

## **REPORT OF POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**(Meeting held 10 December 1998)**

### **1. DISTRICT AUDITOR'S MANAGEMENT LETTER 1997/98 (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 77)**

The Committee has noted with pleasure the District Auditor's Management Letter and expressed appreciation to all employees for the Council's good standing. Specific references were made to early retirement, housing benefit fraud, contacts with the District Auditor and the establishment and use of a corporate database.

In respect of early retirement, the District Council's policies were in line with national standards.

The District Auditor would be keeping the situation regarding housing benefit fraud under review as part of the rolling programme of work.

Members noted they were at liberty to contact the District Auditor's Office by telephone or personal appointment to discuss aspects of the work of the District Auditor finally.

The use of the corporate database from the Economic Development Section for commercial aspects of the Council's work e.g. the trade refuse service was to be investigated.

### **2. RATE SUPPORT GRANT (RSG) AND STANDARD SPENDING ASSESSMENT (SSA) 1999/2000 (MINUTE NO. 78)**

The Committee received a verbal report from the Director of Finance and Administration on the proposed Local Government Revenue Finance settlement for 1999/2000 recently announced by the Government.

The overall 5.4% increase in total spending nationally will favour education and social services. However, future consideration will include reference to rural areas. Recently, the formula had appeared favour to urban areas.

So far as New Forest District is concerned, for the first time since 1995/96 the Council has received an increase in Standard Spending Assessment and a small grant increase. However, the SSA for 1999/2000 was £1m less than 1996/97, although the eligible population has increased by 4.1% (7,000).

### **3. FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF OTHER COMMITTEES (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 79)**

#### **(i) Swimming Pool Tiling and Ozone Filter Refurbishment – Ringwood Recreation Centre – Total Estimated Cost £74,000**

The Committee agreed the transfer of £20,000 funding in 1998/99 from the Applemore Music Centre Scheme for pool tiling and filter refurbishment works at Ringwood Recreation Centre and also to delete £40,000 from the 1999/2000 expenditure plans (the balance of the Applemore Scheme) A supplementary capital estimate of £54,000 in 1998/99 was also approved.

(ii) **Information Technology Strategy – Commercial Services**

The Committee approved expenditure of £56,500 from the New Forest Commercial Services Reserve Fund to finance an identified technology investment programme.

**4. HOUSING BENEFIT – VERIFICATION FRAMEWORK (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 82)**

The Committee has approved the commitment of additional expenditure in advance of formal approval of the Council's budget in February 1999, in respect of Central Services Committee's budget to take account of the "verification framework", a government initiative aimed at the detection and prevention of Housing Benefit fraud by claimants.

Adoption of the framework is currently voluntary only, but it is likely to become compulsory for all local authorities shortly.

**5. DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (REPORT G) (MINUTE NO. 84)**

The Committee has agreed to suspend public participation in respect of a special meeting of the Planning and Transportation Committee scheduled for 15 January 1999, as the purpose of the meeting is to consider modifications and approve the Inspectors proposed modifications for public consultation.

Once the proposed modifications have been published there will be a six week statutory public consultation period during which the public can comment on the proposals.

**6. CAR PARKING CHARGES – APPEAL AGAINST HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S REFUSAL TO APPROVE CHARGING IN CERTAIN TOWNS AND VILLAGES (REPORT H) (MINUTE NO. 86)**

The Committee noted that a decision from the Government Office for the South East against the decision of Hampshire County Council not to approve car park charging proposals in Hythe, Totton, Ringwood and Lyndhurst was anticipated shortly.

The following information was provided on income which had been raised by the charging regime since its inception: The original budget had been £150,845, based on income from car parking charges in ten towns and villages across the District. However, the actual income from five towns only had been £142,414. Some £71,216 had also been raised via the sale of permits. Thus, the income generated by the scheme (which was now in place which excluded five of the venues from the original proposals) was £213,630.

It had been estimated that the early adoption of the total scheme would have resulted in increased income to the Council of between £154,000 and £250,000. Members noted that the initial period of the new charging regime was to be reviewed in the spring of 1999.

**7. RELEASE OF CONSULTANT'S REPORT (REPORT I) (MINUTE NO. 88)**

The Committee adjudicated on a decision of the Managing Director to disallow a member access to a confidential report prepared for the Council by external consultants. The Managing Director's decision was upheld.

**8. NEW FOREST COMMITTEE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (REPORT K)  
(MINUTE NO. 90)**

The Environment Agency had been asked whether they wished to become a full member of the New Forest Committee. Having received an affirmative answer, the District Council has agreed to recommend to the membership that the necessary changes be made to the Memorandum of Agreement to include the Environment Agency as a full member.

This decision is subject to the agreement of the other constituent members of the New Forest Committee.

Councillor J E Coles  
C H A I R M A N

(Ctteemtg/cttee/pr101298/reports/report)