

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meetings held on 4 August and 1 September 2004)

1. NEW FOREST @ PLAY (REPORT A – 4 AUGUST 2004) (MINUTE NO. 36)

The Cabinet has agreed a new Council Play Strategy – ‘New Forest @ Play’.

The Strategy provides a set of values, objectives and actions that have been the subject of extensive development by stakeholders. The document includes an action plan that highlights priorities for support and development. These will be evaluated and updated annually.

The impact of effective play provision on children and young people is profound. The Strategy will be used to provide a framework for prioritising and targeting multi-agency resources; it will help inform the everyday planning and practice for the Council and other organisations and will enable an ongoing dialogue with children, young people and the community regarding play needs.

2. TETRA (TERRESTRIAL TRUNKED RADIO) COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS (REPORT B – 4 AUGUST 2004) (MINUTE NO. 37)

The Council at their meeting on 26 April 2004 considered a Notice of Motion proposing that the Council should refuse requests for permission for the erection of TETRA masts and associated equipment on any land or buildings owned or controlled by NFDC.

TETRA is a new system that the Government wishes to introduce as a communication system for the emergency services. It operates on a different frequency to the ordinary mobile phone system and this gives rise to a great deal of public concern about risk to human health.

The Corporate and Finance Review Panel considered the issue at their meeting on 24 June and made the following recommendation to the Cabinet:-

“That in all cases where TETRA development is proposed on Council owned land the application be appraised on a precautionary basis with the presumption being that they are not approved if the public are likely to perceive a threat to their health or well being”

Current Government advice is that health issues should not be considered as part of the planning process so long as the masts satisfy specific standards. Independent research findings so far do not indicate that TETRA poses a serious health hazard.

The Cabinet noted that local planning authorities should not seek to impose their own judgements on safety and health matters or introduce their own policies by, for example, a ban on the granting of planning permissions. Ignoring this advice is likely to receive little support from planning inspectors determining appeals.

At present there are no TETRA masts on Council land, however, the Council does share a Forestry Commission site at Fritham with Hampshire Police Authority where a TETRA system was installed last year. There are no requests for new installations outstanding.

After consideration the Cabinet has agreed that, rather than impose a moratorium, any new proposals should be considered on a case by case basis.

3. FINANCIAL REPORT – FORECAST FULL YEAR AND ACTUAL FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2004 TO JUNE 2004 (REPORT C – 4 AUGUST 2004) (MINUTE NO. 38)

The Cabinet has considered the forecast budget variations of all Portfolios and Committees from the approved original estimates for 2004/2005 and, subject to the recommendations set out below, has agreed the revised General Fund budget, the revised capital expenditure and the revised Housing Revenue Account as set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 respectively to report C to the Cabinet.

Members have also noted the financial position of Commercial Services as set out in Appendix 4 of report C to the Cabinet and, the actual expenditure to profiled budget positions of the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account as set out in Appendices 1 and 3 of report C to the Cabinet.

In the General Fund the reported variations show a decrease in forecast net expenditure for the full year of £163,000. Capital Expenditure (Other services), excluding housing, shows an increase in 2004/05 expenditure of £2,193,000, but excluding items of rephrasing, virement, developers' contributions and external funding, there is no call on the Council's capital resources.

For the Housing Capital Programme the reported variations show an increase in 2004/05 expenditure of £202,000 but again, excluding virements and external funding there is no call on the Council's capital resources.

In terms of the Housing Revenue account the new reported variations amount to an increase in net expenditure of £27,000. The actual net expenditure at the end of June is £719,000 below the profiled budget expenditure. However, this principally reflects the variations in the timing of expenditure and income.

RECOMMENDED:

That the following supplementary estimates be approved:

- ***£35,000 income shortfall in Tourism***
- ***£75,000 net loss due to delay in implementation of new Liquor Licensing system***
- ***£47,000 for the Solent Dynamic Coast Scheme***
- ***£29,000 in respect of Pay & Reward Strategy costs***

- ***£71,000 in respect of the reinstatement of the remaining stock option appraisal budget***
- ***£189,000 in respect of Capital Financing Costs (this cost will be borne by increased Government Grant)***

4. INSTALLATION OF POWER TEE – DIBDEN GOLF CENTRE (REPORT D – 4 AUGUST 2004) (MINUTE NO. 39)

The Driving Range at Dibden has recently undergone a planned refurbishment that has been extremely well received by the public and is already generating additional usage. The Cabinet has now agreed a supplementary estimate in the sum of £13,320 for 2004/2005 for the installation of an automatic range-ball teeing system called "Power Tee". This is a system that automatically dispenses range balls to the tee/range mat used by the golfer on the driving range. It will be installed in six of the nineteen bays available on the range.

The business case is based on a 25% projected increase in use. Over a 5 year period it is anticipated that the net benefit to the authority will be £66,940.

5. HOUSING – FINAL BEST VALUE REPORT (REPORT E – 4 AUGUST 2004) (MINUTE NO. 40)

The Cabinet has considered the findings of the Housing Best Value Review and approved the Action Plan for continuous improvement of the service.

In view of the size of the Housing service and the staff resources available and with the approval of the Best Value Board and customers, it was agreed that only the following service areas should be reviewed:

- The Maintenance Service
- Rent Collection and Former Tenant Arrears
- Tenant Participation
- The Disabled Facilities Grants Scheme

These services were selected because they would benefit from a thorough review based on performance indicators and customer views.

The Best Value Review Board were involved at key stages in the review process and on the drafting of the Improvement Plan. There were a number of complex issues that impacted on the review process including the housing options appraisal, the business process changes arising from the district audit review of the service and the recent CPA assessment.

The conclusion of the Review Board was that Housing provides a good service. The Review Board were satisfied with the Improvement Plan and in particular were pleased with the real commitment to Tenant choice that was reflected in it.

The Cabinet agreed that it was essential that the Improvement Plan was adopted by the Housing Management Team and partners. Any actions in the Improvement Plan requiring extra resources would be met by efficiency savings or would only be implemented when included in the appropriate budget. Progress on the Improvement Plan will be reported through the appropriate service plans.

**6. WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (REPORT F – 4 AUGUST 2004)
(MINUTE NO. 41)**

The Cabinet has approved a Waste Management Strategy that sets out the Council's aims for dealing with waste for the next three years.

The Council identified, in 2003, the need to have in place a strategy for dealing with waste that linked to initiatives such as the Commercial Services partnership with Test Valley Borough Council and with Project Integra. The Council is faced with statutory recycling targets and rapid developments in many areas of waste management and it is important for a Strategy to be in place to deal with these challenges.

The new Waste Management Strategy updates the Council's policies on refuse collection, recycling and street cleansing. As part of this the opportunity has been taken to change the Council's policy on refuse collection from back door collection to edge of curtilage collection. The change will be phased in on a round by round basis, taking into consideration the needs of the elderly, the disabled and those properties with particular access difficulties. The aim of this change is to provide a more efficient refuse collection service that will give the refuse collectors more time to deal with recycling collections.

Members noted that the extension of the kerb side recycling scheme to Ringwood was working well and, as a result of this success, 96% of the residents of the District now had access to the clear sack recycling scheme.

The Strategy proposes high levels of recycling, waste minimisation and other measures that should reduce the quantity of waste going to landfill. The Strategy also proposes stronger action to deal with fly-tipping and littering.

**7. HANGER FARM – COMPLETION OF WORK (REPORT H – 4 AUGUST 2004)
(MINUTE NO. 43)**

Following the bankruptcy of the principal contractor in this scheme, the Cabinet has agreed to a sum of up to £80,000, to be allocated from developers' contributions for open space, to enable Totton and Eling Town Council to complete the works at Hanger Farm.

This is a principal open space development for West Totton. As a cornerstone for the quality of the area it is a vital scheme for the current and future quality of life for a significant population.

Inevitably there are additional costs when a project experiences such a difficulty, however the impact is mitigated by the existence of a bond of £285,000. The negotiated additional cost of £365,000 will therefore ultimately net to a difference of £80,000. In the meantime, this is a significant sum for the Town Council to bear and therefore the Cabinet has agreed to fund the cash flow deficit by making a further sum of up to £285,000 available from developers' contributions until the bond is recovered.

Both of these sums will be applied on the basis of the current arrangements for stage payments. The additional £285,000 will be subject to repayment in full by the Town Council, within a defined timescale set by the Director of Resources in consultation with the Director of Community Services.

Should there be a shortfall on the recovery of the bond from the first contract, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Resources, in consultation with the Director of Community Services, to approve the level of funding required from developers contributions, up to the sum of £285,000, providing that Totton and Eling Town Council have made their best endeavours to secure funding assistance from other partners.

The uncommitted fund for open space schemes in Totton is £507,000. Whilst this project now represents a further draw down on that budget, this is a principal scheme for the area.

8. COST OF TOWN/VILLAGE PARKING CLOCKS FOR PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2005 TO 31 DECEMBER 2005 (REPORT A – 1 SEPTEMBER 2004) (MINUTE NO. 48)

The charges and conditions of use for the Council's car parks are set out in the District of New Forest (Off-Street Parking Places) Order 1983 (as amended). As highway authority, HCC must give their consent to the Order and any amendments. Only temporary consent was given last year for the cost of the parking clocks and therefore, any proposals for change for the coming year are subject to HCC's agreement.

HCC have expressed concern that the present cost of the clock is not high enough to encourage a modal shift and is low in comparison to neighbouring authorities. As a result it is felt that a charge of £6 for the parking clock for the period 1 January 2005 – 31 December 2005 would be appropriate.

The Cabinet are mindful that the parking clocks are only a part of the Council's overall traffic management proposals. The next part of the process is the introduction of decriminalisation enabling proper enforcement around towns and villages. The set up costs for decriminalisation are considerable and there is a shortfall in funding from HCC towards those costs. To increase the cost of the parking clocks to £6 will assist in covering this shortfall. The Cabinet is also of the view that car owners rather than the council tax payer should fund any traffic management scheme.

RECOMMENDED:

That the District of New Forest (Off-Street Parking Places) Order 1983 be altered by notice of amendment under section 35C of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to the effect that the cost of parking clocks for the period 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2005 be £6.

9. HOMESARCH HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME (REPORT B – 1 SEPTEMBER 2004) (MINUTE NO. 49)

In 2001 the Council was chosen as one of 27 pilot schemes to operate a new approach to allocating vacancies known as 'Choice Based Lettings'. In view of the success of the pilots the Government set a target for all local authorities to operate the scheme by 2010. Although the funding for the pilot scheme expired in 2003 the Council has continued to operate the scheme within existing resources.

Following the pilot, the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel agreed that a working group comprising members and tenants should be formed to update and improve upon the policy.

The Cabinet has now considered and agreed a number of amendments to the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme, the main ones of which are detailed below.

The new Policy sets out the statutory background and the overall aims of the Scheme. The categories of 'need' have been changed. Applicants are placed in one of three categories of need. Within the categories, priority is based on application date order. This approach to assessing the priorities of applicants replaces the points scheme that was used previously and which is no longer seen to be good practice by the ODPM.

The use of the broad categories of 'need' has the benefit of being a simple and easy way to prioritise applicants. More emphasis is placed on a date order queuing system that is, arguably, a fairer way of allocating a scarce resource. The problem of 'points chasing' is significantly lessened by this approach. The other benefit is that mixed communities are created, as the Council is able to re-house a broader range of applicants.

The policy now gives greater flexibility to assist keyworkers who can be placed in the high priority band if the Council and employer agree that there is an urgent need for a designated keyworker to be re-housed to ensure the availability of an essential public service for the New Forest Community.

The policy on local connection areas has also been changed so that applicants need to have lived in a village for more than two years before they can establish the lowest level of connection. This will ensure that a meaningful local connection is established. The bands have also been modified to give greater priority to housing keyworkers who are performing an essential service to the village community.

The Homelessness Act 2002 gave local authorities new powers to exclude applicants believed to be unsuitable to be tenants or alternatively to reduce their priority. Whilst these powers were incorporated previously, the new policy is more explicit in defining these powers.

Choice Based Lettings has proved to be an innovative approach to allocating affordable housing which has led to greater use of ICT, improvements in the council customer service and partnership working arrangements and, in the long term, should help to build sustainable communities. The changes to the policy will also assist the Council in tackling anti social behaviour and ensuring priority for keyworkers, where appropriate.

10. CIVIL ENGINEERING SERVICE – FINAL BEST VALUE REPORT (REPORT C – 1 SEPTEMBER 2004) (MINUTE NO. 50)

The Cabinet has considered the final best value report for the Civil Engineering Service and agreed the Action Plan for continuous improvement as set out in Appendix 1 to report C to them.

The Best Value Board, following its evaluation, concluded that there was sufficient evidence of good performance and the capacity for improvement to score the service as Good (2*). Whilst there were a number of areas for improvement, the Board also scored the service as Good (2*) in terms of prospects for improvement.

Based on the Service Team's assessment and the Best Value Board's evaluation, the Improvement Plan was developed to provide a framework for service improvements. The Cabinet has agreed that the actions in the Plan not requiring additional resources will be implemented in accordance with the timetable. The actions requiring additional resources will either need to be met by efficiency savings, or not implemented until sufficient budgetary provision is available.

Phase 2 of the Government's review of the funding and administration of flood and coastal defence is due to be completed in 2006. As the outcome could have a major impact on service delivery mechanisms and responsibilities, the next assessment of the service will coincide with the publication of the Government's proposals arising from their review. There are also ongoing issues relating to land drainage and these will be the subject of a separate report to the Cabinet in the near future.

11. AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT (REPORT D – 1 SEPTEMBER 2004) (MINUTE NO. 51)

The 1995 Environment Act places a duty on local authorities to assess air quality in their area in terms of air quality objectives. The objectives are set out in the National Air Quality Strategy for seven defined pollutants. The Act goes on to require local authorities to identify those parts of its area where the prescribed air quality objectives will not or are unlikely to be met by the relevant year. In such cases the local authority has a statutory duty under Sect 83(1) of the Act to declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).

The monitoring of air quality of in the New Forest is a continuous process. There are currently four real time monitoring sites:

- Fawley – Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂)
- Holbury – Particulates (PM₁₀) and Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂)
- Ringwood – Particulates (PM₁₀) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)
- Totton – Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)

An AQMA will require an action plan to be formulated to alleviate the problems. The objectives of the plan will then be evaluated in terms of cost effectiveness and its environmental, economic and social impact. The Cabinet has agreed that, following the findings of the Air Quality Assessment, AQMA's are declared in respect of NO₂ for Lyndhurst and Totton. The Cabinet noted some of the options that could be considered to alleviate the problems in these areas such as signs to encourage motorists to switch off their engines whilst waiting in traffic queues, and greater enforcement of the lorry ban through Lyndhurst. In Totton the impact of traffic and resultant pollution needed to be considered as an integral part of the regeneration of the Town Centre.

In Ringwood, three years of data has now been collated from the monitoring site in respect of NO₂ and PM₁₀ during which time neither pollutant has shown any indication that the relevant target is likely to be exceeded. The Cabinet has therefore agreed that the real time monitor for NO₂ be relocated from Ringwood to Lyndhurst but that monitoring in Ringwood for NO₂ should continue with diffusion tubes. This will make much better use of the equipment available. The Ringwood monitoring site will be decommissioned but reinstated should future problems be detected

The action plans for the AQMA's will now be prepared and the Council's overall monitoring programme will continue in accordance with DEFRA's requirements.

12. STILLWATER PARK – FUTURE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS (REPORT E – 1 SEPTEMBER 2004) (MINUTE NO. 52)

Following previous proposals relating to the management of Stillwater Park the Cabinet has agreed that the residents should have a larger role in managing and controlling the site. The Cabinet has therefore now agreed that the Residents' Association at Stillwater Park is formally recognised and that formal consultation is undertaken with this group relating to the future management and control of the Park. This will include the opportunity of all reports to Cabinet or the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel, relating to Stillwater Park, to include a paragraph for the Residents' Association comments.

To help the Association the Cabinet has also agreed that the group be financially supported by the provision of an annual grant of £360 and by the reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred as part of the consultation process.

**13. OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF STILLWATER PARK
(REPORTS F AND G – 1 SEPTEMBER 2004) (MINUTE NOS. 54 AND 55)**

Following the decision by the Cabinet last year not to proceed with the sale of Stillwater Park to the residents, the Housing Portfolio Holder and officers have had meetings with the residents to discuss measures for the future management of the site and to reassure them as to the future stability of the park.

With regard to the development of the Park the Cabinet has considered the options to provide additional mobile homes on the site. To assist in the Council's provision of affordable housing, Members have agreed to the provision of 12 additional homes on the site. The Housing Portfolio Holder and the Leader will meet with the residents to discuss the detail of the proposal.

Members noted that a detailed site survey will be required to determine the necessary infrastructure for any additional homes and that their decision is still subject to further legal advice in terms of clarification on action that can be taken by the local authority under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960.

The Cabinet agreed it was important to ensure that the new homes were marketed locally and to this end tenders will be sought from local agents for this purpose. Any other necessary improvement works to the site will also be undertaken and funded as a result of this project.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**

(CB010904/Report of Cabinet.doc)