

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 4 October 2006)

1. MODERNISING MATERNITY SERVICES (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 48)

The Cabinet has considered a public consultation document on Modernising Maternity Services issued by Southampton University Hospitals Trust (SUHT). The document concerns proposals to change the provision of the stand alone birthing centres currently based in Lymington, Hythe and Romsey. The principal proposal is to move all services onto one site.

The Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel have received presentations from SUHT at their meetings on 19 July and 20 September and have considered the issues in detail. They made a number of recommendations to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet agreed with the Health and Social Inclusion Portfolio Holder in her strong support for the current New Forest birthing centres in Lymington and Hythe (and also Romsey). Members expressed concern at the proposal from SUHT that the options for change included the rationalisation of the birth centres from three to a single twelve bed facility. The Portfolio Holder said that she had been assured that the services available in the current Lymington Hospital would be transferred to the new hospital and that there would be 12 maternity beds available. She now understood that the proposal was for only 6 beds and this was being given as the reason for the unit not being viable.

A birthing centre in Lymington would, geographically, be the most sensible option. There were traffic congestion problems in Lyndhurst and at the level crossing in Brockenhurst that could cause difficulties for people travelling north from the coastal towns and villages.

Whilst Members strongly supported the retention of a birthing centre in Lymington they did agree with the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel that if that centre was not retained then the next best option would be the proposed improvement and retention of the birthing centre in Hythe.

Members agreed that the SUHT should be asked to honour the previous commitment to provide 12 maternity beds in the new Lymington Hospital. Members expressed concern generally at the suggestion by the SUHT that access to services across the district needed to be equalised to give the east of the district and the Southampton area a better quality of service. There were a number of areas of social deprivation in and around Lymington and New Milton and many people were without transport. The provision of services for people in those areas would reduce if the Lymington birthing centre were closed to provide better services elsewhere. Members were also unhappy at the suggestion that the SUHT appeared to be attempting to solve their financial problems by reducing the services available in Lymington. Members agreed that patient care should come before financial balancing.

Concern was also expressed at the suggestion that NHS staff had been pressurised into remaining silent during the consultation period with threats of disciplinary action should they speak out on the subject.

The Cabinet agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Health and Social Inclusion would respond to the consultation document on Modernising Maternity Services taking into account the recommendations from the Housing, Health and Social Inclusion Review Panel and the points raised in discussion at the Cabinet meeting.

2. EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 49)

The Cabinet has agreed the Employment Development Plan Document Preferred Options (as detailed in Appendix 1 to Report B to the Cabinet) for consultation.

The Economy and Planning Review Panel have also considered the Preferred Options document and have supported the sites and options as set out in the report. They raised a number of issues that were reported to the Cabinet and which will be taken into account in preparing the final document for consultation.

The Preferred Options document is part of the Council's Local Development Framework and follows on from work to compile an extensive evidence base of background information to help identify the future needs of business and the district's economy and from stakeholder consultation on a range of identified issues and options.

The document sets out the options considered and recommends preferences in six broad areas:

- Retaining existing employment sites and allocations;
- Employment Land allocations;
- Allocating sites for different types of employment;
- Conversion and redevelopment of buildings;
- Encouraging/diversifying agriculture; and
- Encouraging flexible working and home working

Members noted that, following their agreement of the document there will be a six week consultation period in late October/December 2006. A report would then be made back to the Economy and Planning Review Panel and the Cabinet before the document was submitted to the Government for public examination.

3. DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 50)

The Cabinet has agreed a Disability Equality Scheme for 2007 – 2009 as detailed in Appendix 1 to Report C to them.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 places a general duty on public authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment of people with disabilities; promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and others; and, in carrying out its work to take into account the needs of disabled persons even where that means treating disabled persons more favourably than other people.

The DDA also places several specific duties on the Council:

- To publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) no later than 4 December 2006;
- To involve people with disabilities in the development of the DES;
- To publish in the DES how the Council will assess the impact of its policies and practices, or the likely impact of its proposed policies and practices on disabled people;
- To include in the DES the Council's arrangements for gathering information on the effect of its policies on people with disabilities and show how this information is used to assist it in its performance;
- To show how the information gained is used to improve the recruitment, development and retention of people with disabilities;
- To produce an action plan for the next 3 years;
- To review and report on progress every year; and
- To review the scheme every 3 years.

This is the first time that any public body has been required to produce a DES. Previous other similar equality duties have required the Council to consult however, there is a requirement in this new duty to actively involve those most affected. The Council therefore held an Involvement Day in May 2006 to seek information from disabled people themselves, their carers, and organisations and partner bodies on what barriers they faced in their public lives. The issues that were raised have been incorporated into the DES action plan. A DES Advisory Group comprising volunteers from the community was also formed to ensure that the issues raised by the disabled community were followed up. Representatives from this Group attended the Cabinet meeting and participated in the debate.

Now that the DES is approved the Advisory Group will take on a monitoring role and update the Council on any changing needs.

4. FINANCIAL REPORT – FORECAST FULL YEAR AND ACTUAL FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2006 TO AUGUST 2006 (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 51)

The Cabinet has considered the forecast budget variations of all portfolios and Committees from the approved original estimates for 2006/07. They have noted the actual expenditure to profiled budget positions of the General Fund budget, the Capital Programme and the Housing Revenue account and the detail of the current budget position for Commercial Services. In addition they have agreed a revised General Fund budget and Capital Expenditure Programme.

**5. RINGWOOD TOWN CENTRE – OPTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT (REPORT E)
(MINUTE NO. 52)**

The Cabinet has considered the work undertaken to date by the Ringwood Town Centre Steering Group. The Group agreed that the broad options for the possible development of part of the Furlong Car Park at Ringwood should be the subject of a consultation exercise. It was also clear that technical work was needed to define the appropriate scale, environmental impact and practical constraints on the development of the site.

To enable this work to proceed the Cabinet has agreed a supplementary estimate of £20,000 to appoint consultants to carry out the necessary technical and financial appraisal work.

Members noted that all three options as detailed below would be consulted on:

- a purely retail scheme;
- a mixed retail, municipal and social scheme (including a public hall); and
- a municipal and social scheme (including a public hall).

Members agreed that it was important to hear the views of the local community to ensure that a proper balance of development was achieved. This would be done in a time frame that would allow the results of the town planning exercise to be taken on board.

A further report on the progress of this work will be made back to the Cabinet when the initial consultation exercise and technical appraisal work has been carried out.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**