

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meetings held on 1 March and 5 April 2006)

1. **MANDATORY LICENSING OF HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION – DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO SIGN AND ISSUE LICENCES AND SETTING THE LICENCE FEE (REPORT A – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 113)**

The Housing Act 2004 introduced some significant changes to the way housing authorities dealt with standards in the private sector. Among the new provisions were the Housing, Health and Safety Rating Standard, which will replace the current standard of fitness for human habitation, new enforcement powers for housing standards and mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

Currently there is only one property known to be within the New Forest boundary that will be defined as a house in multiple occupation. However, there is a publicity drive both locally and nationally which may lead to more dwellings being registered in the future.

In order to facilitate the arrangements the Cabinet has approved the delegation of authority to the Head of Housing Services and the Housing Improvements Manager for the issue of Temporary Exemption Notices, together with the power to include conditions in the licence, the power to issue the licence, the power to vary or revoke the licence, the power to prosecute for offences for non-licensed HMOs and the power to apply to the residential property tribunal for a rent repayment order.

The aim of HMO licensing is to ensure that vulnerable tenants in high risk HMOs are protected. The licence process will ensure that there are no health and safety risks within the dwelling and will introduce improved minimum management standards.

The Cabinet has also agreed a fee of £270 for the licence application. The fee must justify the cost to the authority of processing the application. The fee has been set in line with the fee setting structure agreed with other Hampshire authorities.

2. **REVIEW OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES (REPORT B – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 114)**

The Council owns and is responsible for 32 public conveniences. In September 2005 the Council's Environment Review Panel undertook a review of the future provision of the service and agreed proposals for a capital rebuild programme and permanent decommissioning of some individual sites.

Following consideration by the Review Panel, and taking into account views expressed by the public, the Cabinet has agreed revisions to the capital programme that will provide new toilets in Lymington (Waitrose Car Park) and Ringwood, over the 2006 -2008 period. The toilets at Blackfield, Holbury, Brockenhurst (Main Road) and Testwood Recreation Ground, Totton, will all be permanently decommissioned. These premises are either already closed, are in poor condition or have such low usage that neither their renovation nor replacement can be justified.

The Cabinet has also agreed to waive Standing Orders as to Contracts to appoint John Pardey Architects for the 2006/07 public convenience programmed works, without inviting tenders. However, they agreed that if Ringwood Town Centre toilets proceeded as part of a wider scheme, the entire project should be subject to competitive tender in view of the scale of the work.

3. REVIEW OF THE CEMETERIES SERVICE (REPORT C – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 115)

The Cabinet has agreed revised cemetery regulations and a new Memorial Mason Registration scheme. They have also agreed a headstone and memorial inspection regime and procedures for dealing with unauthorised memorials.

The Council is responsible for 7 operational and 2 closed cemeteries with an obligation under law to keep them all in good order. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) requires burial authorities, as employers, to ensure not only the safety of their employees but also the safety of members of the public. The amended Cemetery Regulations and the establishment of a Memorial Mason Registration Scheme will establish a uniform standard of workmanship and working practice throughout all Council cemeteries and graveyards.

The Cabinet is very mindful of the need to ensure that all due care and attention is shown not only to those interned, but also to the relatives of the deceased. In particular it is important, in lawn cemeteries, that no additional elements were added to a grave area. Chippings or kerbstones are a health and safety risk to both employees and visitors when lawn mowers or strimmers are being used. The new regulations clarify the position and will be applied in as sensitive and sympathetic way as possible.

In addition, the Cabinet has agreed that a more detailed review of burial provision district wide needs to be undertaken. The Council needs to look ahead and have clearly identified plans in place to accommodate the burial needs for the future. A funding bid will be made for 2007/08 to enable a feasibility study to be undertaken to determine the future needs and locations for burials, for the remainder of this century.

4. PROJECT INTEGRA ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2006-2011/JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (REPORT D – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 116)

The Cabinet has considered and is recommending the adoption of the Project Integra Annual Business Plan (ABP) for 2006 – 2011 and the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS). The ABP sets out the service priorities for the next five years and the financial arrangements for 2006/07. The JMWMS is a plan for dealing with municipal waste in Hampshire in the next 10 years.

This is the first time the Council had considered a JMWMS. The document complements the Council's own Waste Management Strategy and proposes five options for consideration as a way forward. The Cabinet agreed that option 5, as detailed in Report D to them, provides the best way to achieve Government targets.

The option includes enhanced collection and treatment methods as well as greater focus on waste minimisation and commercial waste collections. However, the costs to the Council are unclear and members agreed that the financial implications need further clarification before proceeding.

RECOMMENDED:

That, subject to the clarification and agreement of the financial implications:

- (i) The Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Hampshire be endorsed; and***
- (ii) The Project Integra Annual Business Plan 2006-2011 be approved.***

**5. MARCHWOOD COMMUNITY FACILITY (REPORT E – 1 MARCH 2006)
(MINUTE NO. 117)**

The Marchwood Sports and Social Club (MSSC) is on the site of the former power station and was the social facility for the site. When the power station closed the Club had already established a broader base of membership locally and at the time was regarded as the key community facility in the village.

In order to secure the land for community use the Council took a head lease from the landowner and then sublet to MSSC. Financially, the Council pays the rental to the landlord and then recovers an equivalent sum from MSSC. The sub lease has been in place since 1993 and has worked well up until this financial year

Cllr Walmsley, a local member who addressed the Cabinet, said that the community premises were a good local facility that was well used. There were a number of local residents who voluntarily ran the Marchwood Sports and Social Club (MSSC). He acknowledged that the Club's recent large electricity bill had meant that they were now in arrears with their rent to the Council. However, he felt that if they could be helped with that, and were granted an extension to the lease, they would be able to continue.

Members noted that if MSSC pay no further rental until the end of the lease in September 2006, there will be a shortfall of income of £17,500. Officers are working with the Club to try and reduce that liability and they will continue to support the Club to achieve a solution to their difficulties. However, the Cabinet agreed that the Council can no longer maintain the current situation. Having considered the arrangements they have agreed that the lease for the community premises in Marchwood will not be renewed, but that officers will continue to actively support the retention of community use on the site.

The Cabinet have agreed that the financial implications of the arrangements should be reported as part of the financial variations for the financial years 2005/06 and 2006/07. The maximum income possible should be recovered under the current arrangements, consistent with the continued use of the site.

The arrangements on the site for Forest Bus are unaffected by the situation and they will continue to operate as usual.

6. NEW FOREST PRIMARY CARE TRUST/HAMPSHIRE STRATEGIC HEALTH AUTHORITY/AMBULANCE TRUST - CONSULTATION (REPORT F – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 118)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to two consultation papers on reconfiguration, issued by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority (STHA).

The Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel has considered the consultation documents and the advantages and disadvantages of the proposals and made a number of recommendations that the Cabinet has supported. The basis of the response to the consultation is set out below.

The two proposals for Primary Care Trust (PCT) reconfiguration outside of Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight are either for a single PCT or three PCTs to replace the existing seven. For the Strategic Health Authority the proposals are either for one authority for the south east, coterminous with the Government Office for the South East, or for two authorities, one covering Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and the Thames Valley and the other covering Kent & Medway, Surrey and Sussex.

There is also an option for the Hampshire Ambulance Trust to merge with the trusts for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire to mirror the proposed STHA for Hampshire and the Thames Valley.

This is the fourth major restructuring of health care provision in the last few years and the constant changing is not of benefit to local people. There is a lot of good work being done locally and the Cabinet agrees that it is important that any reconfiguration preserves the best of the current position.

Whilst it is appreciated that one PCT will give greater economies of scale, the Cabinet expressed concern that this should not be at the expense of current local arrangements, particularly in relation to the number of small cottage hospitals in the district. Any changes need to reflect whatever is the best way of delivering services locally and engaging with the local agenda, whether this is done through one or more PCTs. Any reorganisation should include an arrangement for a sub structure for the eleven district councils involved.

The Cabinet also expressed concern over dentistry provision. New contracts for dentists meant that they are no longer able to run mixed practices providing private services to adults whilst at the same time providing NHS services to children, the elderly and those on benefits. This will result in insufficient NHS provision for these vulnerable groups.

The Cabinet agreed that the Portfolio Holder, in consultation with officers, should respond to the consultation documents on behalf of the Council, taking into account the views of the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel together with the points raised by the Cabinet to include the following issues:-

- (a) That whichever PCT structure is agreed, the following aspects will be critically important: -
 - (i) That LSPs be a key building block of any future structure.

- (ii) That strong emphasis be placed on public health work with district councils.
 - (iii) That partnership work continues to be a key element of future work.
 - (iv) That ongoing support be given to joint projects and appointments, including financial support.
 - (v) That the District Council be involved in the developing Practice Based Commissioning and the social care agenda.
 - (vi) That concern is expressed over dentistry provision. New contracts for dentists have meant that they are no longer able to run mixed practices providing private services to adults whilst at the same time providing NHS services to children, the elderly and those on benefits. This will result in insufficient NHS provision for these vulnerable groups.
 - (vii) That whilst it is appreciated that one PCT would give greater economies of scale there is concern that this should not be at the expense of current local arrangements that worked well. Any reorganisation should include arrangements for a sub structure for the eleven district councils.
- (b) That the option for two Strategic Health Authorities for the South East, one covering Hampshire & The Isle of Wight and Thames Valley (covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxford) and the other covering Kent & Medway, Surrey and Sussex be preferred.
- (c) That the proposed reconfiguration of the Ambulance Trust be supported, subject to the following: -
- (i) The changes not altering response times and that reassurance on this issue be sought.
 - (ii) The changes not detrimentally altering services for local people especially in more rural areas such as the New Forest.
 - (iii) The changes result in improved communication between the Ambulance Trust and the Council and other community groups.
- (d) That a letter be sent to the Department of Health, the Strategic Health Authority and the PCT stressing the Council's concerns regarding the rate of change within these organisations and the negative impact on staff morale.

7. COUNCIL'S KEY TARGETS (REPORT G – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 119)

Each year the Council identifies its key targets for the year ahead and assesses performance against these targets. The targets are designed to reflect the high level/high impact activities that help the Council focus on achieving outcomes and provide an opportunity to promote the Council's work through the Performance Plan and other means.

The 2006/07 key targets have been identified in the main through the service planning process. They are then agreed in draft with the Portfolio Holder, scrutinised by the relevant review panel, with the Corporate Overview Panel specifically considering an assessment against the Corporate Plan, and finally agreed by the Cabinet (See report G to the Cabinet for the detail of the individual targets).

All the targets will be included in the Council's Performance Plan to be published later in the year.

8. THE COUNCIL'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN (REPORT H – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 120)

The Cabinet has considered progress against the various areas in the Council's Improvement Plan. The Plan is constantly evolving as new key challenges are presented. As part of this development process the Cabinet agreed a number of additions and deletions as detailed in the report to them.

The Improvement Plan is updated and reviewed on a regular basis and acts as a focus for key corporate improvement issues facing the authority. The Improvement Plan works with the four year Corporate Plan and the annual Performance Plan, which remain the key corporate planning documents of the authority. The Improvement Plan also plays a role in the Council's Direction of Travel Assessment.

9. LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (LSPs) – SHAPING THEIR FUTURE – A CONSULTATION PAPER (REPORT I – 1 MARCH 2006) (MINUTE NO. 121)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to a consultation paper examining the future role of LSPs, their governance and accountability and their capacity to deliver sustainable community strategies and Local Area Agreements.

The Government's vision for the role of the LSP is that it takes the strategic lead in the locality by bringing together the views of local partners, including representatives of the private, voluntary and community sectors with national, regional and parish priorities in developing the Sustainable Community Strategy. It promotes the ideas that the LSP is the partnership of partnerships in an area, rather than it being seen as separate to other partnerships.

Members noted that the partnership approach is still evolving and the response to the consultation reflects that. The proposals in the document are generally welcomed although greater clarity is needed on some aspects.

A full copy of the response is available on the Council's Website.

10. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS – 1 MARCH 2006 (MINUTE NO. 122)

In line with the Council's Financial Regulations, the Cabinet noted the reasons for a suspension of Standing Orders by the Director of Resources, in order to make an urgent payment of £20,000 to settle a claim made by a former employee.

RECOMMENDED:

That the suspension of Standing Orders in order to make an urgent payment of £20,000 to settle a claim made by a former employee be noted.

12. ANTI FRAUD RELATED POLICIES (REPORT A – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 127)

The Cabinet has considered and are recommending a number of changes to the Council's anti fraud related policies. The policies have been reviewed and updated in accordance with the agreed action plan under the Code of Practice for Corporate Governance for 2004/05. Whilst the basis of the policies remains the same they now give greater focus on employee related and front line services.

The Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy is an overarching document and prescribes the Council's commitment to deal with fraud and corruption in accordance with the standards of good corporate governance. The document replaces the current Fraud Investigation and Benefit Fraud policy.

The Whistle Blowing at Work Policy provides the basis for employees to report, in confidence, on matters of fraud, corruption, malpractice, unethical conduct or any other matter that may be damaging to the individual, or affects the reputation of the Council. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1988 protects those that expose such serious wrongdoings from recrimination by the employer, provided that such claims are not vexatious. This document replaces the current Fraud, Corruption and Probity policy.

The Prosecution Policy – Council Tax and Housing Benefit Fraud seeks to define a consistent and uniform approach to the applications of sanctions, including prosecution, against those that defraud the Council in respect of Housing Benefit and Council Tax claims. The Policy meets the standards expected by the Housing Benefit Inspectorate and the Department for Work and Pensions. This document replaces the current Council Tax and Housing Benefit Administration Benefit Fraud Policy.

The Employee Side expressed some concern in relation to the issue of maintaining confidentiality in terms of reporting by email on 'Whistle Blowing'. Members agreed that there are a number of other reporting methods that employees could use if they had concern over email. However, officers will pursue this point further with employee side. In relation to a comment in the document relating to false or malicious allegations (paragraph 6.3 of Appendix B of Report A to the Cabinet refers) Members agreed to change the wording to read that "the making of such allegations by an employee of the Council *may* be regarded as a disciplinary issue".

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy as detailed in Appendix A to report A to the Cabinet be approved;***
- (b) *That the Whistle Blowing at Work Policy as detailed in Appendix B to report A to the Cabinet and as amended be approved; and***
- (c) *That the Prosecution Policy – Council Tax and Housing Benefit Fraud as detailed in Appendix C to report A to the Cabinet be approved.***

13. CONSULTANT’S REPORT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (REPORT B – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 128)

The Cabinet has agreed, as a basis for consultation, a report commissioned from Roger Tym and Partners to review and revise the current Economic Development Strategy for the district.

Members expressed some concern at the quality of the document. They feel that the document lacks a general cross cutting theme and that there are a number of issues such as supporting a growing older population that have not been addressed. Some members suggested that a shorter more focussed document would have been more helpful.

Members noted that the document was intended to give an opportunity for consultation and discussion with key partners. The document and the outcome of the consultation will then inform the final Economic Development Strategy that will address the issues of concern that are being raised.

The timeline set out below reflects a number of factors. Firstly, as a major document leading to policy questions, it should be open to consultation for three months under the “Compact” arrangements. When comments are considered, the process of agreeing the Strategy can begin. The Council’s Constitution requires that the Economic Development Strategy is devised with the input of the Economy and Planning Panel and is agreed by the Cabinet and the Council.

April	Cabinet approve for consultation
May – July inclusive	Consultation with partner agencies, for example: National Park Authority New Forest Business Partnership Hampshire County Council Town and Parish Councils Education sector
August	Lead Scrutiny members, Corporate Management Team and Portfolio Holder discussions
September	Economy and Planning Review Panel
November	Cabinet
December	Full Council

14. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PLAN : CONSULTATION RESPONSE (REPORT C – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 129)

The Children Act 2004 sets out a statutory agenda for local government under the theme of “Every Child Matters”. This indicates at the outset that all agencies are regarded as having a part to play in this agenda. The duty to produce a Children and Young People Plan is that of the Children’s Services Authority (for NFDC this is the County Council). District councils have a duty to co-operate with the Every Child Matters agenda and the Children and Young People Plan that guides the work.

The Cabinet has agreed a response to the Children and Young People Plan as detailed in Appendix 2 to report C to them. Members discussed a number of points and, in particular, agreed the importance of the provision of appropriate health care for children and young people. It was agreed that the Council's response to the consultation will be amended to reflect this. Members also agreed that the composition of the group proposed to support the work of the Portfolio Holder should be expanded to include other members with a specific interest in the subject. Members are invited to contact officers direct if there are particular issues that members feel should be addressed in the consultation.

15. SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT ON HOUSING DESIGN, DENSITY AND CHARACTER (REPORT D – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 130)

In accordance with the Council's Local Development Scheme 2005, the Cabinet has agreed a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) relating to the housing design and density policies of the NFDC District Local Plan First Alteration.

The document was prepared following full consultation with the Economy and Planning Review Panel and is intended to give developers a process to follow to justify higher densities through design.

The Local Plan First Alteration introduced a new Policy DW-E2 on the density and mix of new housing development, as well as changes to existing Policy DW-E1 to require the submission of design statements with major development proposals.

The need for guidance on the implementation of these policies arises from a series of Member seminars held to discuss concerns over the impacts of higher density developments on the character of existing residential areas.

Members expressed some concern in the light of a decision by the Planning Inspectorate, where little weight had been given to the guidance in the document. Members noted that the document at that stage had not been finalised. There will, however, always be an element of judgement made on quality issues.

Members noted that the ongoing issue of space allocation for car parking continued to be pursued with HCC and it was hoped that a more reasonable interpretation of highway standards could be reached in the future.

16. COMMERCIAL SERVICES SERVICE PLAN 2006/07 (REPORT E – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 131)

The Cabinet has approved the 2006/07 Service Plan for the Commercial Services Directorate.

The Partnership between NFDC and TVBC was created in September 2002. The Partnership constitution requires that both parent authorities agree an annual business plan.

Members noted the key targets and objectives for the coming year. These include, for the New Forest elements of the Partnership, the following key issues:

- Reviewing options for:
 - support service provision
 - financial and internal systems
 - provision of joint policy advice and strategic functionality
 - Integration of new service areas into the partnership
 - Alternative models for future delivery of the Partnership
- The reorganisation of functions across business units alongside a new management structure;
- An improvement to office accommodation at Marsh Lane Depot;
- A fundamental review of domestic waste and recycling collections;
- The extension of the garden waste collection scheme to the whole of the district;
- The future role of the Central Purchasing Unit following the fundamental review of procurement and purchasing arrangements across the Council;
- The establishment of a commercial Gas Servicing team to fulfil the needs of both NFDC and TVBC;
- Implementation of the new working arrangements for the delivery of reactive maintenance to the Council's housing stock;
- Greater responsibility for managing and delivering certain elements of the Housing planned maintenance programme;
- Responding to the requirements of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 when Regulations are finalised.

17. PROCUREMENT (REPORT F – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 132)

The Corporate Overview Panel commissioned two major reviews during 2005. The first covered a number of issues around the delivery of the capital programme following concerns over the amount of slippage that was occurring each year. A number of challenges had also been made by contractors used by the Council that had resulted in litigation.

The second review, whilst related to the first, focussed on the Council's overarching approach to procurement.

A Project Review Board was established for the Capital Review, which was latterly enhanced to include the Procurement Review in order to ensure synergy and avoid duplication. The main causes of capital slippage and the reasons for the contractual problems were identified and analysed. The existing rules, regulations and guidance were evaluated to assess whether the frameworks within which projects had to operate were fit for purpose. The outcome of the deliberations showed that the Council needed to operate a more flexible and modern approach to project delivery. However, it was agreed that with any relaxation, or increased flexibility, must come increased accountability and action for breaches of the framework once agreed.

Significant work has been undertaken in updating the Standing Orders to ensure that they are more flexible and appropriate but these may need to be further refined in the light of a new Procurement Strategy.

The Project Management Guide is, at this stage, a summary document and will need significant additional work to finalise it into a detailed guide.

During all the review processes it became clear that there were some examples of poor practice and breaches of existing regulations, although this was not replicated around the Council. As part of the process therefore, specific training issues will be addressed around the introduction of the amendments to Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

The Procurement Brief for the Procurement Review envisaged a much more protracted review than is likely to evolve, as the strategic direction that the organisation is following gains clarity. The Procurement Strategy will set out a framework that will assist the Council to deliver the key corporate objectives within the Corporate Plan.

Members agreed some minor textual amendments to the documents.

The Cabinet noted that there will be a number of ways in which local businesses will be appraised of the new arrangements. In particular the local business partnership will be approached, with a view to them disseminating information to their members. Guidelines will also be introduced to ensure that there is a fair rotation of work between all contactors used by the Council.

The new arrangements will enable improved performance that will be monitored through the Corporate Overview Panel.

The Cabinet thanked all members and officers involved for their hard work in producing these complex documents. Subject to the agreement of the recommendations below, the Cabinet has agreed the delegations attached to the Contract Standing Orders, in so far as they relate solely to executive functions.

RECOMMENDED

- (a) *That subject to the following words “the latter may include economic, social and environmental considerations” being added to clause 8.3.2 after the word “quality”, the new Contract Standing Orders and the amendments to the Financial Regulations and the delegations attached to the Contract Standing Orders in so far as they relate solely to Council functions, be agreed;***
- (b) *That subject to the addition of a further bullet point at paragraph 8.1.4 to read: “economic, social and environmental considerations”, the Contract Standing Order User Guide and the Desk Guide to Purchasing be agreed; and***
- (c) *That a supplementary estimate of £50,000 (on a rolling basis) to enable design and preparatory work to be undertaken on schemes in the year prior to their commencements be agreed.***

**18. MEALS ON WHEELS CHARGES 2006/07 (REPORT G – 5 APRIL 2006)
(MINUTE NO. 133)**

The Cabinet has considered a proposal to increase the New Forest District Council Meals price by 10p to £2.80 for 2006/07. Hampshire County Council had already set the county price meal at £2.80.

RECOMMENDED:

That the meals on wheels price be set at £2.80 for 2006/2007.

**19. COMMUNITY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2006/07 (REPORT H – 5 APRIL 2006)
(MINUTE NO. 134)**

Every year an action plan is developed and delivered by each of the Community Action Networks (CANS) for each topic chapter of the Community Strategy. The Cabinet has considered and agreed an action plan for 2006/07.

Members were pleased to note the progress of the action plan and the increasing cross cutting nature of the work. Individual portfolio holders and review panels were asked to consider their own specific areas of work, and bring forward any actions they would wish to see progressed in 2006/07 and beyond.

**20. HOUSING PLANNED MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME
2006/2007 (REPORT I – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 135)**

The Cabinet has agreed proposals for planned maintenance, cyclical maintenance and improvement work as listed in Appendix 1 to Report I to them. They have also agreed proposals for extending two kitchen modernisation contracts with East Dorset Housing Association.

The Housing Portfolio Holder said that there was a balance to be met between the need to meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard and the expectations of the residents with regard to environmental improvements on estates. However, in accordance with the tenants' wishes, the work required for the Decent Homes Standard would not be delayed in favour of environmental improvements.

A survey of properties is being undertaken that will detail the actual kitchen and bathroom works that are required. The survey will be completed later in the year and, at that point, it will be clear how much funding is needed to meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard and how much might be available for environmental improvement work.

**21. PROPOSED MERGER OF POLICY & STRATEGY AND FINANCE & SUPPORT
PORTFOLIOS (REPORT J – 5 APRIL 2006) (MINUTE NO. 136)**

Following the resignation of Cllr Wise from his position as Finance and Support Portfolio Holder, the Cabinet considered the merger of the work of that portfolio with the Policy and Strategy Portfolio with both areas of work being covered by the Leader of the Council.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Finance & Support and Policy & Strategy Portfolios be merged into one Portfolio.

22. NFDC/TEST VALLEY COMMERCIAL SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE. – 5 APRIL 2006 (MINUTE NO. 138)

The Cabinet has appointed Cllr Beck to fill the vacancy on the NFDC/TVBC Commercial Services Joint Committee.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**

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