

## **REPORT OF CABINET**

**(Meeting held on 7 December 2011)**

### **1. ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 44)**

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.

Once again, the 2010/11 audit comprises two elements; the audit of the Council's financial statements and the auditor's assessment of the Council's arrangements to achieve value for money in use of resources.

The Audit Commission has issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements. The Auditor recognises that the preparation of the 2010/11 statements has been more challenging than normal because of the transition to International Financial Reporting Standards, and that the Council's approved statements have met the new requirements.

The Audit Commission has also issued an unqualified Value for Money conclusion stating that the Council has been successful in facing another challenging year, responding to the continuing financial pressures while seeking to preserve essential services.

The Cabinet has noted the current and future challenges that the Audit Commission has set out for the Council. The Auditor recognises that the Council clearly understands the significant risks it faces and is taking appropriate action to secure a stable financial position over the medium term.

The Chairman thanked members and officers for the work they had undertaken to maintain the Council's position and achieve such a favourable report in the current climate..

The Chief Executive thanked the Audit Commission for the professional and constructive way in which they had carried out their audit. The Council is accustomed to receiving favourable Audit reports, but to maintain that record in the current climate was particularly valuable. The report recognised the additional challenges that the Council would continue to face in the coming months.

### **2. SITES AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN PRE-SUBMISSION DRAFT (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 45)**

The Cabinet was aware that the Core Strategy for the New Forest District, outside the National Park, had been adopted in October 2009. The Sites and Development Management Development Plan document had been prepared within the context of the Core Strategy and together, once this second document had been formally adopted, would complete an up to date development plan for the area. The draft proposals had already been subject to a 6 week consultation period, starting in January 2011. The current document, which took account of the representations received, will be subject to a further 6 week statutory consultation period starting in January 2012. The Cabinet will then need to decide, in the light of the further representations received, whether the document should be formally submitted to the Secretary of State for Public Examination.

The pre-submission draft had been discussed at a special joint meeting of the Planning Development Control Committee and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 2 December 2011, to which all Members of the Council had been invited. Their comments were reported to the Cabinet. The Joint meeting had approved the pre-submission document subject to amendment to take account of a number of changes and errata, as set out in Appendix 1 to the minutes of that meeting. They had also asked the Cabinet to consider amending the allocation of land at Little Testwood Farm, Totton from employment as currently set out in Policy TOT12, to public open space.

The Cabinet was concerned about changing the allocation of Little Testwood Farm in advance of the public consultation exercise. The concerns of the local ward councillors, and their aspiration to secure essential recreational space for local residents were recognised. However, the Cabinet was aware that the Council was obliged to try to develop proposals within the framework established through the adoption of the Core Strategy, which included a requirement for the allocation of new land for employment purposes at Totton. Little Testwood Farm was the only site that had been identified through the earlier consultation processes. The Joint meeting had believed that intensification of the use of the Eling Wharf site would provide sufficient additional employment opportunities, but that was an existing allocation and would not meet the requirement of the Core Strategy to provide a new allocation. In addition there were a number of planning and legal issues that needed to be investigated and explored fully, before any decision could be taken. The Cabinet considered that this process should take place in conjunction with the planned public consultation exercise, which would also allow the opportunity to have a proper dialogue with local ward councillors and the Town Council.

It was agreed that having taken account of the views of the Planning Development Control Committee and the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- (i) The Document should be amended to take account of some changes and errata that had been identified;
- (ii) The Document should not be amended to amend the land allocation in policy TOT12 to recreational open space instead of employment land; but that this issue should be explored in greater depth in conjunction with the statutory consultation exercise; and
- (iii) The Document should be published in January for a 6 week statutory period.

It was also agreed that the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder, should be authorised to make editing changes in preparing the document for publication.

### **3. REVIEW OF CAR PARKS WHERE CHARGES DO NOT CURRENTLY APPLY (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 46)**

The Cabinet considered recommendations from the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel following a review, undertaken by a task and finish working group, of options for the future management of 9 car parks where charges were not currently levied. The Cabinet also took account of petitions received during the public participation period at the meeting which opposed the introduction of car parking charges in Bransgore and for the Oak Road Car Park in Dibden Purlieu.

The task and finish group had undertaken extensive research which had included meetings with key stakeholders, including local ward councillors and the town or parish council. They had also looked at the context of the car park, its size, and the current patterns of use. Where the group had considered that it would not be appropriate to introduce charges, they had developed suggestions for alternative courses of action with a view to reducing the costs falling on the general tax payer.

The Cabinet agreed with the Panel's conclusion that it was important that there was a fair and consistent approach to charging for the use of car parks across the District. The Portfolio Holder had instigated a review of a number of inconsistencies in the approach to car parking of charges, and it was recognised that, in the current harsh economic climate, it was important that those users who benefitted from a service met the costs of providing it, as far as possible. This Council was liable for the payment of business rates on each of the car parks where parking was currently free and this cost, together with the cost of any maintenance, fell upon the Council tax payer. The Cabinet was also mindful that the purchase of a car parking clock allowed anyone to park in the Council's car parks for just 40 pence per week, and that the introduction of the Council's charging regime elsewhere in the District had not prejudiced the viability of the town centres.

There was some debate on the issue of car parking in Lymington where it was recognised that the proportion of long term spaces was high. Proposals have been developed, and would be brought forwards once the additional 50 spaces had been created at the Town Hall, site, for use on Saturdays. In addition, the need for car parking at the Town Hall site would be re-evaluated once the situation was more settled, to see if any space could be reallocated for public parking.

In the light of Panel's recommendations, the Cabinet agreed the following course of action in respect of each of the following car parks.

- i) **Ashurst car park** – Charges for parking should not be introduced because of the small size of the car park, the likelihood of displacement to adjacent free car parks, the low and volatile anticipated net income and the likelihood the rent payable by the Council to the Forestry Commission would increase if charges were introduced.
- ii) **Bransgore car park** – Charges should not be introduced at this time, as it may be uneconomic because of the surrounding free on street parking, but alternative solutions should be progressed by the Asset Management Group, working in conjunction with Bransgore Parish Council.
- iii) **Oak Road car park, Dibden Purlieu** – The Asset Management Group would review the site as a whole to consider alternatives, including leasing/licensing the site to the Church or the Parish Council and considering all or part of the site for alternative uses.
- iv) **Eling Cemetery car park** – Charging should not be introduced, given the sensitivities of the use of the car park and the support given by this Council to maintaining the viability of the Tide Mill.
- v) **Hordle Village car park** - The lease, which had expired, should not be renewed and the area returned to the Parish Council.
- vi) **Pennington Bank car park** – This very small car park should be retained but charging not introduced as it would be uneconomic to do so.

- vii) **Totton car parks** – Charges should be levied in the Rumbridge, Westfield and the Civic Centre car parks for the reasons set out in Report C to the Cabinet unless a four-year agreement can be reached for the Town Council to pay this Council an appropriate sum in lieu of the anticipated parking charges for the respective car parks.

The Asset Management Group should also consider using some of the Westfield site for alternative use, such as affordable housing.

It was noted that the outcomes from the review should produce additional income and savings to the value of £57,000 per annum and would be included in the budgets for 2012/13.

#### 4. **THE COUNCIL TAX 2012/2013 – SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX BASE (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 47)**

The Cabinet considered the detail of the proposed tax base for 2012/13. This was a technical report which established the basis of the calculations for the council tax for the district for the coming year. The details of individual town and parish council precepts were set out in Appendix 1 to Report D to the Cabinet. It was agreed that, in so far as it is empowered to do so by law, the calculation of the Council Tax Base for the year 2012/13 as set out below should be approved and that pursuant to this report and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (Amendment) Regulations 2003, the amount calculated by this Council as its council tax base for the year 2012/13 be as follows and as detailed in Appendix 1 to Report D to the Cabinet.

<b>PARISH/TOWN</b>	<b>TAX BASE 2012/13</b>
Ashurst & Colbury	926.2
Beaulieu	508.7
Boldre	1059.1
Bramshaw	347.5
Bransgore	1881.1
Breamore	182.8
Brockenhurst	1846.5
Burley	791.0
Copythorne	1247.1
Damerham	241.0
Denny Lodge	156.5
East Boldre	398.3
Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley	596.7
Exbury & Lepe	114.7
Fawley	4942.1
Fordingbridge	2398.4
Godshill	228.5
Hale	267.5
Hordle	2473.8
Hyde	512.6
Hythe & Dibden	7854.2
Lymington & Pennington	7299.7
Lyndhurst	1410.2
Marchwood	2146.0
Martin	193.6
Milford on Sea	2763.9

Minstead	367.1
Netley Marsh	824.8
New Milton	11054.0
Ringwood	5526.1
Rockbourne	166.7
Sandleheath	283.1
Sopley	308.8
Sway	1690.9
Totton & Eling	9916.1
Whitsbury	98.7
Woodgreen	250.3
<b>Whole District</b>	<b>73274.3</b>

**5. DIBDEN GOLF CENTRE PROCUREMENT PROCESS UPDATE  
(REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 48)**

The Cabinet was briefed on progress in the review of the future operation of the Dibden Golf Centre. The future of the centre had been the subject of a review undertaken by a task and finish working group established by the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and that working group had been closely involved in proposals to initiate a competitive tendering process to explore options with potential providers.

The Cabinet was pleased to note the continuing involvement of the task and finish working group, who would have a key role in the evaluation of the detailed proposals and the prospective operators in the coming stages, including the site visits and meetings with the potential providers. The companies would be giving presentations on their proposals on 13 December, and members of the Task and Finish Working Group, the Cabinet and stakeholders had been invited to attend. There would be a further meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 26 January 2012, and in the meantime references would be sought, and site visits held to evaluate the bids further. A final decision would be made by the Council in February 2012.

**6. EMPLOYMENT AND TOURISM REVIEW CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND  
SCRUTINY PANEL TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS  
(REPORT F) (MINUTE 49)**

The Cabinet received the recommendations of the task and finish working group that had been established by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel in response to the Cabinet recommendations of 7 September 2011 (Minute 21 refers), as part of the medium term financial plan to meet the shortfall in the funding position.

The task and finish group was working to a short timescale but had undertaken essential research, including meetings with the New Forest National Park Authority, the New Forest Business Partnership and the New Forest Tourism Association. The task and finish group evaluated the need for the service, its structure and funding, and had reported through the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The Cabinet agreed with the conclusion that, although the service was held in high regard and had provided good outcomes while also achieving useful savings over recent years, there was scope for further significant savings to be made. In the current harsh economic climate it was important to support the wider economic community to boost employment, with the tourism function as one part of that wider role. More innovative approaches, working with partner organisations, need to be adopted to provide a service which is fit for purpose in the current economic climate.

The Cabinet has agreed to support a two phase approach. In Phase 1, the service will move towards a core team delivering the key functions of business support, web development and income generation. One focal point visitor information centre will be retained, with a network of subsidiary low cost outlets across the District; and there will be greater coordination with the New Forest National Park Authority. There will also be a review of the current Agreement which identifies which authority will lead on each function and how.

In Phase 2, work will continue with the National Park Authority and also the Ninth Centenary Trust to seek to gain efficiencies in operational arrangements for the visitor information service; and in addition there will be greater emphasis on the use of electronic media to raise net income across all business sectors, to reduce the net operating costs of the Service.

The Cabinet agreed with the analysis of each of the functions set out in Appendix 2 to Report F. This established those functions that should form the focus in the use of resources, those where there is merit but which are not a key priority, and those where the emphasis should be moved to partner organisations.

It is intended that savings of £57,000 will be achieved in the delivery of core services and £46,000 from the operation of visitor information centres in 2012/13, with additional savings of £20,000 in 2013/14.

**Cllr B Rickman**  
**CHAIRMAN**