

Executive – 3 March 2010

Present: Councillor A Wedderkopp (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Councillors R. Lees, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Smith and Mrs Wilson

Officers: Penny James (Chief Executive), Tonya Meers (Legal and Democratic Services Manager), Martin Daly (Strategy Lead), Maggie Hammond (Strategic Finance and Section 151 Officer), Paul Fitzgerald (Financial Services Manager), Richard Sealy (Client and Performance Manager), Adrian Gladstone-Smith (Performance and Client Lead) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager).

Also present: Councillors Mrs Court-Stenning, Hall, Horsley, Stuart-Thorn and Williams.

Chris Trevelyan, Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership Manager

Maurice Stanbury, Independent Member of the Standards Committee

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

29. Apologies

The Chairman (Councillor Henley) and Councillors Coles and Slattery.

30. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 2 and 9 February 2010, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

31. Public Question Time

Councillor Horsley drew attention to the recent news that the current Police Station in Taunton was to be relocated to Bridgwater and that IBM, our Southwest One partners, had purchased office accommodation in Highbridge. He wondered why sites in Taunton had not been considered in respect of both matters. He also asked when the Executive was going to discuss these issues to ensure future policy was shaped to champion Taunton?

In response Councillor Wedderkopp stated that although part of the local Police presence was indeed going to be moved to Bridgwater, a new office would also be built in Taunton with 130 jobs. There were shortly to be meetings to discuss the joint occupation of a possible new building complex which could house a number of organisations in the future. He added that IBM had purchased the accommodation at Highbridge because there was currently no suitable building readily available in Taunton.

Councillor Wedderkopp went on to say that the Executive did need to discuss the issues raised by Councillor Horsley, particularly the wider issue of providing more employment land. In response to a point raised by Councillor Williams, he also undertook to clarify the situation relating to new jobs being created in Taunton when the new Police offices were constructed.

32. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Paul and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council.

33. **Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a proposal that Taunton Deane should join the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) as part of the Council's Core Council Review.

The SWPSHP was an existing partnership between West Somerset and Sedgemoor District Councils, set up in October 2007. It was responsible for delivering the following private sector housing services:-

- Grants (principally repair grants and low interest loans);
- Disabled Facilities Grants;
- Enforcing housing standards;
- Bringing empty properties back in to use;
- Energy efficiency; and
- Production of strategies and policies.

Since the commencement of the SWPSHP, the performance and capacity of both West Somerset and Sedgemoor District Councils had improved, as well as enabling cost savings to be achieved. Overall, between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, service delivery savings of 30% in Sedgemoor and 56% in West Somerset were made, whilst in the same period performance had improved by 68% and 87% respectively.

Although during the same period Taunton Deane's performance had improved by 20%, costs had actually risen by 4%.

A recent review of Taunton Deane's partnership arrangements by the South West Audit Partnership had provided a framework for evaluating future partnerships. An initial evaluation had been undertaken that had suggested that if Taunton Deane joined SWPSHP:-

- The governance arrangements would need to be scrutinised by the legal team;
- Potential conflicts of interest and commercial transactions would need to be covered in a written code of conduct;
- Financial monitoring and reporting arrangements would need to be modified; and
- ICT contractual arrangements would need to be clearly specified and set out in an appropriate document.

The underlying rationale of the Core Council Review was to enable the Council to operate more efficiently and effectively at a time when resources were diminishing and demands on services were increasing. This challenge required innovation and flexibility.

As far as undertaking private sector housing functions was concerned, doing nothing was not an option for Taunton Deane.

Noted that the Audit Commission had 'red flagged' strategic housing services in Somerset under the Comprehensive Area Assessment. Specific reference was made to the following:-

- Many homes did not meet minimum standards;
- Councils could do more to bring empty properties back into use;
- Adaptations for the disabled were taking too long; and
- Some Councils did not have the skills needed to deliver improved housing services.

The Audit Commission had also commented that in Taunton Deane there was no overall private sector housing strategy, stock condition information was out of date, a strategy for overseeing the regulation of private rented accommodation was needed, as was a proactive approach to improving energy efficiency and more needed to be done with empty homes.

The Audit Commission would return to the Council later in the year and would be assessing the Council's approach to functions against the framework of strategic housing Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) which assessed how well Taunton Deane worked with other Councils to address housing challenges and achieve outputs that contributed to sustainable outcomes. The KLOE would also measure Taunton Deane's ability to make efficiencies and deliver improvements as well as partnership arrangements.

In addition to the wide-ranging operational and strategic advantages to joining the SWPSHP, there would also be potential cost savings, particularly in the joint procurement of private sector housing services including the re-negotiation of energy efficiency advice, support and data with the Centre for Sustainable Energy, consolidation of software licences for private sector grants and enforcement systems, entry into a new private sector housing landlord accreditation scheme and the employment of an Empty Homes Officer and an Energy Efficiency Officer (utilising Government money already available in all three Council areas).

Reported that discussions had taken place with staff about the implications of the Council joining the Partnership. Details of the advice provided to staff was submitted for the information of Members.

The location of staff was one of the major issues which could impact on the overall success of the Partnership. Whilst it was likely that staff would remain at The Deane House, to restrict the relocation of staff solely to within Taunton Deane could be restrictive and damaging to the potential success of partnership working.

It was therefore recommended that the Statement of Particulars of Employment for Taunton Deane Grants and Enforcement staff should be formally amended to include partnership working places of employment outside of Taunton Deane too.

If agreement was given to the Council becoming a member of SWPSHP with effect from 1 April 2010, a lead in time of three months would be used to fully integrate staff, systems and procedures into the partnership. Taunton Deane's active membership would therefore commence on 1 June 2010.

Regardless of SWPSHP membership, Taunton Deane would need to work closely with the new provider of Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services in Somerset. The Council's membership of SWPSHP would enhance its credibility with the new HIA and the ability to scrutinise the work it did in Taunton Deane.

The Council would continue to utilise low interest loans for home improvements, through the Wessex Reinvestment Trust, a not for-profit organisation, that SWPSHP already worked with to improve private sector housing conditions.

The proposal to join SWPSHP had been considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 18 February 2010 and its comments were reported which included the recommendation that the Executive Councillor for Housing Services should sit on the SWPSHP Board. The latest views of the Taunton Deane branch of UNISON were also submitted.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the proposal for Taunton Deane Borough Council to join the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership with effect from 1 April 2010 be approved;
- (2) consent be granted for Taunton Deane Grants and Enforcement staff to work in other Council areas covered by the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership, once staff consultation had been concluded; and
- (3) the Executive Councillor for Housing Services be nominated to sit on the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership Board.

34. Financial and Performance Monitoring – Quarter 3 2009/2010

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an update on the financial position and performance of the Council to the end of Quarter 3 of the 2009/2010 financial year (as at 31 December 2009).

The monitoring of the Corporate Strategy, service delivery, performance indicators and budgets was an important part of the overall performance management framework.

A new framework for performance management had been approved by the Executive in September 2009 (Minute No. 75/2009 refers).

The key changes to the process which were being implemented to improve and strengthen how we monitored and managed the performance of all Council services were:-

- Performance reports would be produced using the exception principle - only providing full details on those areas of concern;
- The introduction of a new Performance 'Scorecard', which was designed to be simple to use and would reduce the size of the report;
- Performance reports and the Scorecard would provide a better and more holistic overview of the Council's performance; and
- The performance reporting cycle would involve:-
 - Firstly, the Corporate Management Team where key issues / concerns would be discussed in detail with corrective actions proposed documented;
 - Secondly, the Executive which would agree actions deemed necessary to address areas of poor or deteriorating performance; and
 - Finally, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, whose role in addition to reviewing the full performance report would be to scrutinise the actions proposed on any areas of under performance.

The new Performance Scorecard was divided into seven sections, which were structured to provide a summary of all the main areas of performance that required reporting. These were:-

(1) **Corporate Strategy Aims**

A high level progress update on planned actions and key performance indicators for the corporate aims and objectives (Economy, Transport, Crime, Healthy Living, Environment and Delivery);

(2) **Service Delivery**

A summary of the key performance measures and issues of the main Council services: Planning, Environmental Health, Customer Contact Centre, Benefits Service, Landlord Services, Deane DLO including Parks, Street Cleansing, Highways and Transport;

(3) **Managing Finances**

A summary of the key financial measures and issues.

(4) **Key Projects**

A progress update of the current high priority Council projects: Local Development Framework, Housing Improvement, SAP, Core Council Review and Project Taunton;

(5) **Key Partnerships**

A summary of the performance and status of the key partnerships: Local Strategic Partnerships, Southwest One, Tone Leisure, Somerset Waste Partnership and South West Audit Partnership;

(6) **People (Human Resources)**

A summary of the key performance measures and objectives of our corporate Human Resource priorities: Investor in People Award, staff sickness, Performance Review and Employee Development (PREDEs), training plans, staff turnover; staff satisfaction and thematic working; and

(7) **Corporate Management**

A summary of the high priority corporate management and operational issues: Corporate Governance, Audit and Inspection, Equalities and Diversity, Risk Management, Value for Money, Asset Management and Health and Safety.

Reported that a high level summary of successes and/or improvements included:-

- The General Fund Revenue Account showed a potential overspend of £40,000 - a decrease of £180,000 from that reported in Quarter 2;
- The 2010/2011 Draft Budget had been balanced;
- General Fund reserves were healthy;
- Local Development Framework, Core Strategy progress;
- The Core Council Review was meeting milestones;
- Customer calls being answered within 20 seconds and resolved at first point of contact;
- Increased speed in processing planning applications for minor and other applications.

Also noted that the Housing Revenue Account showed a potential underspend of £898,000 and that the working balance was forecast to stand at around £2,585,000 at the end of the financial year.

Further reported that areas off course included additional homes built and affordable homes delivered, household waste recycling, Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates and sundry debtors collection, procurement benefits, employee sickness, Planning appeals allowed and Licensing inspections. The Scorecard also detailed the actions that had been, or would be, put in place in an attempt to improve current performance.

Resolved that the report be noted.

35. **Executive Forward Plan**

Submitted for information the Forward Plan of the Executive over the next few months. It was suggested that Project Gaumont should be added to the Forward Plan.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.31 pm.)