

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meetings held on 4 March and 1 April 2009)

1. PROJECT INTEGRA ANNUAL ACTION PLAN 2009 - 2014 (REPORT A – 4 MARCH 2009) (MINUTE NO. 101)

The Cabinet is recommending the approval of the Project Integra Annual Action Plan 2009 – 2014. The Plan is the mechanism by which the Project Integra Board carries out its work on behalf of the partnership and it sets out the costs of running the Board and the associated joint activities of the Partnership.

The partnership continues to be one of the best examples of joint working in relation to waste management in the UK, not least by virtue of the high level of diversion from landfill now being achieved. Currently, the overall recycling/composting rate for Project Integra stands at around 44% with the amount of waste that is treated through the energy recovery process standing at around 47% of the total waste. This means that 91% of all waste is diverted from landfill, the highest of any county Grouping.

In particular the Cabinet is pleased to note that in 2007/08 NFDC exceeded their individual statutory recycling target and will continue to work to improve recycling rates in order to meet future increased statutory targets. The Cabinet is also pleased to note that NFDC is the only local authority in Project Integra that still offers weekly collections for both waste and recyclables and yet maintains its position as the third lowest in cost which is an excellent result.

Income per tonne from the sale of recyclate of all types has shown a dramatic decline since October 2008 with the market for all materials except glass, but especially paper, fluctuating dramatically. Although the latest information indicates that the markets have now stabilised, Project Integra will continue to carefully monitor the situation in 2009/10.

Currently, it was felt that to provide a doorstep glass recycling collection would increase the Council's costs and carbon footprint, but would not achieve a significant increase in the amount of glass collected. However, waste and recycling options are continually being reviewed and if it becomes economic to collect mixed glass in one vehicle, then this might be considered.

The Cabinet agree that the Council's good performance had been achieved through education and working with the customers.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Project Integra Annual Action Plan 2009-2014 be approved.

2. GREEN AUDIT DRAFT IMPROVEMENT PLANS (REPORT B - 4 MARCH 2009) (MINUTE NO. 102)

The Cabinet has agreed three further improvement plans arising from the Green Audit process relating to the way in which the Council operates its services; procures its goods and services and how it understands and plans for climate change.

The theme for the way in which the Council operates its services looks at the Council's internal approach to reduction, re-use and recycling of materials arising from the operation of its services. This includes paper, printing materials, glass, cans, plastics, batteries, office furniture and cleaning materials etc.

The theme for the way the Council procures its goods and services looks at the issue of Sustainable Procurement, focussing on how the Council can acquire goods and provide services that achieve positive impacts on a range of sustainability objectives. As part of the development of this plan, the Green Audit Board has favoured an approach to use a framework promoted as the "UK Government Sustainable Procurement Toolkit" to move from where the Council is now to where sustainable procurement is embedded into thinking and processes.

Unlike virtually all elements of the other themes, the third theme is about adaptation to, rather than mitigation of, climate change. It is about dealing with those impacts of climate change that are likely to happen irrespective of any actions we take now. Our level of preparedness for climate change is being measured by National Indicator 188. It is one of the targets under the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

The Cabinet is very pleased with the work that the Green Audit Board is producing and for the helpful cross party working that is taking place. The improvement plans will help the Council focus on improvement activities that will assist in reducing reliance on non-renewable natural resources as part of the approach to efficiency

3. STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING SERVICE (REPORT C – 4 MARCH 2009) (MINUTE NO. 103)

The Cabinet has agreed new criteria for the purpose of administering the Council's street naming and numbering statutory function together with revisions to officers' delegated powers in order to bring them up to date.

The detail of the revised criteria is set out in Report C to the Cabinet but the main changes are as follows:-

- Following a decision on re-naming a street, no further application will be accepted in respect of that street until ten years after the decision. This will prevent repetitive approaches which tie up resources.
- New street names for new developments will not be subject to an application for change until ten years have elapsed from the issue of the street numbering certificates. Consultation takes places with the developer, the appropriate parish / town council, local ward member(s) and the Royal Mail before such a street is named and therefore for a new occupier to then be able to propose that the name be changed causes an unnecessary administrative burden.
- For an existing unnamed street to be named, a majority of occupiers of properties with a postal address in the street will be sought to support the proposal (one "vote" per property). Where there is a long established unnamed street, a request to name it should only require support at the lowest possible threshold.

4. HYTHE PROMENADE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME – FINAL CONTRACT PAYMENT (REPORT D – 4 MARCH 2009) (MINUTE NO. 104)

The Cabinet has noted the details of a final contract payment required for the Hythe Promenade Enhancement Scheme. The Scheme was opened in July 2006 and was highly commended in the Local Government News Street Design Awards in 2007 and won a Civic Trust Award in 2008.

The project was a partnership scheme with an approved total budget of £792,000 funded by contributions from Hampshire County Council (£492,000), New Forest District Council (£271,000), Hythe and Dibden Parish Council (£28,500) and local business (£500).

During the course of the project two claims were made by the contractor for additional payments. The claims, which were for additional work above that originally contracted for, were complex and were professionally assessed, with the conclusion being that at least in part, the claims were justified. Members agreed that it is disappointing that the management of the contract has led to additional costs being incurred. Since the contract has been let, new guidance on project management has been issued to all staff, and training is being organised for officers with responsibility for managing contracts of that nature to emphasise individual responsibilities and highlight lessons learned.

In view of the requirement to make the outstanding payment by 13 March 2009, the Cabinet has also noted that the Executive Director (Section 151 Officer) will, as a matter of urgency, and in accordance with Financial Regulation 2.4, arrange for the payment to be made by that date.

RECOMMENDED:

That a supplementary estimate of £115,000 (of which HCC will contribute £67,500) be agreed in order to make a final contract payment for the Hythe Promenade enhancement works.

5. ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT (REPORT A - 1 APRIL 2009) (MINUTE NO. 109)

The Cabinet has considered the Annual Audit and Inspection letter that summarises the work undertaken by the Audit Commission and the District Auditor for the preceding year.

In 2007/08 the Council made good progress in implementing its corporate improvement plan, with the majority of key objectives and milestones being achieved. The Council demonstrated improvement in over half of its key performance indicators with nearly half being in the best 25%, which was above average when compared to other councils.

Whilst the Council's risk management arrangements have improved since the previous year, the Audit Commission commented that there remains scope for further improvement, specifically on recognising and responding to partnership risks and providing risk management training to all relevant staff.

In terms of Financial Management and Use of Resources, for the financial year 2007/08 the report concluded that the Council had approved its financial statements in advance of the 30 June statutory deadline and the Audit Commission had issued an unqualified opinion on them and commented that this was a commendable achievement by the Council. The statements were well presented and supported by comprehensive working papers.

An unqualified Value for Money Conclusion was also issued. The Council continues to provide good value for money. The Council's performance continues to improve and is maintained at a level that is above average compared to other councils whilst costs remain below average.

The scoring in the Use of Resources assessment was undertaken against five key themes with 1 being the lowest score and 4 being the highest. NFDC scored a 3 for each of the five themes. The Council's achievement was commendable as the process continued to get tougher each year.

A new performance assessment framework, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) has been developed which will, in future, provide an independent assessment of how well people are being served by their local public services. The CAA will have two main elements. An area assessment that looks at how well public services are delivering better results for local people within agreed priorities, and how they are likely to improve; and an organisational assessment for councils which will combine the external auditor's assessment of value for money with a joint inspectorate assessment of council service performance.

The first area and organisational assessment reports will be published in November 2009. The Council is already engaged with the new CAA process and will continue to work hard to maintain its standards.

In discussing the detail of the Annual Audit Letter the Cabinet noted that the matters that have been raised for improvement are already being acted upon. In particular, members once again noted the unique problems of shortage of land in the New Forest that reduce the ability to provide sufficient affordable housing. However, the Cabinet is pleased to note that the Council has completed 136 new affordable homes in the district in 2007/08 which is in excess of the target of 100.

In conclusion the Audit Commission comments that in terms of action the Council need to:-

- keep under review plans to achieve improvements in performance in planning and homelessness services;
- recognise and respond to any significant partnership risks, and ensure all appropriate staff received relevant risk management training

Overall, the Audit Commission are pleased with the direction of travel of the Council and that it is clear that the Council are continually improving.

6. COUNCIL HOUSE RENT INCREASE – UPDATE (REPORT B – 1 APRIL 2009) (MINUTE NO. 110)

The Cabinet at their meeting in February, as part of the annual budget process, recommended a rent increase of 5.8% for council house rents. This level of increase was necessary to comply with Government recommendations aligned to the rent restructuring process.

Both Cabinet members and tenants had expressed concern about this level of increase and the Housing Portfolio Holder wrote to the Minister for Housing expressing concern and asking for the Government to reconsider their position.

A draft determination and consultation has now been received from the Government proposing that the average rent increase be reduced by half. However, this was a consultation document and a formal determination was not expected until May. This would mean that, following the required 28 day notice to tenants, the actual rent reduction may not be achieved until June or July.

The Cabinet considered the risk to the Council of implementing a reduced rent increase in advance of a formal decision and balanced this against the benefits to tenants of reducing their rent as soon as possible. They also took into account the potential costs to the Council that could be incurred in terms of repayments to tenants as a result of the Government's previous higher increase.

Mindful of the difficult situation that many tenants, particularly those on low incomes, find themselves in, the Cabinet is recommending that subject to the appropriate notice requirement, the lower average rent increase of 2.9% should be implemented as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDED:

That, following receipt of a draft determination and proposed consultation period from the Government, taking into account the associated risks to the Council of implementing a rent decrease in advance of formal confirmation versus the benefits to council tenants, a reduction in the council rent increase be agreed to give an average rent increase of 2.9% for the remainder of 2009/2010, to be implemented as soon as practical.

7. OLDER PEOPLE'S ACTION PLAN (REPORT C – 1 APRIL 2009) (MINUTE NO. 111)

The Cabinet has agreed an Older People's Action Plan that sets out how the Council will value and support older people and importantly links to the work and aims of Hampshire County Council to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to the needs of older people in the District.

Following the publication of the HCC Older People's Wellbeing Strategy, and in line with the approach taken with all other themes linking to the Council's Community Strategy and Local Strategic Partnership, a Community Action Network (CAN) has been established for the older people's agenda. The work of the CAN will also feed into and inform the work of the District Health and Wellbeing Board.

The prime purpose of the older people's CAN is to create an Older People's Action Plan that primarily aims to set targets that will meet the needs of older residents in the New Forest but also feed into and complement the wider HCC Older People's Wellbeing Strategy.

The action plan will assist in bringing services together and provide a means of signposting access to those services for older people.

8. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2008/09 AND PROPOSED KEY TARGETS 2009/10 (REPORT D – 1 APRIL 2009) (MINUTE NO. 112)

The Cabinet has considered and agreed the Council's assessment of achievements against key targets for 2008/09 and the proposed key annual targets for 2009/2010. They have also confirmed that the targets provide a reasonable balance across all the key issues for the coming year, and that no key or strategic issues for the council have been omitted.

The Cabinet noted that the Policy & Resources Portfolio target (PRS02) relates specifically to negotiations over single status and not to the annual negotiations over pay levels. The annual pay award is now negotiated at a national level. However it is considered that at New Forest there should be a pay freeze for all employees for 2009/2010. Whilst the Council continues to value its staff highly they will be asked to show restraint in the face of the unprecedented economic turmoil.

Elected members have already shown the way by voting to forgo any pay increase for themselves. The Cabinet supported the approach that the Council should go further and explore other ways of reducing costs including the question of the number of councillors on the authority. Clearly that is not solely within the power of the Council however, members will continue to do all that is possible to reduce costs at a time when many people in the community are facing increasing hardship.

9. COMMUNITY MEALS (REPORT E – 1 APRIL 2009) (MINUTE NO. 113)

Hampshire County Council has set the county meal price at £3.10 in line with increases in previous years and they are recommending that this is the price that should be charged by all Hampshire districts.

The Cabinet supported this proposed increase.

RECOMMENDED:

That the New Forest District Council Community Meals (Meals on Wheels and Luncheon Clubs) price for 2009/10 be set at £3.10, an increase of 10 pence (3.3%).

10. DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACES (REPORT F – 1 APRIL 2009) (MINUTE NO. 114)

The Cabinet has agreed that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to enable him to designate polling places outside the relevant polling district in special circumstances, after consultation with local councillors.

11. WRITE OFFS (REPORT G – 1 APRIL 2009) (MINUTE NO. 115)

Following the senior management restructure in the Council, officer delegations and authorisations have been reviewed. As a result the Cabinet has agreed a new code of practice for Write Offs as detailed in Appendix 1 to Report G to them, in order to streamline the process and make it more efficient.

The Council's current income collection performance was good with approximately £150m collected in income each year which equated to about 99.5% of that due. The effectiveness of the Write Offs arrangements will be reviewed annually in a report to the Corporate Overview Panel.

RECOMMENDED:

That Financial Regulations be updated to reflect that Heads of Service be authorised to write off debts as detailed in Report G to the Cabinet.

**Cllr B Rickman
CHAIRMAN**

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