

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meetings held on 5 and 13 November 2003)

1. ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT – PROGRESS REPORT (REPORT B – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 70)

The Cabinet considered a progress report on implementing the Council's Electronic Governance Strategy and agreed an outline action plan intended to ensure the successful development of electronic service delivery across the Council.

Good progress has been made on developing key access channels for the Council's customers to engage with services. The E-Governance team were currently focussing on developing:

- A comprehensive contact centre dealing with calls via the telephone, general e-mail enquiries and assisted interviews via video conferencing from local access points.
- A fully transactional web site, enabling customers to request goods and services, complete forms for electronic processing and to make payments for good and services.
- A network of local information offices with access to corporate information systems and fully trained employees able to handle a wide range of customer enquiries.
- A network of local access points (in local information offices, Citizens Advice Bureaux offices and local libraries) where customers can take part in an assisted interview with service providers, using video conferencing technology.

These access channels have been prioritised following consultation with the Citizens' Panel. To ensure that customers' enquiries are handled effectively it will be essential that the ICT infrastructure is capable of supporting electronic service delivery. Much of the work in 2003/2004 is aimed at achieving this.

The Council is only one organisation, within the district, that provides services to customers. The E-Governance team has been actively developing partnerships with groups, such as The Hampshire and Isle of Wight E-Government Partnership and the New Forest Business Partnership, to help deliver the Council's vision for electronic service delivery.

For the third year running local authorities are required to complete an IEG statement, which is an essential part of the national monitoring process. This Council's submission indicates that the Council is making good progress, with most of the projects either actioned or implemented or particular standards achieved.

For electronic service delivery to become a reality, front line operations with direct contact with the public will need systems that are fully integrated with 'back office' operations. This is known as 'normalising' and will require changes to current operating procedures and changes to thinking.

In future electronic service delivery needs to be fully integrated into the Service Planning process. There are also a number of issues to be addressed in terms of the way in which electronic service delivery will impact on the Council's customer care standards.

2. HOUSING STOCK OPTIONS REVIEW (REPORT C – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 71)

In June 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) sent out guidance for Local Authorities on delivering decent homes and carrying out an options appraisal. The Council has to submit an options appraisal by July 2005.

Whilst the paper is guidance, there is a clear message that if Local Housing Authorities do not carry out a review, then no additional money will be made available to help them reach the decent homes standard. The guidance asks that a judgement be made as to whether or not the Council can meet the Decent Homes Standard and what options should be reviewed.

The ODPM expects Tenants to be consulted about the options review before it gets underway, not during the process. To this end, a Tenant Advisor will need to be appointed at the start. It will also be necessary to consult with a wider body of Tenants, not just current established groups.

In terms of resources the Guidance says that local authorities must fund any additional resources required to reach the decent homes standard or any additional Tenant expectations. For this Council, the need to provide affordable homes is a priority. Currently, the strategic target is to provide 200 affordable homes but at the moment the Council is providing about half that amount. This will be an important issue to discuss with stakeholders when reviewing the options.

The Cabinet has agreed that the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel should be asked to appoint a Housing Stock Options Project Group comprising members, tenants and officers to manage this project. They have also agreed to the appointment of a Tenants Advisor to be funded from within the budget of £32,000.

The Cabinet has authorised the Housing Portfolio Holder, in conjunction with the Stock Options Project Group, to formally appoint the Tenants' Advisor after the Tenants have completed the selection process; and to appoint, in conjunction with the Stock Options Project Group, a communications expert and suitable consultants to carry out a stock condition survey.

The Cabinet has also agreed to the appointment of Butlers, the Council's current Treasury advisors, as advisors on this matter.

The Tenants' representatives have supported the proposals. However, they have said that the appraisal will generate a high volume of work for the Tenants' Consultative Group and increase the need for a larger resource room for them to work out of. The Cabinet agreed that officers should give further consideration to this issue.

3. CATERING SERVICE – FINANCIAL POSITION 2003/04 – 2004/05 (REPORT D – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 72)

The Council's catering service made a loss against budget in 2002/03 of £122,000. Whilst this was substantial it came about mainly from ambitious cost savings not being achieved. However, new projects did successfully enable the annual generation of income in other areas at greater value than the shortfall.

The shortfall in 2003/2004 is as a result of the ambitious budget for 2002/2003 being rolled forward and if not corrected will be repeated in future years.

RECOMMENDED:

That a supplementary estimate of £106,000 for catering in 2003/04 be approved together with an Expenditure Plan bid of £50,000 for 2004/05.

4. RECREATION CENTRES – FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY (REPORT E – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 73)

The benchmarking exercise for the evaluation of how the Recreation Centre Service should be delivered in the future has now been completed.

The analysis of the results showed a number of specific differences between the service that the Council provided and the services provided by the private sector:

- (a) The levels of operation cover varied but in general were less intensive than that provided by the Council;
- (b) Management structures tended to reflect more business and operational specialisms than at the Council;
- (c) Service activities such as cleaning and catering were carried out by centre staff rather than outside contractors and costs were up to 50% lower than the Council's;
- (d) Procurement costs including utilities were lower in the private sector;
- (e) The private sector invested substantially more resources in marketing, sales and promotion;
- (f) Less emphasis in the private sector on the Social Agenda and Community Programming; and
- (g) Generally lower standards of pay and conditions in the private sector.

The Cabinet considered the results of this exercise and agreed an action plan that addresses all of the issues raised. A number of initiatives have already been undertaken, such as the pilot partnership in Sales and Marketing with the private sector, which it is hoped will lead to substantial improvements in performance.

5. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR – PROTOCOL (REPORT F – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 74)

The Cabinet has approved a 'Dealing With Anti Social Behaviour Protocol' attached as Appendix 1 to report F to the Cabinet.

In the New Forest the 'Divided We Fall' partnerships have been looking at ways of tackling neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour. With the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act in 1998 the District Council became a statutory partner on the Community Safety Partnership. The subsequent introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and the development of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) has given the Partnership new tools to use.

Following requests for more detailed guidance the 'Divided We Fall' core group has guided the development of this new Protocol, which will assist in ensuring that correct procedures are followed to help produce successful applications for ASBOs in court. The first ASBO for the New Forest was recently granted.

There was still some concern that the intention of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) was being frustrated by the Courts as they did not allow offenders to be named. Members were of the view that, in order to obtain the maximum benefit from an ASBO, the name of the individual should be publicised.

The Cabinet were pleased to note that the flow chart procedures in the Protocol had been recognised nationally, as good practice, and other organisations were interested in using them. They felt that the new Protocol would make a real practical difference in addressing the issues.

6. NEW FOREST HEALTH STRATEGY – 'IMPROVING LIFE IN THE NEW FOREST' 2003/2004 (REPORT G – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 75)

The Cabinet has agreed the New Forest Health Strategy 'Improving Life in the New Forest' 2003/2004.

The Council has, for many years, had its own Health Strategy. Many other organisations concerned with health care have also had their own individual strategies. For the first time a strategy has now been developed that joins up all the work into one single document owned and developed by a partnership.

The Government Office for the South East has commended this new cross cutting strategy as an example of excellence. The Strategy focuses on the health and well being of the people of the New Forest and builds upon previous work undertaken by the NHS and local authorities through the former Health Improvement Programme.

7. PROPOSED CHANGES TO PPG3 : HOUSING (REPORT I – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 77)

The Government has published two consultation papers on proposed changes to parts of Planning Guidance Note 3 (PPG3) Housing: relating to influencing the size, type and affordability of housing and supporting the delivery of new housing.

The Cabinet considered comments on the main proposed changes. Within the New Forest area there were small rural villages and market towns and members were of the view that the proposals for increasing housing density were inappropriate for areas such as these, and that the Government's attention should be drawn to the Council's concerns.

Whilst the need to meet increased housing targets was acknowledged, it was agreed that this should not be done at the expense of urbanising rural areas of the district. A balance also needed to be maintained between use of land for housing and use of land for employment.

The Cabinet agreed that in responding to the consultation on revisions to PPG3: Housing, they reiterated their general concern that increases in housing densities could change the character of certain towns and villages in the New Forest;

The Cabinet then commented:

That the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister be informed:

- (i) That the Council supports the proposed changes set out in "Influencing the size, type and affordability of housing" subject to the comments that:
 - (a) the revised guidance should allow for tenure considerations to be set out where appropriate in Supplementary Planning Guidance and Development Briefs related to more general Local Plan (or LDD) policies, as this will provide for greater flexibility as circumstances change (this comment relates to para. 6 of the proposed revisions);
 - (b) there is a strong case for allowing site allocations for affordable housing within the larger villages where there are severe constraints on expansion (as in this District). The "rural exceptions" policy should also be allowed to continue because not all suitable opportunities that might come forward for small rural affordable housing schemes can be foreseen during plan preparation (this comment relates to para. 16 of the proposed revisions).
- (ii) That the Council objects to the proposed additional paragraph 42a suggested in "Supporting the delivery of new housing."

8. LYNDHURST FLOOD RELIEF SCHEME (REPORT J – 5 NOVEMBER 2003) (MINUTE NO. 78)

The initial project cost for the Lyndhurst Flood Relief scheme was agreed at £115,000. The scheme is part funded by HCC with a contribution of £30,000 for highways drainage works. Of the remaining £85,000, 25% is funded by DEFRA with the remaining 75% (£63,750) being funded by the Council, with the Government granting a supplementary credit approval for that amount.

Bad ground conditions and bad weather resulted in an increase in costs in the first phase of the work. Tenders for the second phase of the work consequently came in over budget. With these increases and fees and contingencies, the total cost of the scheme has risen to £208,000, an increase of £93,000.

Since the original scheme approval, changes to DEFRA grant rules have resulted in the grant rate being raised from 25% to 45% of eligible costs. In this case eligible costs are the full scheme costs, less the £30,000 contribution from Hampshire County Council.

These changes to scheme costs and grant rates are summarised in the following table:

	Original Approval		Proposed Costs		Difference
Works Fees etc.	£115,000		£208,000		£93,000
Hampshire County Council Contribution	£30,000		£30,000		Nil
Eligible Costs	£85,000		£178,000		£93,000
Grant	25%	£21,250	45%	£80,100	£58,850
SCA	75%	£63,750	55%	£97,900	£34,150

RECOMMENDED:

That a supplementary estimate of £93,000 to be funded by grant and SCA as detailed in report J to the Cabinet be approved to enable the Lyndhurst Flood Relief Scheme to be completed.

9. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE DISTRICT OF NEW FOREST (OFF-STREET PARKING PLACES) ORDER (REPORT A – 13 NOVEMBER 2003 (MINUTE NO. 80))

The Cabinet considered the objections and representations received following the publication of the draft amendments to the Council's Off-Street Parking Places Order.

The Cabinet noted that the County Council, in supporting the introduction of car parking charges in off-street car parks in principle, qualified their consent by agreeing to the £5 charge for the parking clock payment method for a period of 12 months only. The County Council were of the view that charges should be sufficient, not only to meet the costs of administering the scheme, but also to ensure a change in people's attitudes to encourage them to use alternative forms of transport.

The Leader of the Council said that he was confident that the calculations that had been made in setting the charges were robust. He said that the Council would want to use any surpluses made to work in partnership with the County Council to improve alternative means of transport, in particular community transport schemes. Any income from decriminalisation arrangements could also be used towards this. The Leader said that the £5 charge was only ever intended as a charge to cover the administration costs of the scheme and had never been intended as a way of achieving a change in people's attitudes. He saw no reason for any early change in the clock cost, but said that everything had to be reviewed over time.

In considering the detail of the comments received, the Cabinet agreed that a minor amendment should be made to the advertised order to allow approximately 40 spaces in the car park in Sea Road, Milford-On-Sea to be designated as short stay, to provide a greater turn round of spaces to accommodate people wishing to shop locally, and to relieve pressure on surrounding roads.

The Cabinet has therefore agreed that, having given due consideration to the objections and representations received following publication of draft amendments to the Council's Off-Street Parking Places Order,

- (i) that a modification be made to the draft amendments as published, to impose a 2 hour maximum waiting restriction in approximately 40 spaces at the Sea Road, Milford-on-Sea car park, as indicated on the plan displayed at the meeting;
- (ii) that the Cabinet does not consider that this modification makes a substantial change, within the meaning of regulation 14(3) of the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) Regulations, to the advertised Order; and
- (iii) that, subject to the above modification, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorized to make the District of New Forest (Off-Street Parking Places) (Amendment) Order 2003, to implement the proposals as advertised with effect from 2 January 2004.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**

(CB131103/Report of Cabinet.doc)