the tenants voted to stay with the Local Authority. Staff had been

disciplined for exercising a particular view. Would the Council give an assurance that no Union Member would be disciplined. He also asked if any Labour Member of the Council could confirm that they supported Government policy.

Councillor Garner replied that the Council would be transparent in all of its undertakings.

Councillor Williams added that there would be no victimisation providing the normal procedures and rules of conduct were observed. He pointed out that no Member of the Labour Group was present.

5. Paul Partington asked if the Council had any plans to increase the number of bicycle stands in Taunton town centre. He also drew attention to the former bicycle park in Coal Orchard and asked if the Council had taken any steps to get it running again.

Councillor Williams replied that although he was not aware of any plans to increase the number of bicycle stands this was something that might be included as a condition of any planning permission in relation to the regeneration of Taunton.

Councillor Bishop stated that the demand for this facility would be investigated.

Councillor Cavill added that successive operators had failed to make a success of the bicycle park. A longer term solution was now being investigated with the possibility of a partnership being formed with the neighbouring St James Street Medical Centre. A report would be submitted to the relevant Review Panel in the near future. Councillor Mrs Bradley added that she felt bicycle maintenance courses should be offered by SCAT in pursuit of sustainability and an alternative means of travel.

107. Council Tax Section 13A Reduction Procedure

Reported that the Local Government Act 2003 had introduced various changes to the Council Tax legislation. One of these changes added a new Section "13A Billing Authority's power to reduce the amount of tax payable" to the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

The new powers allowed the Billing Authority to reduce the Council Tax payable either for specific classes of cases or for individual cases. The Billing Authority had the power to either reduce or cancel the amount of Council Tax payable.

The new legislation intended to allow Billing Authorities to create local discounts or exemptions in order to cater for local circumstances. The disadvantage of this change however was that the cost of awarding any such

reduction had to be wholly funded by the Billing Authority. No provision was made for the other precepting Authorities to contribute.

This meant that the financial implications of any decision to create a class of reduction had to be considered in detail before any such reduction was created. It was anticipated therefore that such reductions would only be awarded in exceptional cases.

It was felt that the following procedure should be adopted to deal with such applications on a consistent basis:

(a) Procedure for creating and determining applications for specific classes of reduction

The power to consider and decline applications for the creation of specific classes of reduction should be delegated to the Section 151 Officer and the relevant portfolio holder for Revenues.

Where both the Section 151 Officer and the relevant portfolio holder for Revenues decide that consideration should be given to creating a specific class of reduction a recommendation should be made to the Executive. The Executive should have the delegated power to create, amend or cancel any specific class of reduction.

Once a specific class of reduction has been agreed by the Executive individual applications in respect of that class are to be considered by the Revenues unit. The Revenues unit should have the delegated power to determine individual applications within an agreed class of reduction.

(b) Procedure for determining individual one-off applications for reductions

The power to determine individual one-off applications (ie all applications other than those to create a specific class of reduction or for a reduction under a specific class) should be delegated to the Section 151 Officer.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended that the procedure and delegation of powers as outlined above be agreed when considering applications for Section 13A reductions.

108. Capital Programme Update 2005/06

Reported that over recent months reports had been submitted to the appropriate Review Panels regarding some expected changes to the Capital Programme of the Council. Submitted report which consolidated these variations and which sought the approval of the Executive prior to final approval by Council. Changes to the Capital Programme were being sought for the following schemes:-

- Additional funding for the indoor tennis centre extension of £60,000
- Virement of £44,000 from “Grants to Parish Play Areas” budget towards health and safety improvements in TDBC play areas within parishes
- Virement of a total of £28,000 from the Depot Improvements budget to DDA works and to the DLO reserve
- Reductions to the Housing capital programme and an additional RCCO from the HRA working balance (plus associated General Fund revenue costs) to meet a shortfall in Right to Buy capital receipts. This followed the submission of reports to both the Review Board and the Housing Review Panel.

RESOLVED that the proposed changes to the Capital Programme detailed in the report be supported and Council be recommended that the following be agreed

- (i) Additional funding for the indoor tennis centre extension of £60,000
- (ii) Virement of £44,000 from the “Grants to Parish Play Areas” budget towards health and safety improvements in TDBC play areas within parishes
- (iii) Virement of a total of £28,000 from the Depot Improvements budget to DDA works and to the DLO reserve
- (iv) Reductions to the Housing Capital programme as outlined in the report (A summary of the revised Housing Capital Programme is attached as Appendix A).
- (v) A Supplementary Estimate from the HRA Working Balance of £500,000
- (vi) A Supplementary Estimate from General Fund reserves of £60,000 to meet the additional debt costs that would result from a switch of supported borrowing approvals from the HRA to the General Fund

109. Housing Stock Transfer Consultation

Submitted an update on the work that had been undertaken recently in respect of Housing Stock Transfer consultation together with the current position on the Warranted Stock Condition Survey and a recommended change to the makeup of the Shadow Board of Management.

A number of progress reports regarding Housing Stock Transfer had been provided over a period of time together with newsletters to tenants, leaseholders and staff. Submitted with the report was a communication log for the process.

The Housing Stock Transfer Project Team was now fully operational and information was submitted on the key work that the team had undertaken recently.

The report also gave details of a first draft report by Savills who had been appointed to undertake a 20% Warranted Stock Condition Survey of the Council's stock. The next step was to link this information to the expected resources which the housing service could expect over 30 years if the stock was retained or a stock transfer took place. Mr G Wheeler of Savills gave a presentation in relation to the survey.

With regard to the Shadow Board of management all four independent positions had now been filled. In addition to this three of the four tenant places had also been filled. It was anticipated that the remaining place would be filled by the end of the year.

As far as this Council's representation was concerned one of the Council nominee places had not been taken by the Liberal Democrat Group. It was felt appropriate to leave this place open until the end of December 2005 when the matter could be reviewed. Also submitted was the job profile of the Shadow Board Member which clearly outlined their role.

Submitted details of all the Shadow Board Members, an overview of their backgrounds and the progress made at its first meeting on 6 October. Also noted its programme for the immediate future.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the report and appendices be noted
- (ii) the first draft report by Savills on the Warranted Stock Condition Survey be noted and the development of the two standards being proposed be agreed whilst taking account further work that would be undertaken in order to take into consideration the conclusions of the priority survey
- (iii) a place on the Shadow Board remain open for the Liberal Democrat Group until the end of December 2005 when the matter would be reviewed.

(The meeting ended at 8.05 pm)