

Executive – 11 January 2006

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

Officers: Mr K Toller (Head of Corporate Services), Mr M Western (Head of Housing), Mr C Brazier (Housing Transfer Consultation Manager), Mr S Murphy (Principal Accountant), Mrs C Bramley (Corporate Support Services Manager), Mr S Rutledge (Property Services Manager) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)
Hugo Stephens, Pinsent Mason

Also Present: Councillors Coles, Henley, House, Lisgo, Prior-Sankey, Slattery and Wedderkopp.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

1. Apologies

Councillors Cavill, Edwards and Leighton.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2005 were taken as read and were signed.

3. Public Question Time

Councillor Henley, as a member of the public, asked the following questions:

- (i) The ice rink in Taunton was undoubtedly a success and added to the colour of the town centre. Are there any net costs to the Council and is it intended to review the provision and use of the ice rink?

Councillor Williams replied that there would be a net cost to the Council. Although the figures are not yet available it would be less than the amount budgeted for.

- (ii) In view of the good Revenue Support Grant received for the next financial year, would the opportunity be taken to reduce the level of Council Tax, not introduce increases in Shopper Car Park fees and revisit those organisations where grant aid had not been given?

Councillor Williams replied that it would be foolhardy to spend this hard earned funding when the Medium Term Financial Plan indicated a deficit again next year.

The level of Council Tax would be considered by the Executive and Council. The level of fees in Shopper Car Parks had already been agreed. The level of commuter car park fees had been set in conjunction with the Somerset County Council Highway Authority strategy for reducing traffic congestion.

- (iii) Councillor Williams' recent condemnation of the increased bus fares proposed by First was applauded. In view of this increase, was it proposed to revisit the policy to ring fence funding from commuter car parks so that funds could be used to contribute financially with a view to keeping bus fares down? The current level of fares were forcing people off of public transport.

Councillor Williams replied that the level of commuter car park fees had already been agreed and would not therefore be revisited. This was a matter that would be raised through the Bus Users Forum. Increases of this size would deter use of public transport at a time when people were being encouraged to reduce car use and use of public transport.

As a District Council there was little this Council could do as this was a matter for which the County Council was responsible as the Highway Authority. Councillor Bishop added that he would shortly be meeting representatives of First and he would raise this issue with them.

4. Treasury Management Update

Submitted an update, previously circulated, on the current position for Treasury Management activities in 2005/06. It was noted that the Bank of England base rate was currently at 4.5% with the expectation of downward movement by the end of the year. Investment income was on target to meet budget but the trend suggested lower return in the future.

RESOLVED that the current Treasury Management position for 2005/06 be noted.

5. Replacement Printer

Submitted report, previously circulated, which sought "invest to save" funding of £41,857 to purchase upgraded colour print facilities. This would bring back in-house considerable amounts of printing with savings estimated at £32,000 per year. It was also anticipated that additional business of around £10,000 per year might be achieved.

Demand for colour quality printing requirements had increased over the past few years. The Council's Design Team had produced work to customer specifications by using their skills and employing the technology currently available to them. The situation had now been reached where the Print Team were only able to partially support this work by producing 30% in-house with the remaining print work having to be externally sourced.

Details were submitted of the technology currently used within the Council together with new equipment which would enhance and improve the service already provided. Not only would new equipment improve the service to the Council, it would provide an opportunity to create new business from other organisations.

An upgraded printing facility had previously been agreed and although this would enhance service delivery to customers, it would not enable the Council to significantly reduce the amount of printing currently outsourced.

RESOLVED that a Supplementary Estimate of £41,857 from unallocated capital reserves be agreed for the purchase of Docucolour 250 under the invest to save principles contained in the Council's Financial Strategy. This would be repaid within 18 months, after which revenue budget savings would begin to accrue part way through 2007/08.

6. Housing Stock Transfer Consultation

Further to Minute No 113/2005, submitted report, previously circulated, which provided a further update on the Housing Stock Transfer Consultation process together with an overview of the returned Tenants Priority Survey. Details were also submitted of an introduction to the Offer Document.

It was noted that over 50% of the survey questionnaires had been returned and details were submitted of the key areas ranked in the order that were important to tenants and which they wished to see improved. Also submitted a report from Pinsent Masons which introduced the concept of the Offer Document. The Offer Document would explain what the transfer was, why the Council was proposing to transfer and what level of service tenants could expect should they vote either "no" or "yes" to transfer.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7. Housing Need Report

Reported that in 2002 DCA Associates had carried out a Housing Needs Survey which had informed the Council's Social Development Plan. In 2004 the five Somerset districts had agreed to use a common method to inform all the Councils of their housing needs. This would provide consistency, accuracy and economies of scale. Ark Consultancy were appointed to carry out this work.

The draft report had now been prepared and was submitted. The findings contained in the report had also been submitted and considered by the Housing Review Panel at its meeting on 9 November 2005.

RESOLVED that

1. The Housing Needs Report be used to inform the Planning Service of the need for social and affordable housing in future plans: and

2. This survey method be used to update the Council's Housing Needs Plans in future as necessary.

8. Security System Replacement - Deane House

Reported that the existing security system at the Deane House had been installed some 8 to 10 years ago. The technology was now old and incapable of further expansion and spare parts were difficult to obtain. It was no longer cost effective to keep the system functioning.

Coombers Security Systems Limited had provided a proposal to supply identity cards that required a "show only" procedure to a reader for the car park and entry around the building with a swipe facility required for time keeping purposes. It was likely that the costs would be approximately £17,000 and if approved, the work would be funded out of unallocated reserves. If an order was placed before the end of January 2006, the work would be completed by the end of current financial year.

It was acknowledged that if agreement could not be reached with the proposed contractor, then further prices would need to be obtained which would mean that the work would not be completed in the current financial year.

RESOLVED that:

1. The purchase of a new security system for the Deane House and car park be agreed: and
2. Coomers Security Systems Limited be appointed to purchase and install the system at a cost of approximately £17,000 to be funded from unallocated reserves.

(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.)