

4 FEBRUARY 2004

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 4 February 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
- p C A Wise

In Attendance:

Councillors:

C Baker
F R Harrison
Mrs M Humber
R J Neath
B M F Pemberton

Councillors:

Mrs M J Robinson
D N Scott
Mrs S I Snowden
P R Woods

Also In Attendance:

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

Officers Attending:

D Yates, N Gibbs, C Malyon, J Mascall, D Atwill, Ms J Bateman, D Brown, K Green and Miss G O'Rourke.

106. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2004, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllr Harrison declared an interest in Minute 112.

108. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

109. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA) (REPORT A).

The Cabinet noted with pleasure the results of the Council's first Comprehensive Performance Assessment that had resulted in the Council being rated as one of the best local authorities in the whole country. The Council's outstanding score of 'excellent' and 'improving' followed a visit from Audit Commission inspectors who looked at every aspect of the Council's functions but especially at the three key issues of quality of services provided; corporate and management effectiveness and capacity to improve.

The Chairman read out a letter he had written to the Chief Executive to congratulate him on the result. The letter said that this result was a testament to the dedication, hard work and commitment of all the people who worked for NFDC. The Chief Executive responded and said that everyone who worked for the Council, the politicians and all the Council's partners had had a part to play in the outstanding result.

The Chairman said that CPA was an ongoing process and the Council would be rated again in the future. The Council had an improvement plan that set challenges that would not be easy to meet without additional resources.

Members agreed that there were still areas of work where a more robust approach was needed. However, they did express some surprise at the comments in the Assessment in relation to the uncertain focus of Council's Youth Strategy. Members said that whilst the youth service as such was a County Council function the District Council played a major supporting role.

Youth was a major aspect of the Community Strategy. A Children's and Young Persons Strategy was planned to coordinate work with young people. The Council also ran a Young People's Panel along similar lines to the Citizens' Panel. 2004 was planned as the Year of Youth with the Council hosting a number of events. Town and parish councils also provided excellent facilities for youth.

The Chairman said that the CPA had praised the Council's strong leadership of the community; the excellent public services it provided, the high quality environment it maintained and the provision of a housing service with user satisfaction amongst the best nationally. The Council's priorities were clear and were based on extensive consultations with the community, partners and government. The Leader and the Chief Executive had a very good working relationship and councillors, managers and employees were pleased to serve New Forest.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of the CPA Report be noted; and

- (b) That a report be made to a future meeting on the further development of the Council's Improvement Plan.

110. CAPITAL FINANCE IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES (REPORT B).

The Cabinet at their meeting on 7 January 2004 agreed, in principle, that the Council should seek to become debt free by 31 March 2004. The Cabinet had now received clarification of some of the outstanding technical issues that might have influenced that decision.

The Director of Resources confirmed that there was no provision in the current new regulations that would restrict the Council from borrowing in the future, after they became debt free, should they wish to do so.

Members also noted that in future, to maintain a debt free position, the DEFRA grant aided Coast Protection Programme of Works would need to be funded from reserves rather than by means of a Supplementary Credit Approval.

The Finance and Support Portfolio Holder confirmed his support for the Council becoming debt free.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the current advice on the Council's future ability to borrow to meet capital expenditure be noted; and
- (b) That the Council pursue becoming debt-free by 31 March 2004.

111. FAWLEY : PROVISION OF SKATEBOARD FACILITY (REPORT C).

The Cabinet considered a request from Fawley Parish Council for an allocation from developers' contribution towards the funding of a skatepark.

RESOLVED:

That a sum of £12,120 be allocated from developers' contributions to enable the construction of a skatepark facility at Gang Warily, Fawley and that the funds be released on the letting of the scheme.

112. WEST TOTTON CENTRE EXTENSION (REPORT D).

Cllr F.R. Harrison declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this matter as a member of Totton and Eling Town Council. He left the meeting during discussion of this item.

The Cabinet considered a request from Totton and Eling Town Council for a contribution towards the funding of a feasibility study into the extension of West Totton Centre, using developers' contributions.

RESOLVED:

That a sum of £10,000 be allocated from developers' contributions to enable the completion of a feasibility study into an extension to the West Totton Centre.

113. FINANCIAL MONITORING APRIL – NOVEMBER 2003 (REPORT E).

The Cabinet considered the forecast budget variations of all portfolios and committees from the approved original estimates for 2003/2004. Members noted that officers continued to monitor budgets carefully with a view to maintaining the projected under-spending.

RECOMMENDED:

That the following supplementary estimates be approved:

- ***£22,000 increase in costs for Stillwater Park***
- ***£160,000 increase in Leisure budgets***

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the revised General Fund budget as set out in Appendix 1 to Report E to the Cabinet be approved;
- (b) That the revised capital expenditure as set out in Appendix 2 to Report E to the Cabinet be approved;
- (c) That the revised Housing Revenue Account as set out in Appendix 3 to Report E to the Cabinet be approved;
- (d) That the financial position of Commercial Services as set out in Paragraph 5 of report E to the Cabinet be noted; and
- (e) That the actual expenditure to profiled budget positions of the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account as set out in Appendices 1 and 3 of Report E to the Cabinet be noted.

114. HOUSING STOCK OPTIONS REVIEW – STOCK CONDITION SURVEY (REPORT F).

The Cabinet considered a request to waive Standing Orders to appoint specialist consultants to enable a stock condition survey to be completed quickly to inform the stock options review.

The Housing Portfolio Holder said that the stock options review was a very important matter for the Council, and he therefore supported the need to obtain sound information on which to base future decisions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That a waiver of the Council's Standing Orders in relation to Contracts be agreed on the grounds of urgency and due to the specialised nature of the work involved;
- (b) That Ridge and Partners be appointed as lead surveying consultants at a cost of £15,000 to commission, supervise and interpret the results of a stock condition survey; and
- (c) That tenders from a minimum of two firms of surveyors, recommended by Ridge and Partners, be sought to carry out the stock condition survey.

115. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT ESTIMATES FOR 2004/2005 - UPDATE (REPORT G).

The Cabinet considered the updated draft Housing Revenue Account showing the variations from the previous report considered at the meeting on 7 January 2004.

In addition to the comments detailed in report G, the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel had expressed the view that the increase in service charges for hostels originally proposed at 4.2 % should be limited to a 3% increase. The Cabinet noted that the Council's policy was to recover costs from the users of a service however, they agreed that it would be appropriate in the circumstances to limit this particular increase as suggested.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That an increase of 3.47% (average) in rents for Council dwellings, in line with the rent restructuring guidelines be approved;***
- (b) ***That the increase in service charges for hostels originally proposed at 4.2 % be limited to a 3% increase;***
- (c) ***That an increase of 3.6% in Service Charges for Sheltered Housing be approved;***
- (d) ***That an increase of 20p per week in garage rents (plus VAT for garages let to non-Council tenants) be approved; and***

- (e) *That the updated Housing Revenue Account budget set out in Appendix 1 to Report G to the Cabinet and as amended by (b) above be approved.*

RESOLVED:

That the updated Housing Revenue Account and variations be noted.

116. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2004/2005 (REPORT H).

The Cabinet considered the General Fund revenue budget and capital programmes for the financial year 2004/2005.

Members noted that the final Revenue Support Grant had been received and had only increased by £1,700. Appendix 1 to report H had been amended to include that amount in the capital finance provision.

The Finance and Support Portfolio Holder thanked officers for their hard work in preparing the budget and Review Panels for their input into the process. He said that every year the Council were improving their approach to planning and control of the budget and the key priorities and plans were clear. However, the Portfolio Holder said that again, this year, the central government grant was insufficient and that NFDC had received only 0.5% equivalent rather than the 3% promised.

In supporting the proposals the Portfolio Holder drew members' attention to the following four specific issues:

- (1) The additional income from second homes had been set aside essentially for the future provision of affordable homes;
- (2) The budget had been drawn up on the assumption that the Council would achieve debt free status;
- (3) £246,000 had been set aside for future capital expenditure; and
- (4) The budget assumed a greater planning development grant than last year and whilst the final figure would not be known for a few weeks, it would not require any further changes.

In considering the issues the Cabinet agreed that, subject to consultation with the residents at Stillwater Park, the site licence fees and service charges should be increased by a further 1% to 3.5% and the capital finance provision would be adjusted accordingly.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That the additional expenditure plan bids as detailed in paragraph 5 of Report H to the Cabinet on 4 February 2004 be approved;*

- (b) *That the General Fund budget for 2004/05 be set at £18.658m;*
- (c) *That the Council tax be agreed at £130.94 for a Band D property for 2004/05;*
- (d) *That, subject to consultation with the residents, the site licence fees and service charges at Stillwater Park be increased by 3.5%;*
- (e) *That the General Fund Capital Programme for 2004/05 be agreed as £4.193m; and*
- (f) *That the Capital Programme for Housing for 2004/05 be set at £6.850m.*

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments of Committees and Review Panels outlined in Report H to the Cabinet be noted; and
- (b) That the additional expenditure plan bids detailed in Section 5 of Report H to the Cabinet be approved.

117. RESTRUCTURING OF SERVICE CHARGES IN SHELTERED HOUSING (REPORT I).

The Cabinet considered proposals for the restructuring of the service charges payable by sheltered housing tenants.

The Housing Portfolio Holder said that there was an imbalance in the way in which charges were currently applied and that the charges did not always reflect the services that were received. The revised structure would result in a fairer distribution of costs between residents.

RESOLVED:

That, with effect from 5 April 2004 and subject to the views of Hampshire County Council:

- (i) Phasing-in begins of a revised service charge structure for sheltered housing, as outlined in Report I to the Cabinet;
- (ii) The combined rent and service charge payable by any tenant should not vary annually by more than inflation +/- £2 per week;
- (iii) An implementation period of 3 years is set for the phasing-in of revised service charges; and

- (iv) To ensure continued fairness of service charges across all schemes, the charging structure should in future be reviewed annually as part of the budgetary review process.

118. TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY (REPORT J).

The Cabinet considered a strategy intended to guide the Council and Housing Landlord services on ways to inform, consult and involve tenants in the development, review and monitoring of services that were provided to them. Members noted that the document built on the current strategy that helped the Council and tenants to work together to achieve aims.

The Housing Portfolio Holder supported the revised strategy and said it was an excellent opportunity for tenants to become more involved in the decision making process.

Mr Dougherty, Tenant representative, also supported the strategy but said that the Tenants Consultative Group still had concerns relating to anti social behaviour and the need for tenants to be involved more closely with the Council in addressing those issues. It was acknowledged that the first point of reference, when an incident occurred, was the Area Housing Officer and to involve tenants at an early stage might raise data protection issues. However, it was agreed that a conference should be organised to enable all parties to discuss the best way to deal with the anti social behaviour issues and the roles that each group could play.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategy for Tenant Participation be approved.

119. NEW COUNTY TRANSPORT PANELS AND REVISED HIGHWAY MANAGEMENT ADVISORY PANELS (REPORT K).

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cllrs Fidler, Shand, D N Scott and Wyeth be appointed as this Council's representatives on the New Forest Transport Panel; and
- (b) That Cllrs F R Harrison and Neath be appointed as this Council's representatives on the Solent Transport Panel.

CHAIRMAN

(DEMOCRAT/CB040204/MINUTES WITHOUT ACTION.DOC)