

REPORT OF POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

(Meeting held 15 November 2000)

1. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FOR RINGWOOD TOWN CENTRE (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 75).

Members considered a report suggesting a way forward for the possible development of land in the Council's ownership in Ringwood town centre. A planning application submitted in March 2000 for retail and other development had met with considerable concern from the local community. Retail consultants were of the opinion that in the longer term market towns would struggle generally, and that Ringwood required significant retail development to improve its viability. New retail floor space could also help to fund community facilities, the need for which had been identified by both the local community and in the Local Plan, but for which no funding was currently identified. The financial implications of the Council's involvement would be reported to members in due course.

Members were pleased to note the intention to involve local people fully in the consultations, and hoped that this would lead to a development which met the aspirations of all those involved. It was also hoped that the consultation process could begin soon, while there was evidence of interest by developers. This was a major opportunity to provide facilities both to enable Ringwood to maintain its viability, and for the benefit of local people.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That proposals for a design brief be prepared in consultation with the local community and developers;**
- (b) That the Council explores further the possibility of using land in its ownership in the Furlong car park for redevelopment with a view to securing facilities and improvements for the benefit of the town of Ringwood;**
- (c) That the Council is prepared in principle to consider entering into an appropriate joint venture for redevelopment in Ringwood town centre, but this would be subject to further reports on:**
 - (i) the financial implications of the specialist professional inputs necessary to progress such a scheme;**
 - (ii) the detailed arrangements for any such joint venture scheme to achieve the objectives of an agreed development brief; and**
 - (iii) the details of the proposals for the consultation arrangements**

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN REPORT AND CONCLUSIONS (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 76).

The Committee noted final conclusions of the IDeA peer review team's visit to the Council during June 2000, and considered a way forward. Members were advised that, while opinions varied as to whether all the team's findings were correct or the balance of their report was completely accurate, the fact that they had found much to praise was to be welcomed. The team had considered a number of areas required consideration and improvement if the Council was to achieve its aspirations and approach the ideal, and some of these were already being addressed.

As part of its agreement in joining the Local Government Improvement Programme, the Council now needed to produce an improvement plan demonstrating its response to the review team's findings, and the process for this was considered and agreed. The process will be as follows:

- (i) A workshop session will be held in January 2001 for members and a cross-section of employees, and IDeA representatives will also be invited;
- (ii) The Corporate and Finance Portfolio Performance and Review Panel will consider a draft improvement plan at its February 2001 meeting; and
- (iii) following recommendations from the Advisory Cabinet, Policy and Resources Committee will approve an improvement plan soon afterwards.

3. A REVIEW OF STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOICE AND DATA COMMUNICATIONS (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 77).

The Committee has agreed that the strategic direction for the Council's voice and data communications strategy should be to commit to the Hampshire Public Services Network, subject to a successful outcome of the evaluation of the telephone system at appropriate County Council sites. The evaluation process should be completed by early in the New Year.

This decision accords with the Council's approved information and communications technology strategy, and is intended to meet the requirements of electronic governance and respond to other key drivers for change; provide a Council-wide telephone system with improved features; provide a flexible and future proof solution; and modernise the organisation. Six strategic options were identified and evaluated in depth by officers using relevant criteria, and the best option was considered to be joining the Network. This should improve communications considerably, both internally and with external customers.

The proposal will require annual revenue provision of £15,000 more than the current provision for telephones and related costs, but this additional funding can be met by switching resources from the leasing budget. Overall, the proposal will result in a net revenue saving of £14,250. Only a £9,000 increase in capital expenditure will be required. As a term of the contract, the system provider will also be required to implement any improvements in technology for the benefit of the Network at no extra cost. It will be possible to tailor the particular facilities provided at each site to meet the needs of that site.

In addition to, and as a consequence of, committing to the Hampshire Public Services Network (subject to a satisfactory outcome of the evaluation exercise) the following was agreed:

- (a) Phased implementation is planned, with the following target go live dates:
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| Fully featured telephone system (including voice mail)
at outlying locations | April 2001 |
| Fully featured telephone system (including voice mail)
at Appletree Court, Town Hall and Marsh Lane Depot | July 2001 |
- Phase 1 of a Call Centre operation will be available from October 2001, subject to Corporate Management Team and member approval of its use – the Committee's current decision does not commit the Council to a call centre operation;
- (b) A switch will be made from the leasing budget to meet the £15,000 revenue expenditure required for the additional annual costs;
- (c) A bid for an additional £9,000 capital expenditure (current budget £20,000) will be made through the expenditure planning process to meet installation and wiring costs;
- (d) That the Director of Finance will be notified that, as a consequence of agreeing to the strategic direction of joining the Network, the £130,000 capital memorandum budget will not be needed;
- (e) Revenue expenditure for the ongoing costs of the new system will be met from business units' existing budgets for telephones, and the Project Manager will have responsibility for the allocation of these costs;
- (f) The project will be managed using PRINCE and a Project Initiation Document (PID) will be produced, and the project will be monitored by the Electronic Governance Team;
- (g) Work will commence on a feasibility study to investigate the cost of a call centre, and a report will be made to the Electronic Governance Team, Corporate Management Team and members as appropriate; and
- (h) Presentations on the new system will be made to officers and members when appropriate.

4. PORTFOLIO/CABINET ROLE IN BEST VALUE (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 78)

The Committee has noted the current position on Best Value, and has considered how Cabinet members will in future be involved in steering the Council towards Best Value.

Members were strongly of the view that the Best Value process should be used to deliver real benefits in improving service effectiveness, beyond simply meeting a basic legislative requirement, and that it is important for members to be involved throughout the process. There were some concerns about the amount of time Portfolio Holders will have available to devote to Best Value. However, the level of involvement required of particular members and officers will become apparent as the process developed. Portfolio Performance and Review Panels also have an important role in the process, and have been considering their role during the current meeting cycle.

The Best Value Service Review Process, attached as Appendix 1, has been approved; the detailed timetable for Year 1 Reviews, attached as Appendix 2, has been noted; and the revised Year 2 to 5 programme attached as Appendix 3 has also been approved.

5. MAJOR POLICY ISSUES (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 79).

The Committee has approved a list of major policy issues that will be coming before it, and the Advisory Cabinet, in the first months of their operation. The list will be built on as matters develop and in the light of expected Government guidance, and can be adjusted from time to time as necessary.

The list is attached as Appendix 4.

6. APPLETREE COURT SOUTH WING ROOF TILING (REPORT F) (MINUTE NO. 81)

Small pieces of tile have been falling from the roof of the south wing, and in view of the safety implications it is important that the situation is remedied as a matter of urgency. In the meantime, the public access to the Housing Reception area has been closed. It was considered that the best solution is complete replacement of the tiles to the pitched roofs. Officers will be investigating any other appropriate action.

The Committee considered the tenders received for this work, and agreed to accept a tender for £28,218. Where the matter is not urgent, the Council's financial regulations limit the amount the Committee can approve by way of supplementary capital estimate to £20,000. However, in view of the circumstances of this case, the Director of Finance has been asked to undertake the necessary consultations and to authorise the expenditure under a provision in financial regulations which permits this where expenditure is urgently required.

**Cllr S A Hayes
CHAIRMAN**

(PR151100/Report)