

2 JANUARY 2008

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 2 January 2008.

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

Councillors:

p G C Beck
p Mrs J L Cleary
p E J Heron

Councillors:

e Mrs M D Holding
p C R Treleaven
p C A Wise

In Attendance:

Councillors:

Ms L C Ford
D Harrison
Mrs A J Hoare
Sqn Ldr B M F Pemberton
L R Puttock
A W Rice TD
Mrs A M Rostand

Councillors:

A E J Shotter
Mrs B Smith
Mrs S I Snowden
A J Swain
M H Thierry
F P Vickers
R A Wappet

Officers Attending:

D Yates, J Mascal, Ms J Bateman, C Elliott, K Green and Mrs P Higgins and for part of the meeting D Brown.

75. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2007, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllrs Mrs Ford and Thierry declared interests in Minute no. 80.

77. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

78. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT ESTIMATES 2008/09 (REPORT A).

The Cabinet considered the draft Housing Revenue Account for 2008/09 together with the anticipated impact of the draft Subsidy Determination on the Council's 2008/09 HRA estimates.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That Service charges be increased in line with the detailed proposals as set out in Section 2 of Report A to the Cabinet; and**
- (b) That garage rents be increased by £0.69 per week (plus VAT for garages let to non-Council tenants).**

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the bases for preparation of the final 2008/09 estimate as outlined in Report A to the Cabinet be agreed;
- (b) That the current proposed rent increase be noted but agreement be deferred until the final report is considered by the Cabinet in February;
- (c) That an additional saving of £20,000 as set out in Section 4.3 of Report A to the Cabinet be incorporated into the budget; and
- (d) That the reporting process as outlined in paragraph 2.8 of Report A to the Cabinet be agreed.

79. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09 – 2010/11 (REPORT B).

Following their consideration of the budget in November and December, the Cabinet were updated on the work that had taken place since then, the provisional grant settlement and other proposals that would affect the General Fund budget.

The Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder said that once again the Council were expected to plan a budget without the required information from the Government. Final proposals for concessionary fares were still unknown and could place a huge burden on the council tax payer in the coming year. The Portfolio Holder asked review panels to carefully scrutinise the budget proposals again as there was still a shortfall of approximately £550,000.

Members noted that the Government grant for concessionary fares was £493,000. However, the reimbursement rate had not yet been agreed with bus operators and the amount of user take up would not be known until the end of the year. In view of this the Chairman indicated that the Council would be setting a budget without knowing the full extent of their commitments, and as a result the council tax increase might need to be in the region of 4½%. The Council might need to consider a number of budget reductions in areas such as Rural Assistance Grants; Accredited Community Support Officers (ACSO's); grants to voluntary bodies; sustainable tourism and the revenue contribution to capital.

The deputy leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said that whilst he was not happy with all the proposals for budget reductions, particularly in relation to ACSO's, his Group would work with the Cabinet to achieve a balanced budget.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Review Panels be asked to consider the proposals contained in Report B to the Cabinet and their comments be considered by the Cabinet in February before a final budget recommendation is made to Council;
- (b) That the amendments to the Expenditure Plan revenue proposals contained in Appendix 2 to Report B to the Cabinet be agreed subject to Review Panel comments and final budget considerations;
- (c) That the capital expenditure plan proposals contained in Appendix 3 of Report B to the Cabinet be agreed subject to Review Panel comments and final budget considerations; and
- (d) That the risk assessment and Section 25 Statement contained in Appendices 4 and 5 of Report B to the Cabinet be noted.

80. POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE FURLONG CAR PARK, RINGWOOD (REPORT C).

Cllr Mrs Ford declared a personal interest in this item as a member of Ringwood Town Council. She did not consider her interest to be prejudicial. She remained at the meeting and took part in the debate. She did not have a vote.

Cllr Thierry declared a personal interest as a business owner in Ringwood. He did not consider his interest to be prejudicial. He remained at the meeting and took part in the discussion. He did not have a vote.

The Cabinet considered development options for the south west corner of the Furlong Car Park in Ringwood. The Chairman said that following public consultation there was no clear consensus on a way forward. It was important that any decision that the Council took was based on the views of the people in Ringwood.

The Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder said that he had been part of the Steering Group considering the development options and had originally supported Option1, for a mixed development use on the site. However for a number of reasons he did not now feel that was the most appropriate way forward. He said that there appeared to be no overwhelming support from the people of Ringwood for Option 1. Nationally, there was increasing pessimism in the economy as a whole, particularly in the commercial property market and this combined with a rapid growth in internet shopping placed doubt on the future of traditional high street shopping. The Council's own budget was under increasing pressure and savings of £547,000 were still required for 2008/09. Taking all those points into account the Portfolio Holder said that he did not now consider the mixed use development option to be appropriate.

The Chairman then invited members of the public and others to address the Cabinet.

Mrs S Joy, a member of the public, said that, in her view, the construction and administration of the consultation process had been flawed. She said that the Furlong Car Park consultation document had been poorly distributed and undue weight given to Option1. There was no provision in the document for more than one person in a household to reply. Very little financial information had been available. In view of this Mrs Joy said that she undertook her own survey and found that 20 small high street traders had not received the consultation document and the Chamber of Trade had not consulted with its members on the issue.

Cllr Brian Terry, Mayor of Ringwood Town Council, said that 2 years ago the Town Council had carried out a Market Town Health check and the Council now had a draft Town Plan for the next 10-20 years. As part of that work, 2000 people responded to a consultation document 'Love It Hate It' and Cllr Terry said that Option 1 for a mixed use development scheme would have satisfied most of the points raised in that consultation. Government guidance on town planning said that town centres should be reinforced to make them more viable. Cllr Terry said that rejecting Option 1 out of hand would be detrimental to the future of the local economy.

Cllr Mrs A. Wiseman, Ringwood Town Councillor, said she concurred with the view that the Furlong Car Park consultation document had been poorly distributed. She felt that the responses to the Town Council consultation document 'Love It Hate It' were unclear. She said that of the 2000 responses, 1300 had been from children aged 11 – 13 and whilst it was important to take account of young peoples' views, the views of council tax payers and businesses should be informing the decision making process.

Mrs A Walker, a member of the public, said that in her view it was clear that the proposed development in the Furlong Car park was not appropriate however, that did not mean that local people did not want development at all. The old cinema site in Ringwood town centre could be redeveloped and would be beneficial to the town.

Mr D Daniels, a member of the public, described the current vehicle and pedestrian access from the Furlong car park and said that the Option 1 proposals would cut off the proposed new bus area and car park from the high street. He supported the redevelopment of the old cinema site as that would give continuity of access through the town.

Mrs A Riddell, a member of the public, did not support any development on the Furlong car park and questioned the Council's right to dispose of land she said had been left in a legacy to the town. She supported redevelopment of the old cinema area. She was of the view that there were a number of halls and venues for public and community use in Ringwood and no more were needed. Mrs Riddell said that Ringwood was a unique area and its future should not be governed by commercial pressures.

The Cabinet noted that the Furlong Car Park consultation document and process had been agreed by the Ringwood Town Centre Steering Group. Whilst the document had been distributed to the majority of residents and interested parties including the Chamber of Trade, it was never intended to have been a referendum or a parish poll.

The Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder confirmed that the legal position in relation to the status of the Furlong car park had been clarified and there were no difficulties in the Council disposing of any part of the site if that were decided.

The Chairman said the Council was pleased at the efforts made by the town council to produce a Town plan and hoped that work would continue. The district council wanted to help areas such as Ringwood, Totton and Hythe to improve but would only do this with the agreement and support of the local people. In the light of the consultation process and the comments made by residents in Ringwood he proposed that the Council should explore further a revised Option 4 to secure improved public toilets and a Visitor Information Centre. However, in the light of the possibility of the redevelopment of the old cinema site in the town, any refurbishment of areas of the Furlong Car Park should not prejudice any future options.

Local members also agreed that Option 1 should not be pursued.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That no further action be taken on Options 1, 2 or 3 as set out in Report C to them; and
- (b) That the Council explore further a revised Option 4 to secure improved public toilets and a Visitor Information Centre in Ringwood whilst not prejudicing other development options in the vicinity and that the Cabinet be kept apprised of emerging options.

81. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE TO PAY FOR AN AWARD OF COSTS IN AN APPEAL DECISION RELATING TO THE FORMER WEBBS FACTORY SITE, BRIDGE ROAD, LYMINGTON – URGENT DECISION BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE (REPORT D).

The Cabinet considered an urgent decision made by the Chief Executive to agree a supplementary estimate to enable an award of costs in an appeal decision to be made.

RESOLVED:

That, in accordance with Financial Regulation 2.4 it was noted that the Chief Executive has agreed a supplementary estimate in the sum of £30,246.86 to cover costs awarded against the Council in an Appeal Decision relating to the former Webbs Factory Site, Bridge Road, Lymington and that this decision would be reported to the next meeting of the Council.

CHAIRMAN