

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 5 October 2005)

1. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT – REPORT ON REPRESENTATIONS PRIOR TO SUBMISSION (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 48)

As part of the new Local Development Framework (LDF), that will eventually replace the Local Plan, the Council is required to produce a document called a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This document sets out how the Council will involve people and organisations in preparing its LDF, and when dealing with planning applications.

The pre-production stage of the SCI began in early spring 2005. Two focus groups were well attended by representatives of over 30 organisations including town and parish councils, local businesses and societies. The feedback and ideas from the groups was excellent and informed the drafting of the SCI together with an 'easy read' summary document.

The documents were then published for a period of public consultation during the summer.

The Cabinet has now considered the response to the public consultation and noted the subsequent revisions that were made.

A number of different documents must be produced at the submission stage and the Cabinet considered these documents as appended in Annexes 1 to 8 of Report A to them. Following agreement by the Council and submission of the documents to the Secretary of State there will be a further consultation period of 6 weeks.

The Cabinet noted that the New Forest National Park Authority has agreed to support the Statement of Community Involvement in principle.

RECOMMENDED

- (a) That the excellent response to consultation on the Statement of Community Involvement at both pre-production, and production draft stages be noted;**
- (b) That the responses made by officers to representations received as set out in Annex 1 to Report A to the Cabinet and the revisions to the SCI documents be endorsed;**
- (c) That the documents in Annexes 1 to 8 to Report A to the Cabinet be submitted to the Secretary of State for his approval, and publicised for a further 6-week consultation period commencing on 28 October 2005; and**
- (d) That the Head of Policy, Design & Information be authorised to make any necessary detailed editing or clarification changes.**

2. CONSULTATION DOCUMENT “WHERE SHALL WE LIVE” – DISTRICT HOUSEBUILDING TARGETS FOR SOUTH EAST PLAN (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 49)

The South East Plan, being prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA), will set out a strategic planning framework for the region up to 2026.

Consultation on a broad regional strategy, including sub-regional proposals and sub-regional housing targets took place earlier this year and the Cabinet agreed a response to SEERA in April. Following that consultation, SEERA submitted Part One of the Plan, which included sub-regional and ‘rest of County’ housing targets, to the Government.

A further consultation, that runs until 21 October is on proposed District housing targets for 2006 – 2026. A document ‘Where Shall We Live’ has been prepared by Hampshire County Council and the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) for this purpose.

New Forest District is split into ‘South Hampshire’, which includes Totton and the Waterside east of the National Park and ‘Central Hampshire and the New Forest’, which includes the rest of the district.

The Cabinet are disappointed that two of the three options for the South Hampshire area proposed significant new urban extension on greenfield sites in the narrow strip of Totton and the Waterside east of the National Park. The Council had previously made the point that the transport infrastructure in particular, was inadequate for significant development over and above that already agreed for this area.

Taking into account views received and after discussion the Cabinet has now agreed the following response to the consultation :

- (i) The Cabinet supports the principles that:
 - (a) Further development should only take place where adequate infrastructure and services are ensured hand-in-hand with the development;
 - (b) Development in South Hampshire should be focussed on urban regeneration and renaissance of the two cities and other main urban areas;
 - (c) The major part of any new greenfield development should be concentrated in new Strategic Development Areas, provided with the necessary infrastructure and services;
- (ii) Considers that further work needs to be done with regard to the scope for development in the main urban areas over the whole plan period, with a view to reducing the amount of development that needs to be provided for through greenfield urban extensions;

- (iii) Considers that it is absolutely vital that there is a proper and full Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment of the options before any decision is taken. This must take into account in particular the impact of development proposals on the New Forest National Park, in accordance with the requirements of the 1995 Environment Act and the 2005 guidance published by Defra. It must also take account of the accepted constraints in the New Forest District outside the National Park;
- (iv) Would only support Option 3 for the "South Hampshire area", and objects strongly to Options 1 and 2 on the basis that these options would require unsustainable major new greenfield development in the Totton and Waterside area, and that this would be likely to have an unacceptable impact on the adjacent New Forest National Park and also on the area outside the National Park if proper account is taken of local designations and constraints; and
- (v) Has no strong preference between the options for the "Central Hampshire and New Forest area".

Following this consultation, Hampshire County Council and PUSH aim to advise SEERA of District housing targets to be included in the complete draft South East plan. SEERA will then submit this to the Government in March 2006 with a public examination programmed for late 2006/early 2007.

3. PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT 2005/06 (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 50)

The Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) has been paid to local authorities for the past three years and is due to continue for a further two. It rewards planning authorities for good performance in meeting timescales for processing planning applications as well as progress in producing Local Development Frameworks and hitting targets relating to the e-planning agenda. It is also intended to enable Councils to invest in and further improve their planning services.

In 2003/04 the Council received £109,000 PDG. In 2004/05 this increased to £522,000. In 2005/06 it was a requirement that at least 25% of the grant money had to be spent on capital schemes. This was achieved by investing in a new computer system to be installed this autumn.

In budgeting for 2005/06 it was assumed that the Council would receive £522,000, the same amount it received in 2004/05. In fact the actual amount received was £618,000, an increase of £96,000.

Members noted that the extra grant received is currently being used to enhance the service to Parish and Town Councils, both by providing them with more information on planning applications so they are able to make informed comments to the District Council, reducing the number of applications that have to be referred to the Planning Development Control Committee, and for the employment of an officer to assist with Parish Plans. These services are much valued by Town and Parish Councils and within communities generally. The amount of grant the Council will receive in 2006/07 is not known as the criteria for awards has not yet been set. It is understood that the grant scheme itself will be reviewed as part of the Government spending review so there is no guarantee it will continue beyond the next financial year.

If the amount of annual grant reduced, or ceased altogether, difficult decisions would need to be made on whether the services funded by the grant could continue to be provided by the Council. When the budgetary implications of the National Park Authority taking over responsibility for development control from April 2006 become clear, this issue will need to be considered in the context of the Council's overall expenditure plans.

RECOMMENDED:

That additional expenditure of £96,000 in 2005/6 be funded from the receipt of additional Planning Delivery Grant.

4. LAND CHARGES – UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF BUDGETED INCOME (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 51)

Land charge income has for many years made a substantial contribution to the Council's overall income stream. In 2004/05 this income fell substantially below predicted levels.

The Cabinet noted that a net budget shortfall of £220,000 is predicted for land charges income in 2005/06. The main reasons for this are a significant slow down in the local property market, growth of personal searches at a fixed fee of £11 set by the Lord Chancellor, and an increase in solicitors using companies specialising in providing a search service. The three full time employees in land charges are the minimum that can be employed if the Council is to continue providing a service in line with its target of achieving a 99.9% turn round in 10 working days.

Despite the predicted shortfall, almost £600,000 income is expected from land charges in the current year.

The Council's land charges service is of a very high quality. It appears that many large firms of solicitors, who had business over a wide area, decided in principle to use an outside company rather than deal with numerous District Councils, some of whom may not have provided a good service.

Officers are taking what steps they can in order to maximise income from land charges searches, including encouraging local solicitors to use the Council's service rather than outside companies. However, the reduction in income is largely beyond the Council's control and an improvement in current levels cannot be expected.

RECOMMENDED:

That a net supplementary estimate of £220,000 be approved for 2005/06 in relation to the predicted fall in land charges income.

5. FINANCIAL REPORT – FORECAST FULL YEAR AND ACTUAL FOR THE PERIOD APRIL – AUGUST 2005 (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 52)

The Cabinet considered the forecast budget variations of all Portfolios and Committees from the approved original estimates for 2005/2006. Members are pleased to note a low variation between profiled and actual total revenue budgets for the year to date. An apparent major variation in the vehicles and equipment capital budget will be resolved when substantial invoices have been paid.

Members noted the financial position of Commercial Services. This service has a total budget of approximately £5m, with no contingency budget. A variety of pressures on the service, including rising plastic and fuel costs, increased volumes of fly tipping and litter, and increased employee costs due to sickness and the effects of single status, has made it difficult to contain costs within budgets.

Increases in serious incidents of fly tipping, often involving waste that appears to be from commercial operations and required specialist machinery to clear up, are of particular concern. This is believed to be largely due to substantial increases in waste disposal charges. Steps are being taken to ascertain the potential of CCTV technology in areas where fly tipping is most prevalent. The co-operation of members of the public in reporting the registration numbers of perpetrators' vehicles is also welcomed.

The Cabinet has agreed that, subject to Council agreeing the recommendations below, the items set out in the revised General Fund budget (Appendix 1), the revised capital expenditure (Appendix 2), the revised Housing Revenue Account (Appendix 3) and the financial position of Commercial Services (Appendix 4) to Report E to them be noted. The Cabinet has also noted the actual expenditure to profiled budget positions of the General Fund, Capital Programme and Housing Revenue Account as set out in Appendices 1 to 3 to Report E.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That a supplementary estimate of £125,000 in respect of refuse collection/waste management be approved; and**
- (b) That a virement of £62,000 from Major Repairs to the HRA Disabled Facilities budget be approved.**

6. SOUTH WEST HAMPSHIRE LIFT (REPORT F) (MINUTE NO.53)

The Cabinet has considered whether to participate in the South West Hampshire NHS Local Improvement Finance Trust (LIFT). LIFT is a Government scheme designed to promote the efficient procurement of primary and community health care services through public/private partnerships, and is an alternative to the Private Finance Initiative.

If the Council wishes to participate, it needs to confirm this before an advertisement is placed in the Official Journal of the European Union inviting expressions of interest from the private sector. This advertisement is due to be placed shortly.

Members noted the potential benefits of the scheme to local authorities, as set out in detail in report F to them. However, while it appears there might be no direct financial costs associated with membership, participating at level 1 means the Council will be named as a contracting authority, and at level 2 the Council will be a participant under the Strategic Partnership Agreement.

The benefits that might accrue to the Council from participation do not appear to be significant, and based on the level of information currently available, members felt unable to judge whether participation could lead to additional or opportunity costs falling on the Council. The Cabinet has therefore agreed that further information should be obtained, including, if available, the experiences of authorities that are involved in similar schemes in other areas, any potential financial risks or liabilities that could fall to the Council as a result of participation, and the ability of the Council to withdraw from the scheme should it wish to do so. The Cabinet agreed that if a decision needs to be made before the next Cabinet meeting, the Finance and Support Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Health and Social Inclusion Portfolio Holder, be authorised to decide whether the Council should join the scheme and if so, whether this should be at level 1 or level 2.

7. CALL-IN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS (REPORT G) (MINUTE NO. 54)

In accordance with the Council's constitution the Cabinet noted the decision of the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel following the call in of a Cabinet decision relating to provision of meals on wheels in sheltered housing schemes, and a decision of the Corporate Overview Panel following the call in of a Cabinet decision relating to the Community Strategy Action Plan.

(1) Housing, Health & Social Inclusion Review Panel – Meals on Wheels in Council Owned Sheltered Housing Schemes

This call-in, by Cllr Mrs Robinson, relates to the following decision of the Cabinet on 4 July 2005:

- (a) That the Council cease the provision of meals to residents of Clarks Close, Gore Grange and Winfrid House in the way that they are currently provided with effect from 1 November 2005, but that, in order to achieve equality, all residents of the Council's sheltered housing schemes be offered the opportunity to purchase meals on wheels at full cost if they are not entitled to receive one under existing Social Services criteria; and
- (b) That the Council cease the provision of meals to Gore Grange Day Centre in the way they are currently provided with effect from 1 November 2005, unless Age Concern are willing to pay the additional subsidy of £2.77 per meal, and offer a meal on wheels at full cost if attendees are not entitled to receive a subsidised meal under existing Social Services criteria.

The Housing, Health & Social Inclusion Review Panel on 21 September decided to take no action on the call-in. Some members expressed concern at the decision to cease the provision of the meals, and at the consultation process undertaken. They questioned whether the Cabinet and the Panel had had sufficient information in order to make informed decisions. The majority of members were, however, satisfied with the decision taken. The Panel was advised that a full report on the meals on wheels service was to be submitted to the November meeting. It was also reported that an alternative opportunity for the provision of meals to certain of the Council's sheltered housing schemes was being investigated – the Panel is to receive an update in November.

(2) Corporate Overview Panel – Community Strategy Action Plan

Cllr F R Harrison called in the decision of the Cabinet on 3 August, approving the Community Strategy Action Plan. He called the decision in as he wished the Economy & Planning Review Panel to consider which Partnerships had relevance to that Panel's interests and whether it wished to scrutinise them. However, as the call-in related to the approval of Community Strategy Action Plan, the matter had to be referred to the Corporate Overview Panel.

The Corporate Overview Panel on 22 September 2005 decided not to ask the Cabinet to review its decision, but accepted the concerns raised about what could be described as a 'democratic deficit' in terms of the Council's involvement in various bodies and partnerships, such as the Community Action Networks (CANs). The Panel noted that Member involvement with these bodies was a difficult and sensitive issue, given that each of the bodies had its own particular character and way of operating. The Corporate Overview Panel agreed that individual Review Panels should, at their discretion, deal with particular issues under their remits, while the Corporate Overview Panel would retain its overview of the Community Strategy process.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**

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