

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 7 October 2009)

1. NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK – CORE STRATEGY FOR THE NEW FOREST DISTRICT OUTSIDE OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 34)

The Cabinet is recommending the adoption of the Core Strategy for the New Forest District outside of the New Forest National Park, taking on board the conclusions of the Public Examination Inspector, who found the plan to be “sound” subject to some relatively minor changes.

The Core Strategy is the culmination of three years work. The Council first looked at how well the existing Strategy had been working and the concerns of local people. Following extensive public consultation it was clear that four main issues needed to be addressed. Firstly, the natural environment and the importance of preserving the unique local area; secondly, the imposition by the Government of large house building targets that were destroying the character of towns and villages; thirdly, the lack of affordable housing for local people and lastly the need to create a viable economy within the area to provide employment opportunities for local young people.

In February this year the Council submitted its Core Strategy, together with a large amount of supporting material, to the Secretary of State. The public examination into the submitted Core Strategy took place from February until September.

The Cabinet is very pleased to report that the submitted Core Strategy received the positive endorsement of the Government-appointed Inspector without significant modification. None of the changes introduced by the Inspector fundamentally change, or in any way undermine, the strategy that the Council has submitted and wishes to see applied to the area. NFDC’s Core Strategy is the first to be confirmed in Hampshire and the importance of this should not be underestimated.

The Cabinet is therefore recommending that the Core Strategy be adopted and brought into immediate effect as the key part of the statutory development plan for the area. This will then form the strategic framework for the subsequent “Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document” on which work is already progressing. This will set out detailed site allocations and designations, and more detailed policies for the management of development in the Plan Area.

On the adoption of the Core Strategy, many of the existing Local Plan policies will cease to have effect as these will be replaced by Core Strategy policies. A member training session has been arranged for 21 October to discuss the changes needed to move towards a “development management” approach based on the policies in the Core Strategy.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Core Strategy document, as detailed in Report A to the Cabinet, taking on board the changes set out in the public examination Inspector’s Report, be adopted as a part of the statutory development plan for the area.

2. HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME PILOT (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 35)

The Cabinet has agreed to a bid for Local Authority Challenge Funding to build Council Houses and, in principle, to undertake prudential borrowing to match fund the grant available.

Since the Budget announcement in April, the Government has brought forward several initiatives and proposals to encourage the development of housing, particularly affordable housing. Of particular interest to NFDC is the establishment of a challenge fund of £50m Social Housing Grant, ring fenced for Local Authorities, to be matched with £50m prudential borrowing, which aims to develop in the region of 900 new houses across the country in 2009/10 and 2010/11. This sum has been considerably enhanced in recent 'Building Britain's Future' announcements.

The Council's affordable housing waiting list currently comprises over 5,000 households and it will always be difficult to meet the demand. Last year, in partnership with Registered Social Landlords, the Council delivered 171 affordable homes which is a significant achievement. However, the current economic climate will make that level hard to sustain. The Council needs to explore every possible option and the building of Council houses funded jointly by the Homes and Communities Agency, and through borrowing, will be one way of achieving this.

The Cabinet has also agreed, following a formal tender process, to the appointment of Mace, Management and Construction, as the partner to take forward a successful bid.

3. REFORM OF COUNCIL HOUSE FINANCE (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 36)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to a long awaited consultation paper issued by the Government in July 2009 on the reform of council housing finance.

The Council has been campaigning with other local authorities for some time for a review of the HRA financing system and in broad terms the Cabinet welcomes the government's aim of reviewing the HRA to ensure greater fairness for all, particularly for tenants.

It had been hoped that the paper would spell out clear proposals for ending the unfair housing revenue account system whereby NFDC tenants effectively have to give over £8m of their rents to the Government each year.

However, although the consultation paper did make a number of suggestions, it failed to set out clearly how those suggestions would impact upon the New Forest and its tenants. As a result the Cabinet's response, detailed in Report C to them, is not able to be as focussed as originally hoped.

The Cabinet is not able to recommend supporting possible changes to the housing finance system as the consultation paper does not make clear what the impact upon the Council may be. It is disappointing that it is unlikely that progress will be made in these reforms for some time, particularly as an election is due next year. Until the situation with the notional national housing debt is resolved it is difficult to ascertain clearly what the impact may be on the Council.

4. ICT STRATEGY (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 37)

The Cabinet is recommending the agreement of a Strategy document with supporting policies to develop the use of Information and Communications Technology within the Council, for the next four years to 2013.

The ICT strategy contains a number of specific objectives that are closely linked to the major themes of the Corporate Plan. It incorporates a high level action plan and a more detailed, project-based ICT Work Programme, complete with estimated costs and a broad implementation timetable. The ICT Strategy also commits to reducing the Council's carbon footprint and optimising the use of available accommodation.

The Cabinet is pleased that the Council has a sound base of ICT programmes and systems and that the proposed Strategy will achieve continuous improvement across all services.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That the ICT Strategy for 2009 - 2013 and associated ICT Work Programme, as detailed in Report D to the Cabinet, be approved; and***
- (b) *That progress on implementing the ICT Strategy be reported annually to the Finance & Efficiency Portfolio Holder and the Corporate Overview Panel.***

5. CATERING PROVISION AT APPLETREE COURT – ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 38)

The Cabinet has agreed, subject to the Council agreeing to the recommendation from the General Purposes and Licensing Committee (11 September 2009) in relation to this matter, changes to the method of provision of catering at Appletree Court as outlined in paragraph 3 of Report E to them.

Over the last few years the usage of the Café Revitalise has steadily decreased, despite efforts to encourage greater patronage. On average, only 15 hot meals per day are purchased by staff. The daily income is now in the region of £80 and that together with the cost of overheads means that Café Revitalise has become economically unviable.

The current arrangements are not meeting employee needs. As an alternative to the Cafe, the use of a visiting van selling sandwiches etc at lunchtimes will provide a modernisation of the service in an alternative format tailored to meet the present demand. The new proposals will be able to provide a wider variety and choice and will save an estimated £36,000 per annum. The facility for employees to have an area to eat lunch and relax will remain. Member meetings will also, in the future, continue to be serviced.

**Cllr B Rickman
CHAIRMAN**