

1 FEBRUARY 2006

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday 1 February 2006.

- 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
Mrs J L Cleary
D E Cracknell
L T Dunsdon
Ms L C Ford
F R Harrison
Mrs M Humber

Councillors:

R J Neath
Sqn Ldr B M F Pemberton
L R Puttock
Mrs M J Robinson
D N Scott
Mrs S I Snowden
C R Treleaven

Also In Attendance:

Mrs P White, Tenants' Representatives.

Officers Attending:

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

97. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2006, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Minute No. 90 – 4th Paragraph – rewording of Portfolio Holder's comments to read:

"The Finance and Support Portfolio Holder said that he was sorry that the National Park Authority had not joined in partnership with the Council on the planning function. Such a partnership would have saved the taxpayer money both nationally

and locally. Even with relatively low levels of inflation the Council had to find an additional £1m each year to balance the budget simply to stand still. Whilst the Portfolio Holder was pleased at the 4.7% increase in Revenue Support Grant he reiterated that there was still a shortfall in grant level as a result of previous low settlements.”

98. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllr Kendal declared an interest in Minute No.100

Cllrs Cracknell and Thierry declared interests in Minute Nos. 103, 105, 106, 107 and 108.

99. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

100. DISTRICT OWNED STREET LIGHTING – PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE BID (REPORT A).

Cllr Kendal declared a personal interest as a member of Hampshire County Council. He did not consider his interest to be prejudicial. He remained at the meeting, took part in the discussion and voted.

The Cabinet considered the implications of participating in an HCC Private Finance Initiative bid to improve the condition and effectiveness of highway lighting. Members considered the advantages and disadvantages of joining such an initiative but felt that, in view of the tight timescale, there was insufficient time and information to evaluate the options and they could not make a binding decision at the current time.

Members felt it was important to retain local control over the standard of lighting. A PFI contract may reduce lighting options and choices in sensitive areas. Lighting in district owned car parks would not be included and members felt that it might be more appropriate for NFDC to independently pursue one contract that covered all lighting within the district.

The Cabinet agreed that HCC be informed of the Council’s interest but that they wished to retain the ability to withdraw following further investigation. The Cabinet also asked that the Economy and Planning Review Panel consider any further detailed technical reports and make recommendations back to them as appropriate.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That HCC be informed of the Council's interest in participating in the PFI bid but not if it involves making an irrevocable decision before more information is available;

- (b) That subject to (i) above being acceptable to HCC then NFDC proceeds on the basis that it seeks to include its street lights in the larger settlements (including Totton, Marchwood, Hythe, Dibden Purlieu, Holbury, Fawley, Blackfield, Lymington, Pennington, Hordle, Milford-on-Sea, Ashley, New Milton, Barton-on-Sea, Ringwood and Fordingbridge) in the PFI bid;
- (c) That NFDC Officers identify the options for procuring the maintenance of, and electricity for, its street lights etc (including all those in the National Park, car park lighting and other “non-highway” lighting) that will not be included in any PFI and report their conclusions to the Portfolio Holder;
- (d) That NFDC officers instigate discussions with HCC officers with the aim of identifying any NFDC owned lights that should be re-designated as Highway Lighting (for which HCC would then become responsible);
- (e) That HCC be informed that the Council is concerned about the implications of additional and/or taller street lights on sensitive areas such as the National Park and Conservation areas and urges HCC to ensure that any PFI partner is not given a free hand to decide the extent and type of replacement lighting installed and that appropriate consultations are undertaken; and
- (f) That HCC be informed that the Council is concerned about the road safety implications if the PFI proposal results in inconsistent standards of lighting within the same settlement.

101. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2006/07 REPORT (REPORT B).

The Cabinet considered a strategy for the treasury function of the Council for 2006/07. Members noted the detail of the financing of the Capital expenditure for 2006/07 and the borrowing and investment of funds.

The Strategy gave the Council the option to undertake prudent borrowing if required. Members noted that this might be financially advantageous to the Council in the light of the current low interest rates.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That the prudential indicators at appendix 1 to Report B to the Cabinet be approved;***
- (b) ***That the treasury management strategy and the treasury prudential indicators at appendix 2 to Report B to the Cabinet be approved; and***
- (c) ***That the treasury strategy for 2006/07 as set out in Report B to the Cabinet be approved.***

102. FINANCIAL REPORT – FORECAST FULL YEAR AND ACTUAL FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2005 TO DECEMBER 2005 (REPORT C).

The Cabinet considered the forecast budget variations of all portfolios and committees from the approved original estimates for 2005/06.

RECOMMENDED:

That the following supplementary estimates be approved:

- *An additional £17,000 in respect of Refuse Collection (Special Collections – see Appendix 7 of Report C to the Cabinet)*
- *£128,000 in respect of the Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre Refurbishment project (see Appendix 4 of Report C to the Cabinet)*
- *£31,000 in respect of Health and Safety Compliance expenditure (see Appendix 6 of Report C to the Cabinet)*
- *An additional £18,000 in respect of Stopples Lane (see Appendix 5 of Report C to the Cabinet)*

RESOLVED:

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

103. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT ESTIMATES 2006/07 (REPORT D).

Cllrs Cracknell and Thierry declared personal and prejudicial interests in this item as they both rented Council owned garages. They left the meeting during discussion of that particular aspect of the report. Cllr Thierry did not vote. (Cllr Cracknell did not have a vote).

The Cabinet considered the updated Housing Revenue Account estimates with the details of the most recent variations.

The Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel had again considered the issue of garage rents. They now proposed that the increase be phased in over a 3-year period, reducing the increase in 2006/07 from 50% to 20% with the remainder of the increase being phased in over the following two-year period, subject to a review of the effect on demand and an analysis of other potential changes in the HRA budget situation. As a result that would reduce the anticipated income for 2006/07 by £144,000, which would be met by adjusting the allocation to the HRA major repairs reserve. Mrs White, the Tenants' representative said that the Tenants were appreciative of the opportunity to phase in the increase.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That an average increase of 4.3% in rents for 2006/07; in line with rent restructuring guidelines be approved;**
- (b) That an increase of 96p per week in garage rents (plus VAT for garages let to non-council tenants) be approved;**
- (c) That the allocation of the revised surplus amount of £128,000 to the Major Repairs Reserve be approved; and**
- (d) That the updated budget as set out in the amended Appendix 1 as circulated to the Cabinet at their meeting on 1 February 2006 be approved.**

104. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2006/07 (REPORT E).

The Cabinet considered the draft General Fund revenue and capital budgets for the financial year 2006/07.

The Finance and Support Portfolio Holder expressed his thanks to the Director of Resources and other officers for their hard work in the preparation of the budget within tight timescales.

The Cabinet noted that the final Revenue Support Grant figure was £6,000 lower than anticipated. This was not a significant amount and the Cabinet agreed that the budget provision of £120,000 proposed within the contingency fund for Electoral Services and the Disability Discrimination Act be reduced by £6,000 to £114,000. The exact budgetary requirements for those areas were as yet unknown. That funding would be reviewed later in the year in the light of operational changes and costing of works to ensure an appropriate level of resource.

The Chairman also expressed his thanks to officers and to all the Review Panel and Committee members who had worked on refining the final budget allocations. Members noted that there had been a net growth in the General Fund Revenue budget in 2006/07 of 8.05%. The increase was largely due to an increase in spending on concessionary travel, however, that was balanced by grant funding.

The Chairman said that the Council would be recommended to agree a 2.75% increase in council tax. If any further minor changes were required they would be contained within the overall recommended budget.

Members considered the comments from Review Panels and Committees. In discussing the proposal from the Economy and Planning Review Panel, the Cabinet agreed that additional funding to provide extra staffing resources to assist with pre-planning application advice to potential applicants was necessary. The Cabinet did not however agree that charges should be introduced for this advice to mitigate part of the cost of the service. Once the National Park joint planning arrangements were fully implemented funding might be released that could be redirected to cover this service.

In terms of income, members noted that less long-term parking clocks had been sold than was originally envisaged. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group expressed some concern that this might indicate that less people were using local facilities, which might have implications for local businesses. She also expressed concern at increased levels of parking in side roads as a result.

Members noted that it was still very early in the process to draw any firm conclusions. Additional car park wardens had been employed and would enforce parking restrictions in side roads.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That the General Fund budget for 2006/07 be set at £21.009m;***
- (b) ***That the Council tax be agreed at £140.99 for a Band D property for 2006/07;***
- (c) ***That the site licence fees and service charges at Stillwater Park be increased by 3.0%; and***
- (d) ***That the Capital Programme for 2006/07 be agreed as £13.385m.***

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, following consideration of the views expressed by Committees and Review Panels and taking into account the reduction in grant settlement of £6,000, the additional expenditure plan items listed in Section 5 of Report E to the Cabinet be approved, subject to the budgetary provision within the Contingency Fund of £120,000 for Electoral Services and Disability Discrimination Act being reduced to £114,000.

105. BROOKS CLOSE, RINGWOOD – DISPOSAL OF LAND (REPORT F).

Cllrs Cracknell and Thierry declared personal interests in that they both rented Council owned garages (not on this site). They did not consider their interests to be prejudicial and remained at the meeting, took part in the discussion and voted. (Cllr Cracknell did not have a vote)

The Cabinet considered the disposal of land at Brooks Close, Ringwood to Swaythling Housing Society (SHS) to enable the development of 2 affordable homes for rent to applicants from the Council's Homesearch register.

The Housing Portfolio Holder said that this proposal, together with the following three on the Cabinet agenda, were part of a policy to provide additional affordable housing in the west of the district. Development land in that part of the district was scarce and expensive and therefore Council owned garage sites were being evaluated for their development potential. Funding from the Housing Corporation provided the resources to take the projects forward. The land would be transferred to a Housing Society at a nominal cost of £1 with covenants written into the land transfer to restrict the use to affordable housing.

Cllr Cracknell addressed the Cabinet as a local member. He opposed the development. He was of the view that Ringwood was overcrowded. This area of land, whilst not designated as public open space, was used as 'amenity space' and the loss would be detrimental to the area. Cllr Ford also spoke as a local member and expressed similar concerns.

The Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder spoke as a local member. He accepted that there would be a loss of 'amenity space' but said that that had to be balanced against the housing need in the area. The Environment Portfolio Holder, also a local member, supported the proposal in view of the housing need in the area.

The Cabinet noted that planning permission for 2 homes on the site had been granted in September 2005 and full consultation had taken place through the planning process.

Other members spoke for and against the proposal and discussed balancing the need for affordable housing in the area, against the effects on the quality of life of the current residents.

RECOMMENDED:

That the land between nos 6 & 8 and 19 & 20 Brooks Close, Ringwood, as outlined in Appendix 1 to Report F to the Cabinet, be transferred leasehold to Swaythling Housing Society (SHS) at a nominal cost of £1, the transfer being subject to the planning consent that has already been granted to SHS to develop the site for affordable housing.

106. OLD BARN CLOSE, RINGWOOD – DISPOSAL OF LAND (REPORT G).

Cllrs Cracknell and Thierry declared personal interests in that they both rented Council owned garages (not on this site). They did not consider their interests to be prejudicial and remained at the meeting, took part in the discussion and voted. (Cllr Cracknell did not have a vote)

The Cabinet considered the disposal of land at Old Barn Close, Ringwood to Hampshire Voluntary Housing Society (HVHS) to enable the development of 2 affordable homes for rent to applicants from the Council's Homesearch register.

Cllr Cracknell addressed the Cabinet as a local member. He expressed concern and said that the Town Council were not in favour of the disposal of this area of land for housing.

Mrs White, Tenants' Representative expressed some concern over the loss of garage parking that would result from this proposal, and other similar proposals elsewhere on the agenda. She fully accepted the need for more affordable housing but said that the policy of selling garage sites to provide housing, needed to be balanced against problems that might result from additional cars parked on the highway.

The Cabinet noted that HCC, in conjunction with HVHS, had undertaken a parking survey and had advised on the amount of parking re-provision that had to be provided. The Housing Portfolio Holder said that he understood the concerns raised relating to parking provision. Each individual site that came forward would be considered on its merits.

RECOMMENDED:

That the land at Old Barn Close, Ringwood (as outlined in Appendix 1 to Report G to the Cabinet) be transferred to Hampshire Voluntary Housing Society (HVHS) at a nominal cost of £1, the transfer being subject to planning consent being granted to HVHS to develop the site for affordable housing.

107. SPITTLEFIELDS, RINGWOOD – DISPOSAL OF LAND (REPORT H).

Cllrs Cracknell and Thierry declared personal interests in that they both rented Council owned garages (not on this site). They did not consider their interests to be prejudicial and remained at the meeting, took part in the discussion and voted. (Cllr Cracknell did not have a vote)

The Cabinet considered the disposal of land at Spittlefields, Ringwood to Hampshire Voluntary Housing Society (HVHS) to enable the development of 3 two-bedroom bungalows for affordable rent to applicants from the Council's Homesearch register.

RECOMMENDED:

That the land at Spittlefields, Ringwood (as outlined in Appendix 1 to Report H to the Cabinet) be transferred to Hampshire Voluntary Housing Society (HVHS) for a nominal cost of £1, the transfer being subject to planning consent being granted to HVHS to develop the site for affordable housing.

108. WAVERLEY CLOSE, FORDINGBRIDGE – DISPOSAL OF LAND (REPORT I).

Cllrs Cracknell and Thierry declared personal interests in that they both rented Council owned garages (not on this site). They did not consider their interests to be prejudicial and remained at the meeting, took part in the discussion and voted. (Cllr Cracknell did not have a vote)

The Cabinet considered the disposal of land at Waverley Close, Fordingbridge to Hampshire Voluntary Housing Society (HVHS) to enable the development of 1 two-bedroom bungalow for rent to an applicant from the Council's Homeseach register.

RECOMMENDED:

That the land at Waverley Close, Fordingbridge (as outlined in Appendix 1 to Report I to the Cabinet) be transferred leasehold to HVHS for a nominal cost of £1, the transfer being subject to the planning consent that has already been granted to HVHS to develop the site for affordable housing.

109. BLASHFORD LAKES STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN (REPORT J).

The Cabinet considered a Strategic Management Plan for Blashford Lakes for use as informal guidance to assist in the management of the lakes and the immediate environment and in the determination of planning applications within the study area. The Cabinet also considered proposed Terms of Reference for both the Blashford Lakes Consultative Forum and the Blashford Lakes Strategic Management Plan Steering Group.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Blashford Lakes Strategic Management Plan be approved and published for use as informal guidance to assist in the management of the lakes and in the determination of planning applications within the area; and
- (b) That the proposed Terms of Reference for the Blashford Lakes Consultative Forum and the Blashford Lakes Strategic Management Plan Steering Group as set out in Annex 1 to Report J to the Cabinet be approved.

CHAIRMAN

(DEMOCRAT/CB010206/MINUTES.DOC)