

CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

(Meeting Held 16 March 1999)

1. INDEPENDENT REPORT ON THE EASTER 1998 FLOODS (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 58).

The Committee has considered the conclusions of the independent report commissioned by the Board of the Environment Agency to evaluate the Agency's performance during the Easter 1998 floods. The report has also been considered by the Environmental Services and Licensing and Planning and Transportation Committees as certain aspects of the report affected the services under their control.

The Central Services Committee has confined itself to consideration of emergency response, which falls within this Committee's terms of reference.

The Committee has been pleased to note that the independent report concluded that, apart from specific weaknesses, which are being addressed, the Agency's policies, plans and operational arrangements are sound.

The Committee has noted that responsibility for flood warnings and flood defences is that of the Environment Agency, while assistance to persons flooded is provided by District Councils through their emergency planning processes.

The Environment Agency has adopted an action plan arising from the conclusions of the report. The issue of relevance to the Central Services Committee is that the Agency, with local authorities and emergency services, would assess their emergency response plans and arrange for regular testing through a programme of joint exercises. This Council has a sound and tested emergency planning procedure in existence. The Council also has an operational flood plan covering the whole district.

The Committee has noted the independent report and has resolved that it will continue to exercise the Council's emergency planning powers to assist those parts of the New Forest District Council community affected by flooding and will participate in exercises with the Environment Agency to prepare for possible future emergencies.

2. MILLENNIUM ENERGY MANAGEMENT (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 62).

The Committee has considered a comprehensive overview of corporate water and energy resource use and management across the Council's services. The Committee has been pleased to note the significant progress that has been made in important areas, but has also noted the scope for further efficiency improvements.

Emphasis on energy conservation has changed in recent years from one of concern at depleting the world's supply of fossil fuels to one of damaging climate change. The emphasis is now on providing goods and services as sustainably as possible. This means continuing to increase efficiency to reduce total demand for fossil fuels and the phased replacement of fossil fuels by renewable resources, to achieve targeted reductions in CO² emissions.

The Government is committed to a 20% reduction in CO² emissions by 2010 but there is no national energy management policy. The Committee has reviewed the action already taken on energy and water efficiency at offices and depots, recreation centres and other areas such as sheltered housing and hostels, council vehicles and council housing. It has been noted that developing and maintaining monitoring and reporting systems on consumption has resource implications and, to be the most efficient, systems should be tailored to suit different situations. The various reporting methods have been considered. Targets for reductions in some areas have been set but not yet in others. Areas where targets already exist are at recreation centres, sheltered housing and hostels, council housing and other housing.

With regard to staff travel, the Committee has noted that work is being undertaken to produce a Green Transport Plan for the authority, which would include proposed measures for reducing staff travel and harmful fuel emissions. The Committee has discussed potential efficiencies arising from officers working from home and has asked that the introduction of a pilot home-working scheme to assess the merits of such an initiative be investigated.

The Committee has noted the fact that at the start of the new millennium energy management will be concerned mainly with the switch to renewable sources of energy and has requested the officers to report to a future meeting of the Committee in the coming year on achieving a consistent format and a corporate target for energy saving across the Council's services. This would then be submitted as a recommendation to the Policy and Resources Committee for adoption Council-wide.

3. AMENDMENTS TO COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE (REPORT F) (MINUTE NO. 63).

The Committee has considered an extension to its terms of reference to clarify that it is responsible for all electoral matters, including electoral boundaries. A recommendation in this regard is included in the Policy and Resources Committee's report.

In view of the review of the District Ward boundaries due to be undertaken by the Local Government Commission later this year, the Committee has agreed to the establishment of a Ward Boundary Review Working Party with effect from the Annual Meeting of the Council on 24 May 1999. It is proposed that the Working Party comprise 2 members from each political group appointed to the Council. The following terms of reference for the Working Party have been agreed:-

"In consultation with local members, to review the District Council's Ward Boundaries in accordance with guidelines and operating arrangements laid down by the Local Government Commission, and to submit recommendations to the Central Services Committee."

Appointments to the Working Party will be made at the annual meeting in May.

4. LOCAL INFORMATION OFFICES (REPORT I) (MINUTE NO. 68).

The Committee has considered the latest position with regard to the Local Information Offices at New Milton, Ringwood and Fordingbridge. The Committee was disappointed to learn that the proposed freehold purchase of premises in New Milton to be shared with New Milton Town Council has fallen through as the premises have been withdrawn from the market by the vendor. The Committee has considered other possible market opportunities understood to be available. Members have been reminded that the Council has placed a ceiling of £150,000 as its contribution towards the provision of shared accommodation with New Milton Town Council. There is no financial provision for any extended proposals and if any are suggested these would need to be carefully examined.

The Committee has been pleased to note the progress made with regard to leasing accommodation in Ringwood Public Offices.

With regard to Fordingbridge, the Committee has discussed, in confidence, a proposal for the provision of a new office on a site previously not identified. Fordingbridge local members support the proposal but wish, if possible, opportunities for further major redevelopment of the site in question to be examined.

Cllr N D M McGeorge
CHAIRMAN

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