

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meetings held on 2 January and 6 February 2002)

1. SOUTH EAST STRATEGIC REGIONAL COASTAL MONITORING PROGRAMME (REPORT A – 2 JANUARY) (MINUTE NO. 137)

Historically, local authorities have concentrated their coastal management efforts within their own administrative boundaries. Following an initiative by the Environment Agency (EA) and the coastal groups in the South East to develop a strategic regional approach to coastal monitoring, NFDC were invited to conduct a scoping review. Subsequently the Department for Environment, Food and Rural affairs (DEFRA) funded a preliminary study to plan and design a detailed framework for a strategic regional coastal monitoring programme. The proposed framework provides for three regional programmes, designed to common standards, and a high level programme managed by the EA.

New Forest District Council have been national leaders in this field for a number of years, having developed a local monitoring programme that is considered to be a best practice model. In view of this expertise the Council will provide the project and data management team to co-ordinate the whole programme.

If the programme application is successful, it will be funded by DEFRA. There will be significant staffing, accommodation and equipment implications but these will all be funded as part of the programme.

A structure for recharging other partners in the scheme has been drawn up to ensure that NFDC are not at financial risk from the programme.

2. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES – PROPOSED CLOSURES (REPORT A – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 148)

The Cabinet has recommended, as part of the overall budget making process, the closure of the following public toilets:

- (a) Blackfield – Hampton Lane – toilets to be closed in view of their age, condition and un-neighbourly siting;
- (b) Holbury – Sloane Avenue – close, due to low usage and frequent vandalism;
- (c) Calshot – Car park at western end of the Spit – close, in view of replacement programme proposals and pending consultations with beach hut owners;
- (d) Barton Beach – retain but close Marine Drive West toilet instead, following agreement by New Milton Town Council;
- (e) Totton - Eling Recreation Ground and Salisbury Road Recreation Ground – retain subject to the outcome of discussions with Totton and Eling Town Council on their proposals to share operating costs;
- (f) Ringwood – Market Place – close;
- (g) Lyndhurst Car Park – old block – retain, due to their continuing importance for tourist use; and

- (h) Brockenhurst – main A337 – close when toilets in village centre are rebuilt next financial year;

The Environment Review Panel at their meeting on 18 October 2001 considered the closure of a number of public toilets. Two schedules of options were put forward and the Review Panel identified nine toilets and agreed that their closure should be explored further.

Meetings took place with all the Town and Parish Councils in whose areas the toilets were situated. The general feeling was that all the toilets were well used and should not be closed.

The Environment Review Panel at their meeting on 17 January 2002 considered all the feedback from the consultation meetings. Members noted that, in a number of cases, the original reasons for siting various public toilets were no longer valid. In some cases centres of population, shopping and visitor interest had shifted.

The Cabinet agreed that the public toilet on the main A337 in Brockenhurst should not be closed until after the public toilet in the village centre was rebuilt in the next financial year.

The Cabinet agreed that there were some toilets that were not well used and some that were vandalised. It was open to Town and Parish Council's to put forward proposals for taking over the responsibility for toilets which would otherwise be closed. The closure proposals are in support of a programme of refurbishment and rebuilding to take place to provide public toilets of a better standard and in more appropriate locations.

The demolition costs for 2002/03 would be £15,000 and there would also be redundancy costs in the sum of £1,200 relating to 1 cleaner post. Thus, the total savings for 2002/03 would amount to £10,300. The potential capital receipt of £42,000 from the sale of the sites could be fully utilised for reinvestment in future capital projects, subject to all 3 toilet sites (Blackfield, Holbury and Brockenhurst) being auctioned as a package.

3. SOUTH EAST RINGWOOD LAND DRAINAGE INVESTIGATION AND FLOOD RELIEF SCHEME (REPORT C – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 150)

As a result of flooding in south east Ringwood the Cabinet has considered a flood relief scheme for the area. Developers in the areas draining through south east Ringwood have paid contributions totalling £116,000 to the Council for improvements to the land drainage system there.

It was noted that whilst the scheme was not intended to pre-empt any future development proposals for the area, the funding available did mean that the scheme could be constructed to a maximum specification which could take account of any future development.

In this particular area the land drainage and highway drainage systems are closely linked and there has therefore been close working with the Area Surveyor for Hampshire County Council to produce a single strategy for drainage of the area without duplicating schemes.

RECOMMENDED:

That £104,000 be made available from Developers' Contributions to carry out land drainage works in South East Ringwood.

**4. COMMUNITIES AGAINST DRUGS INITIATIVES (REPORT D – 6 FEBRUARY)
(MINUTE NO. 151)**

A new source of funding for Crime and Disorder Partnerships has been made available through the Government Office for the South East. The main purpose of the funding is to tackle the supply of drugs and disrupt drug markets.

The New Forest Community Safety Partnership has been allocated £117,200 and has produced a spending plan for 2001/2002 for the Communities against Drugs Initiative. The work will be split into four main areas of policing; prevention; partnerships and positive futures.

The Police aim to provide high visibility policing to parks, housing estates and schools to disrupt drug dealing. Drug free zones will be created around problem areas. The Police will also provide Youth Field Workers with training on drug misuse issues. Some funding will be used specifically to extend Ringwood Youth Initiative to the Waterside and Lymington. There is also a sports based initiative that targets those vulnerable to drug experimentation.

In order to satisfy Government requirements a switch of funding is required between revenue and capital resources. However, the maximum financial benefit will still be possible in relation to the CCTV grant funding.

RECOMMENDED:

That a supplementary revenue estimate of £37,500 for the Communities Against Drugs Initiative be agreed and the CCTV net capital budget be reduced by £37,500.

**5. CONTAMINATED LAND STRATEGY FOR NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
(REPORT E – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 152)**

The Cabinet has considered a draft Contaminated Land Strategy for the New Forest.
(Circulated separately to all members of the Council)

Since the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act in 1990 there have been proposals for dealing with contaminated land. Following the amendment of this legislation by the Environment Act 1995, there has been a requirement for every Local Authority to have a Contaminated Land Strategy.

The purpose of the Strategy is to protect human health, important water resources and ecosystems from contaminated land, using some expanded powers under current statutory nuisance legislation.

It is very unlikely that many sites will be put onto New Forest District Council's Contaminated Land Register but far more likely that the Council will identify sites that have had a previous contaminative use. However, there are consequences for the Council as three sites where landfill activity has taken place have already been identified as requiring further investigation.

Guidance requires that a suitably qualified and experienced person carries out or supervises the investigation of contaminated land. It has become clear that with the amount of work involved in identifying potentially contaminated sites, gathering information, recording, collating, assessing the information and inspecting the sites would take a lot of time. The strategy sets out an estimate of 5 years to carry out the inspection of the District. It is anticipated that approximately 1500 sites will be investigated. If the investigation of each site were to take on average 5 hours, this would be equivalent to one full time employee over a 5-year period.

It is very difficult at this stage to quantify the financial implications for the Council. It has to be borne in mind however, that as the Council is a landowner or has owned land, it might have liability for contamination if it is found on any of the site that the Council has been or is involved in.

Contact has been made with a consortium of 6 Local Authorities within Dorset. The consortium has already identified a consultant who will be shared as a resource amongst the Local Authorities signed up to the consortium. The cost of joining the consortium will be £15,000 for which the Council will receive 864 hours of consultancy per year. It is proposed that the Council join the consortium in the next financial year. However, officers will monitor the situation and report back to Cabinet should additional resources be needed before the next budget cycle.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That the Contaminated Land Strategy be approved subject to the Director of Community Services being authorised to incorporate any relevant comments into the strategy from the consultation process;***
- (b) *That any Council land that is potentially contaminated be investigated as a priority;***
- (c) *That due to the current financial position the application to join the Dorset Contaminated Land Consortium be delayed for 1 year, so the bid for funding can be fully considered in the 2003/4 spending review. It has to be recognised however that this will delay the strategy by a year; and***
- (d) *That the progress on the Contaminated Land Strategy be reported to the Environment Review Panel on an annual basis and any amendments to the strategy to be made at that time.***

**6. FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2001 TO DECEMBER 2001
(REPORT G – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 154)**

The Cabinet has agreed the revised General Fund Budget; the revised Capital Expenditure programme and the revised Housing Revenue Account budget as set out in report G to the Cabinet. It was noted that there was not now likely to be any overspend and budgets would remain within original estimates.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That supplementary estimates of £23,000 for Lymington Quay Project and £70,000 for environmental enhancements be approved; and***

- (b) *That supplementary estimates of £55,000 for repairs and maintenance, £70,000 revenue contribution for Environmental Enhancements and £75,000 for reductions in interest be approved.*

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT ESTIMATES 2002/03 (REPORT H – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 155)

The Cabinet has considered the draft Housing Revenue Account estimates for 2002/03.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix A to this report, be approved;*
- (b) *That a revenue contribution of £0.50m from the HRA to fund environmental enhancements be made in 2002/03;*
- (c) *That the overall level of the HRA estimates for 2002/03 and consequential increases in charges of:-*
- *3.1% (average) in rents for Council dwellings; in line with the rent restructuring guidelines;*
 - *3.9% in service charges for sheltered housing schemes and recovery of Council Tax, in accordance with current policy;*
 - *3% in service charges for hostels for homeless households and recovery of Council Tax, in accordance with current policy;*
 - *10p per week in garage rents (plus VAT for garages let to non-council tenants)*
- be approved to take effect from 1 April 2002; and*
- (d) *That the service of the appropriate notices be authorised.*

8. HOUSING CAPITAL ESTIMATES 2001/2002 REVISED AND 2002/2003 (REPORT I – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 156)

The Cabinet considered the Housing draft capital estimates for 2001/02 revised and 2002/03.

RECOMMENDED:

That the capital estimates for 2001/02 revised and 2002/03 attached as Appendix B to this report be approved.

9. GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS (REPORT J – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 157)

The Cabinet considered the draft General Fund revenue and capital budgets for 2002/2003. It was noted that a Council Tax increase of 9.4% was recommended. Whilst this would put the Council in a stronger position in 2002/03 there were still a number of financial challenges facing the Council over the coming years.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That following consideration of the recommendations from the Environment Review Panel the schedule of public conveniences put forward for closure be agreed and the financial implications included in the overall budget making process;**
- (b) That the Expenditure Plan variations as detailed in Report J be agreed including the revised schedule of fees and charges as attached at Appendix C to this report ;**
- (c) That the financial strategy and use of balances as outlined in paragraphs 5 and 6 of Report J to the Cabinet be agreed;**
- (d) That the General Fund budget for 2002/2003 be set at £18,520,000 as summarised in Appendix D to this report;**
- (e) That the General Fund Capital Programme for 2002/2003 be agreed as summarised in Appendix E to this report;**
- (f) That the Council Tax be agreed at £120.60 for a Band D property for 2002/2003; and**
- (g) That the site licence fees and service charges at Stillwater Park be increased by 2.5%, with effect from 1 April 2002, and that the service of the appropriate notices be authorised.**

10. TREASURY MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES : CODE OF PRACTICE (REPORT K – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 158)

The Cabinet considered a proposed new Treasury Management Policy Statement.

The Council had previously adopted a Treasury Management Policy Statement in 1992. The new CIPFA Code of Practice recommends that all public service organisations adopt, as part of their standing orders and financial regulations, specific clauses and key recommendations in accordance with the new Code.

The new Code splits the Treasury Management Policy into two new documents. The first document is a new Treasury Management Policy Statement which will define the policy and objectives of the Council's treasury management activities. The second document will detail the treasury management practices.

The Code also recommends the adoption of four clauses as attached at Appendix F

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the adoption of the four clauses as recommended by the new Code as detailed in Appendix F to this report be approved;**
- (b) That the Treasury Management Policy Statement as detailed in Appendix G to this report be approved; and**
- (c) That it be noted that treasury management practices when determined, in full, will be reported back to Cabinet.**

11. QUALITY TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS – A CONSULTATION PAPER (REPORT L – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 159)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) consultation paper on how “Quality” parish or town councils might work. This follows the commitment made in the Rural White Paper to give rural communities a better deal on local services and a stronger voice in decision making.

The Cabinet has welcomed the aims of the consultation paper overall but noted some concerns over specific issues.

There are a number of proposed tests that local councils will need to pass to achieve “Quality” status and both the District Council and the local councils have been asked for their views on these tests. In particular, the Cabinet has agreed that the test requiring a local council to have all their seats filled by members who had stood for election at the beginning of each four year term did not necessarily demonstrate “Quality”.

The proposal that local councils should produce a newsletter on a quarterly basis was considered too prescriptive. Whilst a newsletter was a good idea, it should be left to individual local councils to decide the most appropriate way of sharing information.

Whilst not all Town and Parish Council’s would attain “Quality” status the Council would remain committed to working with all local Councils regardless of their status.

12. COUNCIL TAX : A PROPOSED RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT’S CONSULTATION PAPER ON SECOND HOMES AND LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY (REPORT M – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO 160)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to a Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) on a consultation paper on proposed changes to the council tax for second homes and long term empty properties.

The Cabinet strongly supports the proposal to reduce or end council tax discounts on second homes.

In the consultation paper the Government sets out proposals to give local authorities discretion to :

- Remove or reduce the existing 50% council tax discount for second homes (defined as furnished dwellings which are no-one's main residence).
- Remove or reduce the existing 50% council tax discount for unfurnished long-term empty homes – and to decide how long a property remains empty before council tax is due.
- Grant additional council tax exemptions or discounts that are not already covered by the current national exemptions, in response to local factors (e.g. flooding) or on a case-by-case basis.

The Government has also invited views on four options on how the additional council tax that could be raised by local authorities could be distributed. The Cabinet has commented that it strongly believes that individual local authorities should be able to retain the additional council tax raised.

Approximately 2850 of the 75000 dwellings in the District currently receive 50% council tax discount because they are either second homes or unfurnished long term empty homes. The maximum extra revenues for this Council could be in the region of £1.2M if the discounts were completely removed.

13. BORROWING LIMITS 2002/2003 (REPORT N – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 161)

The Cabinet has considered the borrowing limits for the financial year 2002/2003 as required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the Council's overall borrowing limit be £60 million of which not more than £15 million be payable at variable interest rates; and**
- (b) That the Council's short-term borrowing limit be £25 million.**

14. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2002/2003 (REPORT O – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 162)

In accordance with the Council's policy on Treasury Management the Cabinet has considered a Treasury Management Strategy for 2002/03.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the borrowing requirement of the Council for 2002/03 be met by raising temporary loans or using temporary surpluses;**
- (b) That up to £2m of invested set aside capital receipts be used to repay outstanding debt if financially beneficial to the Council;**
- (c) That the premature repayment of debt be undertaken if financially beneficial to the Council;**

(d) *That rescheduling and replacement of loans be undertaken if financially beneficial to the Council; and*

(e) *That full consideration be given to financial advice provided by the Council's treasury consultants.*

15. LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP – QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES (REPORT P – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 163)

The Local Government White Paper was published in December 2001. It was a major statement of the view of central government on the future role of local government and the way it would be financed.

Whilst the general intentions of the White Paper are welcomed there are still some major concerns about the commitment of central government to implementing the changes. In particular there are no firm proposals to address the balance of central/local funding.

A seminar is to be held for all members of the Council to consider further the implications of the White Paper. A further programme of member workshops will also be arranged over the next few months to brief members on a number of strategic issues.

16. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2001/2002 AND KEY TARGETS 2002/2003 (REPORT Q – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO 164)

The Cabinet has noted an assessment of the Council's Key Achievements in the year 2001/2002, and agreed a set of new Key Targets for 2002/2003.

The Key Achievements and targets will be considered by the Council in April as part of the Best Value Performance Plan.

17. THE QUEEN'S GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS (REPORT S – 6 FEBRUARY) (MINUTE NO. 166)

The Cabinet has considered a number of issues that have arisen for members of the public who are arranging their own events to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

The Council wish to be as supportive as possible to communities seeking to celebrate the Golden Jubilee and are offering advice, in particular, on public entertainment licences; road closure orders and associated insurance requirements.

It is a requirement of the Council in making Road Closure Orders that the applicant has adequate public liability insurance. This can sometimes be costly and may deter some applicants. In order to assist, the Council has made arrangements with its own Insurers to enable Public Liability Insurance to be offered at a favourable reduced rate in respect of applications for Road Closures.

**Cllr S A Hayes
CHAIRMAN**