

7 JANUARY 2004

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 7 January 2004.

p Cllr M J Kendal (Chairman)
p Cllr B Rickman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

p G C Beck
p P C Greenfield
p J D Heron

Councillors:

p Mrs M D Holding
p M H Thierry
e C A Wise

In Attendance:

Councillors:

C Baker
F R Harrison
Mrs M Humber
R J Neath
Mrs S I Snowden
G J Parkes

Councillors:

B M F Pemberton
Mrs M J Robinson
Mrs B Smith
G M Walmsley
P R Woods

Also In Attendance:

Mrs P White and Mr A Dougherty, Tenants' Representatives.

Officers Attending:

D Yates, N Gibbs, C Malyon, J Mascall, D Atwill, Ms J Bateman and Miss G O'Rourke and for part of the meeting M Devine, K Green, Mrs P Higgins and K Smith.

93. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2003, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

94. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllrs Humber and Rickman declared interests in Minute 99.

95. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

96. PRUDENTIAL CODE OF BORROWING (REPORT A).

The Cabinet considered new legislation that would permit the Council to decide the level of borrowing year on year for capital investment. The principle of the new system would allow the Council to be free to invest so long as its spending plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable.

Members asked for clarification of the arrangements for subsequent borrowing powers if the Council were to become debt free. It was noted that if the Council were debt free then it would be unlikely that it would need to borrow in the short term as the capital programme was already fully funded. However clarification was to be sought on whether further borrowings would be permitted should such circumstances arise in the future.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the introduction of the proposed Capital Finance and Accounting Regulations be noted;
- (b) That the potential impact on the future resources available to the Council to finance capital expenditure be noted;
- (c) That the Prudential Code for Capital Finance, as outlined in Appendix 1 to report A be adopted; and
- (d) That agreement in principle be given to pursuing becoming debt-free by 31st March 2004 but this be subject to a further report in February when the final Regulations have been published.

97. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT ESTIMATES FOR 2004/2005 (REPORT B).

The Cabinet considered the draft Housing Revenue Account for 2004/2005 together with the anticipated impact of the draft 2004/2005 Subsidy Determination on the Council's 2004/2005 HRA estimates.

Mrs White, Tenant representative, said that the Tenants were pleased that the Environmental Enhancements budget had been reinstated for 2004/2005 but this did not compensate for not being able to undertake works in the previous year. It was also difficult to plan a programme of work when the budget situation was so uncertain.

The Housing Portfolio Holder agreed that it was difficult to plan in those circumstances. Housing funding had, generally, been significantly changed by the Government and the financial situation was still uncertain. The Portfolio Holder said that consideration would be given to all schemes that the Tenants came forward with but the emphasis for housing funding in the coming year had to focus on achieving the Decent Homes Standard within the prescribed timescales.

It was agreed that the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel be asked to look at the financial implications of undertaking the environmental enhancement work, the effect on reserves and the capacity to complete schemes.

The Cabinet noted that clarification of the new formula and notification of the Draft 2004/2005 Subsidy determination was still awaited and until these were available firm recommendations on increases in rents for Council dwellings could not be made.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the bases for preparation of the final 2004/05 estimate as outlined Report B to the Cabinet be agreed;
- (b) That, subject to the comments of the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel the following increases be proposed:-
 - Service charges in line with the detailed proposals in section 2 of report B (4.2% for hostels and 3.60% for sheltered housing);
 - 20p per week in garage rents (plus VAT for garages let to non-council tenants).
- (c) That rents for Council dwellings, in line with the rent restructuring guidelines, be considered in the light of revised figures that will be available at the Review Panel meeting;
- (d) That expenditure proposals outlined in section 5 of report B to the Cabinet be included in the 2004/05 HRA estimate; and
- (e) That the reporting process proposed and outlined in paragraph 2.3 of report B to the Cabinet be agreed.

98. HOUSING CAPITAL ESTIMATES 2004/2005 (REPORT C).

The Cabinet considered the Housing Portfolio's draft capital estimates for 2004/05.

The Housing Portfolio Holder reminded members that the level of resources to be allocated to the New Forest by the Regional Housing Board was still unknown. Once this information was available it might be necessary to review the level of the Council's financial capital investment.

It was noted that it was anticipated that the level of spending on Disabled Facilities Grants would reduce following a drop in demand. Some of this work was now being funded via the new loans system and repayment of those loans would also produce income.

RESOLVED:

That the capital estimates as set out in Appendix 3 of Report C to the Cabinet be approved, subject to any amendments that may be required once details of the Regional Housing Board allocations have been announced and once the Council's capital financing strategy has been determined.

99. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2004/2005 (REPORT D).

Cllrs Humber and Rickman declared personal and prejudicial interests in this matter as Beach Hut owners. During discussion of this aspect of the report both members left the meeting.

The Cabinet considered the latest forecast for the General Fund Revenue budget and Capital Programme for 2004/2005. Members commented on a number of specific issues and noted that VAT would be added to the assignment fee for beach huts.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, subject to it being noted that VAT would be added to the Assignment Fee for Beach Huts, the amendments to the Expenditure Plan revenue proposals contained in Appendix 2 to Report D, be agreed; and
- (b) That officers be required to identify further savings, for the meeting of the Cabinet in February.

100. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF RECREATION DEVELOPMENT (REPORT E).

The Cabinet considered the best value review of Recreation Development. Members noted the issues involved in running the service within the Council's corporate aims and the difficulty that then arose in comparing the service with the private sector.

Members commended officers for the breadth of work that was undertaken within Recreation Development and the strong community involvement that they achieved.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Improvement Plan for the Recreation Development Best Value Review package, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report E be approved;
- (b) That those actions not requiring additional resources be implemented in accordance with the timetable; and
- (c) That those actions requiring additional resources be considered during the budgetary cycle process.

101. CHANGING LIVES DRAFT COMMUNITY STRATEGY (REPORT F).

The Cabinet considered the 'Changing Lives Draft Community Strategy'. Many agencies in the New Forest had contributed to the Strategy and members agreed that it contained good ideas that could make a real difference to people in the district.

The Strategy was still developing and members agreed some minor amendments to the document that would be open to consultation until the end of March 2004.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to any further minor drafting amendments, and to the Leader and the Chief Executive approving the final Executive Summary, the Draft Community Strategy be approved.

102. KEYHAVEN AND COAST BEST VALUE REVIEW (REPORT G).

The Cabinet considered the best value review of Keyhaven and the coast.

Members noted that there was strong support from stakeholders for the Council to continue with its role in delivering these services. There were no findings arising from any activities undertaken in the review to counter this.

It was clear that, whilst the Council clearly had a financial interest in the management of these services, there was a recognition of the key role that the Council played in providing an independent balance of all influences on these sites.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Action plan for continuous improvement of the Keyhaven and Coast service as set out in Appendix 1 to report G be approved;
- (b) That those actions not requiring additional resources be implemented in accordance with the timetable; and

- (c) That those actions requiring additional resources be considered during the budgetary cycle process.

103. NEW FOREST TRANSPORT STRATEGY (REPORT H).

Following full consultation HCC had adopted the revised New Forest Transport Strategy. Members discussed a number of minor points that could be addressed in future revisions to the document but supported the current Strategy as detailed.

RESOLVED:

That the revised New Forest Transportation Strategy be adopted.

104. PROPOSED NEW NATIONAL PARK : APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO SERVE ON THE JOINT LOCAL AUTHORITIES MEMBERS' STEERING GROUP (REPORT I).

In considering the response of the Economy and Planning Review Panel, the Chairman welcomed the provision of the 'Call In' procedures in the Council's Constitution as this gave the relevant Portfolio Holder an opportunity to look in more detail at a specific point at issue. In this instance the Cabinet agreed that, once the terms of reference of the Steering Group and its role became clear, they would look again at the membership. However, in the meantime they reaffirmed their previous decision in terms of membership.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet reaffirms their previous decision in relation the appointment of members to serve on the Joint Local Authorities Members' Steering Group.

105. NEW FOREST TOURISM ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Neath be appointed as the deputy representative of the New Forest Tourism Association.

106. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003 - IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL TAX (REPORT J).

The Local Government Act 2003 enabled local authorities to reduce the council tax discount on second homes and long-term empty properties and to introduce local discounts and exemptions.

Following a meeting with HCC and other district councils interested in pursuing the discretion, agreement in principle was reached, that the additional resources raised as a result of reducing the discount on council tax on second homes, should remain at district level. NFDC had approximately 1500 second homes and that far outweighed the number in any other district in Hampshire. This amount of second homes would have had a clear impact on house prices and the purchasing ability of local people.

The Chairman said that the intention was to use the additional resources to fund affordable housing and key worker housing in the district. Members also agreed that they would like to see the Police using their portion of the additional resources to fund Community Safety wardens in the district, specifically in the Hythe/Dibden and New Milton areas, and that officers should approach the Police Authority with this specific request.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the level of the Council Tax discount on second homes be amended to 10%;
- (b) That the additional resources be combined with those of the County Council, the Fire and Police Authorities to be utilised on Affordable and Key Worker Housing within the District;
- (c) That the Police authority be approached with a view to utilising their aspect of the monies to provide Community Safety Wardens in the Hythe/Dibden and New Milton areas of the district; and
- (d) That discussions be held with Town and Parish Councils to clarify the position in relation to their precepts.

CHAIRMAN