

5 FEBRUARY 2003

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 5 February 2003.

p Cllr M J Kendal (Chairman)
p Cllr T M Russell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

e P C Greenfield
p J D Heron
p Mrs M D Holding

Councillors:

p B Rickman
p C A Wise

In Attendance:

Councillors:

G C Beck
W R Catt
Mrs M Humber BA
Mrs B M Maynard

Councillors:

Mrs M J Robinson
D N Scott
M H Thierry
P R Woods

Also in Attendance:

Mr A Dougherty, Tenant Representative

Mr N Downie, Consultant, RTA Associates Limited

Officers Attending:

D Yates, C Malyon, D Atwill, Ms J Bateman, Miss G O'Rourke, J Rainbow and for part of the meeting D Brown, R Easton, B Millard and K Smith.

122. COUNCILLOR NICHOLAS SMITH.

The Chairman reported with sadness the untimely death on 25 January 2003 of Cllr Nick Smith. Members and officers stood in silent tribute to the memory of Cllr Smith.

123. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2003, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

124. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllr Rickman declared an interest in Minute 128.

125. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

126. LOCALITY BASED WORKING (REPORT A).

The Cabinet considered proposals to introduce a pilot scheme for locality based working in a defined area of New Milton.

The Health and Social Inclusion Portfolio Holder said that it was very important that health issues were included in any final locality based working proposals. Officers confirmed that this would be the case but, in the first instance, the pilot would only cover services that were currently within the remit of the Council. It was agreed that key performance indicators would be identified in order to measure the success of the pilot.

At the end of the pilot period a further report would be made to the Cabinet. Members noted that there would need to be a full assessment of the costs and staffing resources if the pilot were to be extended.

Locality Based Working would give the Council an opportunity to consider if there were better ways of providing services, which was a key feature to be examined in the Council's forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That a locality based approach for the areas of work described in Report A to the Cabinet be established in New Milton for a period of 6 months; and
- (b) That a further report be made to the Cabinet on completion of the pilot indicating the outcomes achieved and on proposals for expanding the role if it is considered appropriate at that time.

127. AMENDMENT TO THE HOUSING RENEWAL GRANTS POLICY (REPORT B).

The Cabinet considered amendments to the current Housing Renewal Grant Policy to take effect from 1 April 2003, prior to a full review, which would be carried out in 2003/04.

The Housing Health and Social Inclusion Panel at their meeting on 22 January, 2003 had considered the proposal and were enthusiastic about the proposed changes to the grants system. They felt these were directed towards the overall principle of trying to maintain housing stock within the District whilst helping people to remain within their own homes for as long as possible.

RESOLVED:

That the principles set out in Report B to the Cabinet for a revised Housing Renewal Grants Policy to become effective on the 1 April 2003 be approved.

128. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME (REPORT C).

Cllr Rickman declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a Beach Hut owner. He left the meeting for consideration of this item.

The Cabinet considered the draft General Fund revenue and capital budget for the financial year 2003/2004 together with proposals for the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Programme for 2003/2004. It was noted that the final external grant settlement remained at £10.058m.

The Chairman said that he was pleased that, even though a very low external grant settlement had been received, the Cabinet were able to recommend a council tax increase of 3.5% without the need to cut services.

The Finance and Support Portfolio Holder congratulated the Director of Resources and his officers for their hard work to achieve the proposed council tax.

In relation to the grant funding proposed for the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB) members noted that this year's grant would not include the full year effect for the New Milton offices as they would not be fully operational.

The Chairman said that he was aware that the CAB had budgeted for an increase in their salary bill of £14,000 and this would not be covered by the Council's grant funding. However, he said that Hampshire County Council had indicated that they would be willing to consider a one off grant to the CAB to fund their additional staffing costs. Discussions on future funding arrangements would continue between the CAB and the Council.

Other members said that they felt that the Council were not maintaining a sufficient level of funding to the CAB. The CAB had presented detailed costings to the Council and the grant that was proposed was only a short-term solution. The Chairman responded that the CAB budget contained a number of optional proposals for expansion and they would need to consider those in the light of their available funding.

In the light of comments received from the Leisure Review Panel, and reflecting the concerns of User Representatives, it was agreed that the proposed increase in charges for Beach Huts should be reduced to 6%. The Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel had asked that the Cabinet consider an increase in hostel service charges in line with inflation rather than the proposed 5% increase. After consideration the Cabinet agreed that the increase in hostel service charges should be limited to 2½%.

Members noted that the Employee side had expressed concern over the proposed level of increase in staff turnover and that this might force managers to keep posts vacant for longer than necessary. Members agreed that posts would continue to be filled where there was a continued need to provide the service. The Employee side also expressed concern at the reduction in training budgets but noted that as this was in response to the level of actual activity undertaken it should not affect future training requirements.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That the additional expenditure plan bids listed in paragraph 5 of Report C to the Cabinet be agreed;***
- (b) ***That the General Fund budget for 2003/04 be set at £19.068m;***
- (c) ***That the Council Tax be agreed at £124.82 for a Band D property for 2003/04;***
- (d) ***That a sum of £179,000 be withdrawn from the General Fund Reserve for 2003/04 to meet the general fund budget;***
- (e) ***That the ring fencing of the financial accounts of Stillwater Park be removed with effect from 31 March 2003 and that a 2.5% increase in site licence fees and service charges at Stillwater Park be agreed;***
- (f) ***That the General Fund Capital Programme for 2003/04 be agreed as £5.150m;***
- (g) ***That the Capital Programme for Housing for 2003/04 be set at £3.255m;***
- (h) ***That the Housing Revenue Account for 2003/04 be approved as set out in Appendix 4 to Report C to the Cabinet;***
- (i) ***That the following increases be agreed:***
 - ***2.85% (average) in rents for Council dwellings in line with the rent restructuring guidelines;***
 - ***service charges of 2.5% for Hostels and 2.5% for Sheltered Housing;***
 - ***10 pence per week in garage rents (plus VAT for garages let to non-council tenants); and***
- (j) ***That, subject to the increase in fees for Beach Huts being reduced to 6%, the fees and charges as set out in Appendix 2 to Report C to the Cabinet be agreed.***

129. ROMSEY TOWN CENTRE CCTV MONITORING (REPORT D).

Following discussions between Test Valley Borough Council and this Authority agreement had been reached for the Romsey CCTV system to be monitored from the Council's Control Room at Appletree Court.

RESOLVED:

That the agreement with Test Valley Council to monitor the CCTV system in Romsey from the Lyndhurst Control Room at Appletree Court be welcomed.

130. BORROWING LIMITS 2003/2004 (REPORT E).

The Cabinet considered the borrowing limits for the financial year 2003/2004 as required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That for 2003/04 the Council's overall borrowing limit be £55 million of which not more than £15 million be payable at variable interest rates; and**
- (b) That the Council's short-term borrowing limit be £30 million.**

131. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2003/2004 (REPORT F).

In accordance with the Council's policy on Treasury Management, the Cabinet considered a Treasury Management Strategy for 2002/03.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the borrowing requirement of the Council for 2003/04 be met by raising temporary loans or using temporary surpluses;**
- (b) That up to £2m of invested set aside capital receipts be used to repay outstanding debt if financially beneficial to the Council;**
- (c) That the premature repayment of debt be undertaken if financially beneficial to the Council;**
- (d) That rescheduling and replacement of loans be undertaken if financially beneficial to the Council; and**

- (e) *That full consideration be given to financial advice provided by the Council's treasury consultants.*

132. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODY – THE HANSON CONCRETE CHARITABLE TRUST.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Dow be appointed to serve as a Trustee on The Hanson Concrete Charitable Trust.

133. CONSULTANTS REPORT ON TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT (REPORT G).

The Cabinet considered a report commissioned following a consultation exercise on the proposals from the Council to address certain aspects of the growing problems caused by traffic volumes and congestion.

Mr Downie, consultant from RTA Associates Limited, made a presentation to the Cabinet on the main findings of the exercise. The conclusions of the consultation exercise showed that the Council had broad support to manage parked vehicles more effectively and an acceptance that charging in car parks was necessary. There was recognition that taking control of on-street enforcement was a vital element of any policy and there was a demand for further measures to develop this.

The Cabinet thanked Mr Downie for his informative report.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

134. STATEMENT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS REPORT.

The Leader of the Council made a statement, attached as appendix 1 to these minutes, on implementing the recommendations in the Consultants' report on Traffic Management.

Members noted that officers were preparing a more detailed report, setting out the mechanics of the proposed scheme, for consideration by the Council at their next meeting.

In response to questions the Leader confirmed that it was hoped to introduce the proposals within the suggested timescales but it was important that all Town and Parish Councils were fully consulted before implementation. The intention was to introduce the scheme across the whole district simultaneously.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That officers be requested to:**
 - (i) begin discussions with Hampshire County Council on the decriminalisation of on-street parking and undertaking local enforcement, and take appropriate steps to pursue this matter subject to reference back of details;**
 - (ii) hold discussions with the Forestry Commission to enable liaison between the Commission and the Council on car parking issues;**
- (b) That a scheme for parking in Council owned car parks (based on a clock system charged at £5 per annum including the option of meter charging at a rate equivalent to approximately £0.50p per hour) be introduced following full consultation with Town and Parish Councils; and**
- (c) That the Economy and Planning Review Panel be requested to consider the details of a future scheme for traffic management, for subsequent recommendation to the Cabinet, and Council if appropriate.**

CHAIRMAN

STATEMENT OF INTENT

On implementing Recommendations in Consultants report on Traffic Management with particular reference to car parking
FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

No-one can have failed to notice that tourist and local traffic throughout the New Forest has increased considerably in the last few years, even allowing for the hiccup caused by the foot and mouth disease scare of two years ago.

The advent of the proposed National Park, in one guise or another, will also bring more tourists to us throughout the year. Expansion of the Bournemouth and Southampton Airports will also bring short break tourists to us who will hire cars at the local airports before journeying into the New Forest. For example, the Dorset Tourism Board has already been advertising the New Forest, fairly widely, as one of their tourist attractions for visitors arriving at Bournemouth Airport.

We need to look ahead beyond today's problems to the way in which we will need to be catering for this increase in tourism over the next decade. We also have to recognise the pressures which have been created by the increasing use of cars by existing car owners throughout the New Forest, compared to a few years ago. The number of average journeys per day per car owner has increased considerably in the last few years according to some reports.

Those of us involved throughout the consultation process have all been struck by the fact that we have been receiving repeated requests from Town and Parish Councils, from discussion group meetings, and from Commerce and Trade generally, as well as from remarks written on the consultation document which was posted out to everyone, that there is a need for greater enforcement of regulations relating to car parking and indeed the need for certain anomalies in specific car parks, and on-street parking to be rectified.

It is worth recalling some of the objectives which we set out on the front cover of the consultation document. We need a system which will co-ordinate on and off-street parking. We should ensure better traffic flow by freeing up streets clogged with illegally parked traffic. To this I would add we need a system which will prevent streets which are currently not clogged up becoming clogged up over the next decade as traffic to the New Forest honeypots increase. We need to increase the number of short stay spaces and to ensure that drivers comply with the time restriction notices, as this will keep traffic flowing freely and be of benefit to local businesses by increasing their turnover. We need to make better use of the resources we have as, in most of our towns and villages, we have no possibility of building new car parks.

Managing traffic means controlling the vehicles on the road now and in the future while also developing alternative means of travel by encouraging other forms of transport. The reports which we have received from the Consultants indicate that we need to manage our car parking both in our car parks and on our streets as part, and I stress it as only a part, of our overall contribution towards easing traffic congestion in the New Forest District area. We said, and I repeat, that we want to do this without creating financial burdens, or the need to raise Council Tax to fund any scheme. Nor do we wish a scheme to be of disbenefit to the Traders who help keep our towns and villages vibrant.

I shall be putting proposals forward at the end of this statement and the first of these will be that we take on responsibility for ensuring that traffic restrictions are enforced. We are able to do this with the permission of Hampshire County Council and Government by

taking advantage of the Decriminalisation Act provisions which permit local authorities to absorb the powers necessary to enforce traffic regulations which are currently being enforced by the Police in relation to parking restrictions.

This would enable us to provide the New Forest District with an integrated parking policy which we could ourselves amend and enforce, according to the needs of our towns and villages. Clearly we do not own all the car parks in this area. Many are owned by the Forestry Commission and others are owned by Hampshire County Council. The second proposals I would be asking Council to endorse are that we immediately begin consultation with them in terms of implementing our overall proposals. In particular, I would wish us to work closely with the Forestry Commission so that we integrate future policies with them and Hampshire County Council.

In order to provide a mechanism for managing the demand for car parking spaces, we need a device which will measure the timeframe which we wish to enforce in a particular area, be it an off-street area such as a car park currently belonging to us, or an on-street area such as those currently under the control of the Highway Authority but which could pass to us ultimately under the decriminalisation provisions. Having consulted with the public, we are reassured that the suggestion of a clock card system, apart from being viable, would be acceptable as the device required for both time measurement and permission. Therefore, within the proposals that we shall bring to Council for approval, will be the provision for a card clock system (a "clock") at a universal charge of £5 which may be purchased by anyone in any quantity. The clock would last for twelve months before expiring. For the occasional day-tripper who does not wish to purchase such a clock, the proposal is that parking meters would be installed at a rate equivalent to approximately 50p per hour, with the initial timeframe segments being dependent upon the car park. The proposals, which we will put to Council, will, therefore, seek permission for us to proceed with such a scheme for use in village and town car parks after consultation with each Village and Town Council as to the detail of the scheme in their town or village. For example, in Totton a previous scheme had some car parks free while others were chargeable. We need to resolve those kinds of issues with Totton. In Ringwood, Milford-on-Sea and Beaulieu (the latter two sent in detailed suggestions) there are other kinds of problems which we need to resolve. In Lyndhurst, Hythe, New Milton and Lymington demand pressures are the main problems but we believe our proposals will greatly assist those town once we have sorted out some of the finer detail with the local Parish or Town Councils.

I think you should know why we rejected certain ideas put to us during the consultation. We did consider a permit system such as was previously used by this Council but we rejected it because of the disadvantages which became apparent during the usage of that system. Looking ahead, and not back, its main disadvantage in the future would be that our experience has shown

- that it provided no control of on-street parking;
- that the excessively high tariff encouraged displacement of traffic onto suburban streets from car parks by tourists;
- that it had a high cost of administration;
- that it would be difficult to link it easily with any system which we might want to utilise with partners, and
- that any fee dominated permit system, such as the previous one which provided residents with permits while tourists had to use meters, could discourage shoppers in village trading areas.

The system by contrast that we envisage will provide all motorists with a simple easily purchased card clock which when purchased will enable them to park in all village and town centre car parks, without having to pay any further parking fees. Thus tourists who have purchased a clock, for a price which is roughly equal to one day's parking in Southampton and Bournemouth, will find that they can use that clock in any designated car park in the New Forest area without further payment and will thus not be deterred from shopping in any particular area. They will not be chased to a supermarket's free car park once they have purchased a clock as could happen under a permit system which forced them to use meters only.

The clock will enable us to measure times and to alter time zones to suit traffic conditions in various towns and villages. In the second and third stage it will enable us to zone areas for residents only parking but nevertheless to ensure turnover of parking spaces by having different time zones applicable for residents only parking, as is required by the local Village or Town Council. There are already specific resident's only zones in Lyndhurst and Lymington, and we therefore do not anticipate the same degree of difficulties with this scheme as was created by the previous scheme.

In any event, between the implementation of the clock system and the final approval from Government enabling us to assume the role of enforcer for on-street parking in the later stage, there will be sufficient time for us to ensure that we have monitored any problems that have occurred on street as a result of the introduction of clock systems in the village car parks. The simple administration of this system is clearly an advantage over previous permit systems but it also allows additional localised permit systems to run in conjunction with the clock card in a way which gives us much flexibility. It is this flexibility which will help us in our discussions with the Forestry Commission and others.

Another arrangement, which I must admit I (as a resident) would have liked, would be to have two different prices for the clock with a higher price for non-residents than for residents. Acting on the advice from the Consultants and our own officers we have rejected differential pricing. We are advised that the extra administration costs associated with a secure delivery system preventing fraudulent use and scams would negate any extra income. It is true that there is already a greater benefit to residents than to tourists in that residents will have use of the clock for a full twelve months (at a unit cost of less than 10pence per week) whereas the average tourist would only have the benefit for a matter of weeks for the full cost of £5.00. The tourist will not receive the benefit of resident's only parking areas in the later stage.

The current operating deficit on car parks which falls on taxpayers is just under £200,000. This is equivalent to about £3.00 per year for Band D council taxpayers and proportionately more for the majority of motorists who are in higher tax bands. Savings on this account therefore would flow directly through to Council Taxpayers through the overall budget requirements being reduced. So in most cases Council Taxpayers effectively will benefit by more than £5 per year on their Council Tax arrangements and this, of course, would not apply to tourists who would not receive the benefit of any saving in Council Tax.

We are, therefore, persuaded that differential charging for the clocks, albeit populist, is an unnecessary measure.

During the course of the next couple of weeks, Officers will prepare a more detailed briefing paper on this scheme, setting out the mechanics of the scheme so that we can have a full informed debate at our next Council meeting on these proposals. We shall be asking the Council

- to approve the important step of applying for the authority to enforce the regulations through decriminalisation arrangements,
- to approve the introduction of a £5 clock card system in certain car parks, and for those who do not wish to purchase the clock, to provide for parking fees on a scale equivalent to 50p per hour
- and that within those guidelines Officers consult with individual Town and Village Parish Councils on the finer detail relating to the number of short stay places, long stay places, duration of short stay places, car park layout, free time ,charged periods and so on, where applicable

We shall also be discussing with them whatever particular special arrangements they would like us to include in the first stage within the car parks, and in the later stage on the streets surrounding the car parks.

I hope that all concerned can see that the entire thrust of this approach is that it is the management of parking which is dominating our thinking and not the underlying collection of fees. Fee collection is an integral part of the system and it has to be in order to manage the time that each car occupies a space for without it being an additional cost to the council taxpayer. Similarly, when we employ Car Parking Wardens, fines and penalties are necessary in order to help pay for the enforcement, otherwise that enforcement also becomes a charge on the Council Taxpayer instead of the transgressor. But I hope we shall never become like some Councils who are dominated by the need to increase fee income.

On the assumption that we have met most of the requirements arising from the consultation period, I believe that Council will give its approval to these broad principles. This will enable us to then ask the Economy and Planning Review Panel to work on the detail of the scheme with Officers, and Town and Village Parishes. Advertising would then need to take place for objections, and after that statutory process is over, we would commence with the sale of the clocks from New Forest District Council Information Centres. Therefore, implementation of the first stage is many months away but although the process may seem slow, it is more important to us that it should be sure, as we do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past. We would also like the Panel and the Officers to look at the possibilities relating to multiple user purchase. By that I mean that there could well be room for discounts for the purchases of clocks and permits applicable to the so-called Amenity car parks. A package purchase could be available which reduces the overall costs of individual components.

We need to talk to the Forestry Commission and HCC about such things as who enforces verge parking regulation, how best to zone areas so that the forest is protected without unsightly signs, and the like. As I have said before, the opportunity exists here for an integrated, joined up, enforceable management plan which allows tourists freedom but not at the residents' inconvenience, or local traders expense.

Therefore, we are proposing to Council the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Officers be requested to:
 - (a) begin discussions with Hampshire County Council on the decriminalisation of on-street parking and undertaking local enforcement, and take appropriate steps to pursue this matter subject to reference back of details;

- (b) hold discussions with the Forestry Commission to enable liaison between the Commission and the Council on car parking issues;
- 2. A scheme for parking in Council owned car parks (based on a clock system charged at £5 per annum including the option of meter charging at a rate equivalent to approximately £0.50p per hour) be introduced following full consultation with Town and Parish Councils;
- 3. That the Economy and Planning Review Panel be requested to consider the details of a future scheme for traffic management, for subsequent recommendation to the Cabinet, and Council if appropriate.

Conclusion

As I have said, we shall have a full debate on these proposals and , no doubt, on alternatives and modifications that members may have in mind, at a full council meeting on the 24th February. Therefore, I do not propose to debate any of these matters this morning but I am happy to take questions arising from my statement from anyone in the Chamber, be it a member of the public, press, or member of the Council.