

WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the: **CABINET**

Held on: **WEDNESDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2003**

Held at: **COUNCIL CHAMBER, BRADLEY ROAD, TROWBRIDGE**

Present:

Councillors: Phillips (Leader), Bower, Clark, Manasseh, Mounde, Newbury, Payne, While and Wiltshire

Also present: Councillors Barker, Brice, Chivers, John Clegg, Marion Clegg, Cox, Cunliffe-Jones, Davis, Hames, March, Mudge, Oldrieve, Osborne, Squires, Viles, Wells,

Officers: Acting Chief Executive, Corporate Officer (Democratic Services), Head of Financial Services, Corporate Communications Manager, Northern Area Co-Ordinator, Leisure Services Officer, Conservation Officer, Housing Services Manager, Head of Commercial Services and Member Support Officer (YR)

174 APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

175 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

176 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Newbury declared his interest in the item referred to at minute no 83 - Wiltshire Victoria County History Committee as he was the Chairman of that Committee. He left the meeting and was not present when the item was discussed and returned once the item had been dealt with.

Councilor Bower declared his interest in the item referred to at minute no. 179 - Council Tax and Second Homes as he would be affected.

177 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

The Leader presented a report which updated Members on the work currently being undertaken by the various sections within the Democratic Services department.

A copy is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

The Leader referred to the recent consultation exercise carried out regarding

how the Council could work more effectively with town and parish councils and the local community in the context of the future of Area Committees. The results of the consultation were reported to the last Council meeting on 5 November. The Leader and Councillor Clark as Portfolio Holder would be meeting soon to discuss the way forward.

CPA - The Leader reported that the Council was progressing well with its submission following the peer review.

The Leader gave a statement regarding the Local Government Grant Settlement for 2004/05. He reported that the Council had received notification of its Settlement, although the full implications had yet to be analysed. Copy of the statement is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

178 UPDATES BY PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Loo of the Year Award

Councillor Wiltshire reported that the Council had been awarded a prize for the loo of the year. He congratulated the staff involved for their hard work.

Development Control

Councillor Newbury was pleased to report that for the first time in over a year, the development control section had been able to meet the national targets for all 3 categories. Members were very pleased with this news.

KEY DECISIONS

179 COUNCIL TAX AND SECOND HOMES

The Portfolio Holder presented a report which detailed the new provision allowing a reduction in the council tax discounts given for second homes applicable from 1st April 2004. As with council tax in general, the Council would retain any additional amount raised in respect of its own tax share and would collect and pay over to the County, Police, Town and Parish Councils their share.

Cabinet was advised that there were currently some 215 properties in the district that were designated as second homes. The Council's share on a 10% discount would be approximately £12,000. Detailed guidance was still awaited as to how the actual calculation would be made and Members would be kept up to date with future developments.

RESOLVED:

That subject to detailed guidance being forthcoming

- (a) NO council tax discount be given in respect of second home owners to take effect from 1st April 2004.**
- (b) That Cabinet approve the additional sum raised to be earmarked to replenish the general fund reserve.**

Statement of reasons for decision	A change in the rate of discount will affect second home owners in the district
Options considered and rejected	The options are set out in the report
Date for implementation	1 April 2004

180 **WEST WILTS SHOW 2003**

Open Forum Speakers: Horace Prickett, Michael Bowen, Michael Williams, Terri Welch and Glyn Bridges

The Corporate Communications Manager presented a report which outlined the existing level of Council support for the West Wilts Show and assessed the value of the event to the district. Cabinet was asked to consider whether the Council should continue to support the event at the current level.

Details of the organisation involved in staging the show, the advantages to the business sector and community at large and financial implications were presented. The report concluded that there was no doubt that the West Wilts Show was a success. It was strongly supported by local councils and appreciated by the community, voluntary and business sector and had a positive impact on the reputation of the district.

Councillor Payne denied rumours that the Council wanted to discontinue support for the Show and he emphasised its continuing commitment to the event. He did however, ask Cabinet to reflect on its involvement in a major undertaking like this and whether it is able to maintain its commitment at the current level. This he said, was particularly relevant at a time when the Council's resources were under increasing pressure.

It was noted that it was the intention that this should now form part of the Economic Development portfolio.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

- (a) Reaffirm its commitment to the West Wilts Show event**
- (b) Direct the Corporate Communications Strategy PPG to consider the strategic role of the West Wilts Show.**
- (c) Request that the Corporate Team in consultation with the Show Partners examine the financial structure of the Council's support for the event for 2005 and beyond. That the Corporate Team be asked to consider the impact of the Council withdrawing its £12,000 financial contribution and reducing the cost of staff time attributed to the show by £10,000.**

Statement of reasons for decision	To mitigate the current cost to the council of organising this event
Options considered and rejected	To discontinue support for the event
Date for implementation	As soon as possible

181 **SKATE PARK AT MELKSHAM**

Cllr Clark presented a report which invited Cabinet to consider taking on the proposed skate park at King George V playing field in Melksham as an asset of this authority. Council officers had for the past year been working with the Melksham Skate Park Group to help them establish a new facility in the town.

The District Council owned the land and had been asked by the group to enable the project by receiving the money raised to purchase the equipment and maintain the facility in the future as its contribution to the project. The project would cost £112,112, £93,351 of which had already been raised and the group was awaiting on 2 grant applications. It was noted that the District Council had entered into a similar agreement with the skate park in Warminster and that Trowbridge was in the early stages in also providing such a facility.

Members congratulated the group especially the younger members for their fundraising efforts which had helped make the project a success.

RESOLVED

- (a) That Cabinet confirms its support for the project.**
- (b) That the Council acts as an agent for the skate park group in procuring the project subject to all funding being in place prior to commencement of the work**

Statement of reasons for decision	To provide a much needed skate park facility in Melksham
Options considered and rejected	Not to support the Melksham Skate Park Group in the procurement of this project
Date for implementation	As soon as funding is in place

182 **BOATING LAKE, LAKE PLEASURE GROUNDS, WARMINSTER**

Cllr Clark presented a report in which Cabinet was asked to consider a request for funding to reduce the water loss from the boating lake at the lake pleasure grounds, Warminster.

It was explained that in 2001, the Environment Agency had drawn the Council's attention to the fact that the water of the adjacent Swan River was being used to top up the water level of the boating lake at lake pleasure grounds. Following concern from the Environment Agency, consultants had been engaged to look into the problem. The consultants had estimated the remedial works to cost in the region of £13,000.

Warminster Town Council had considered the matter at its meeting on the 17 November 2003 and agreed to make a contribution of £6,500 provided that this Council re-introduces boats on the lake and provision is made for users with special needs.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet taking into account the support of funding from Warminster Town Council confirm appropriate capital allocation to enable remedial work to be progressed as a matter of urgency.

Statement of reasons for decision	To mitigate the current water loss from the boating lake, thereby enabling the Council to secure and abstraction licence in compliance with legislation.
Options considered and rejected	To remove or reduce the boating lake and create an alternative landscape feature
Date for implementation	As soon as possible

183 WILTSHIRE VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY COMMITTEE

The Acting Chief Executive presented a report concerning the Council's support towards the Wiltshire Victoria County History Committee. It was noted that the Council had supported the project over a number of years and have contributed £5,000 on 2003/04. A summary of the progress of the project to date and proposed partnership arrangements with the University of the West of England was presented. The partnership was proposed for a period of 5 years from September 2003 to August 2008 and in this time the volume for Cricklade would be completed and the volume for Heytesbury which was the last remaining part for West Wiltshire would be started. The District Councils contribution under the arrangements would be £5,660 in 2004/05 rising to £7,250 in 2008/09.

RESOLVED

That the Council agree to participate in the Wiltshire Victoria History partnership up to August 2008 and agree to the financial contributions of £5,660 in 2004/05 and £7,250 in 2008/09 as set out in the report circulated.

Statement of reasons for decision	To enable the establishment of a partnership to progress the preparation of the Victoria County History.
Options considered and rejected	To not participate in the partnership.
Date for implementation	From 2004/05

NON-KEY DECISIONS

184 JOINT VENTURE PARTNERSHIP WITH DC LEISURE MANAGEMENT LTD – MONITORING REPORT

Cllr Clark presented a report which updated Cabinet on the joint venture partnership with DC Leisure as at the end of September 2003. It was noted that the joint venture partnership was now in its third year with 7 years left to run. The report identified the process in place for managing the contract and dealt with facility improvement, facility usage, enhancement of the programme of activities, financial performance and general developments across the partnership. It was noted that the usage figures

across the 8 sites had increased by 17,000 during the first 6 months of the year against the previous year. It was further noted that DC Leisure obtained QUEST accreditation with some of the very best scores ever to have been awarded at their very first attempt. A more detailed report covering the full 2003/04 financial year's performance would be presented to the External Overview Committee in May 2004.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

185 WILTSHIRE LOCAL COMPACT

Cllr Clark reminded Cabinet that it had at its meeting on 27 August 2003, endorsed the principle of establishing a Compact for Wiltshire. A copy of the final draft of the Wiltshire Compact was presented which gave a statement of principles within which the statutory, voluntary and community sectors would work. The aim of the Compact was to improve joint working and understanding between the sectors. This in turn would bring benefits to Wiltshire's residents for example by maximising support from statutory agencies for small community groups. As partners the shared aim of the organisations represented on the Compact would be to "Improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the communities of Wiltshire".

RESOLVED

- (a) That Cabinet endorses the process for establishing a Compact and the Council's part in it.**
- (b) That the Chairman of this Council be authorised to sign the Wiltshire Compact agreement on behalf of West Wiltshire District Council.**

186 DRAFT HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Cllr Newbury presented a report in which Cabinet was invited to start the process to review the Council's Historic Buildings Conservation Strategy which had been last updated in the mid 1990's. The timing of this review was intended to coincide with the Department of Culture's Media and Sports' review of conservation on a national basis through the publication of a White Paper on Protecting Our Heritage due to come out in 2004.

It was proposed to undertake a period of consultation with external bodies to include town and parish councils, English Heritage and other relevant heritage bodies. Results of this consultation exercise would be brought back to Cabinet in Spring 2004 for final consideration and adoption of the strategy. Details of the service currently provided were presented and Cabinet's initial views were sought on the following on a number of proposed actions.

RESOLVED

- (a) That a period of consultation be undertaken over a 2 month period concerning the proposed conservation strategy and that the findings of this be brought back to future Cabinet in Spring 2004 for a final decision.**
- (b) That the next report to incorporate the findings of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on Protecting Our Environment and the implications of this report on the conservation service of this Council.**

187 HOUSING STRATEGY 2004

Cllr Mounde presented a report which set out a time table and process for preparation of a new Housing Strategy. It also referred to the consultative arrangements and Member involvement.

It was explained that it would be necessary for the Council to prepare a new Housing Strategy and submit this to the Government no later than the end of July 2004. The Government would expect all Councils to develop a Housing Strategy that could be classed as “fit for purpose”. The Council had previously developed a 5 year housing strategy in 2002 which had been graded as “average” and not classified as fit for purpose. It was noted that only one Council had produced a strategy that was classified as "fit for purpose". The strategy was also taken into account as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. It was suggested that a Policy Project Group be established to assist in the development of the strategy. The suggested membership of the PPG was Cllr Mounde who as Portfolio Holder would Chair the group with 4 other members of the Council with 5 co-optees from housing association, the private and voluntary sectors.

RESOLVED

- (a) That Cabinet notes the timetable presented for the delivery of the new housing strategy.**
- (b) That a Policy Project Group on Housing Strategy be established.**

Membership:

Councillor Mounde - Portfolio Holder and Chairman of PPG

2 members from the Liberal Democrat group - to be advised

1 member from the Labour group - to be advised

1 Member from the Conservative group - Councillor Viles

5 co-optees representing the private and voluntary interests in housing and related services.

The brief of the PPG would be to assist the Portfolio Holder and the Housing Manager in the development of a fit for purpose Housing Strategy that would be considered by Cabinet and full Council in June and July 2004 respectively.

- (c) That consultation on the new strategy to involve a wide range of stakeholders and service users.**

188 HOMELESSNESS - UPDATE

Cllr Manasseh presented a report to update Members on the performance of the Council's Homelessness section against a number of key performance indicators. Previously, Cabinet had agreed a number of measures to address the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation and the impact it was having on the Council's overall budget. It was noted that the number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation had reduced significantly. The expenditure on bed and breakfast was also beginning to decline as a direct result of the measures agreed. The bed and breakfast target was now 5 months ahead of target. 1 week into November all families who had been in bed and breakfast had been housed appropriately.

Cllr Manasseh informed members that donations were being sought for the Christmas party for the homeless at Kingsbury Square, Melksham on 22 December. Details will be made available through the Intranet and Member's Information Sheet.

RESOLVED:

That the monitoring report be noted.

189 ENABLING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Cllr Mounde presented a report which sought Cabinet's views on using the private finance initiative scheme to contribute towards meeting current and future need for new affordable housing.

The Housing Needs Survey 2001 had established that 194 new affordable homes to rent would need to be built each year up to 2006 and thereafter 90 units per year. However this Council and its partners had only been recently able to achieve at best around 100 units per year and the gap between the overall need and provision was widening each year.

It was explained that the methods by which the Council could raise sufficient funds to match the scale of this unmet need include prudential borrowing and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). A brief explanation of both schemes was outlined in the report presented. The PFI option appeared to provide the potential of matching need and provision in the long term. At best, it could offer the possibility of delivering around 500 units of additional affordable housing without any ongoing revenue costs to the Council. At worst it could mean an annual contribution over 30 years of £195,000 from revenue, however more work was required in order to assess the full implications of the scheme. There would be a cost of around £2,000 to enter into the process and investigate the matter further.

Cllr Mounde assured Cabinet that other schemes would still be investigated.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet give approval to the submission of an initial bid to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to provide around 500 units of affordable housing through a Private Finance Initiative. That Cabinet authorise the payment of £2,000 for the initial bid.

190 FINANCIAL MONITORING AS AT 31ST OCTOBER 2003

Cllr While presented financial information for the period ended 31st October 2003.

Capital Expenditure

The Capital programme for 2003/04, after slippage was £4,429m; this included £2m towards Local Authority Social Housing Grant. It was noted that any new schemes would now be funded directly by the Housing Corporation therefore reducing the amount to be funded by the Council to £2,429m. Expenditure as at the end of October was £1.413m.

Investment Income

The rate of return received on the average amount invested (£13,596,749) was 4.08%. Following advice, a 3 year callable deposit of £3m was invested on 1st August at a

rate of 4.45%. Total investment income received to date was £324k with a projected net investment income for the year on target to achieve the budget of £594k.

The projected out-turn for works services is breakeven.

The base budget for 2003/04 of the general fund spend was £11,639m. Expenditure on the general fund was currently at £9,262m. Details of the main changes between the base budget and the projected out-turn were presented.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

191 AUDIT 2002/2003 - COMMUNICATION CONCERNING FINANCIAL STATEMENTS TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE - AUDITORS REPORT

Following the submission of the Council's financial statements, an audit was undertaken to report whether they had been prepared and presented as a fair reflection of the Council's financial position. A report was presented which detailed the key matters arising from this audit together with the full report from the Audit Commission. The only area yet to be resolved was the successful conclusion of the disputed £1.2m set up costs with West Wiltshire Housing Society. Cllr Mounde reported that this matter was fortunately nearing a conclusion.

An addendum was circulated regarding adjustments necessary to accounting entries required to reflect the commutation of debt repaid by the Government on behalf of the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet determine not to adjust the financial statements in respect of the misstatements and / or qualitative aspects of financial reporting identified in the report.**
- (b) Cabinet request the Head of Financial Services to forward a letter of representation to the auditor explaining why no adjustment is necessary.**

192 POST OFFICES

The Corporate Officer reported that the External Overview Committee in considering Post Offices at its meeting in July, considered how the Council could help to improve the economic viability of struggling post offices. The Committee made a number of suggestions which were presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 27 August 2003. At that meeting, Cabinet had asked officers to investigate the practical issues involved and likely benefit of implementing these suggestions.

These suggestions had now been fully explored and a report outlining the implications of each of the suggestions made was presented.

Having looked at the issues involved the report concluded that there were a number of things that the Council could do to help support local post offices. However some required considerable resource and might not in fact help Post Offices greatly. It was suggested that the Council could if it wished lobby the Post Office Minister and the

Deputy Prime Minister on the subject via the local MP. This would be to try to reverse the trend of the Government reducing the number of transactions people could undertake at Post Offices and reversing the trend of the post office limiting the number of transactions that are undertaken at small post offices.

The report also sought Cabinet's approval for the Council to confirm its support for the retention of the key charging facilities at the One Stop Shop at Oldfield Park, Westbury.

Cllr Manasseh referred to the problems he had had in trying to resolve this particular issue.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- (a) Encourages general debtors and housing benefit overpayment debtors to make payments to the Council through Post Offices.**
- (b) Uses the Council's website, West Wilts Matters, a letter to all eligible Post Offices and members to promote the loans and advice available through Wiltshire and Swindon Rural Regeneration Partnership**
- (c) Includes items in future editions of West Wilts Matters to emphasise the range of services offered by Post Offices**
- (d) Writes to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Post Office Minister via the local MPs, asking that the Government:**
 - Increase the village population threshold and rateable value at which Post Offices become eligible for business rates relief.**
 - Extend the availability of social network payment funding for rural Post Offices beyond the year 2006.**
 - Provide a list of those Post Offices in West Wiltshire which are categorised as 'rural'.**
 - Take every opportunity to increase (rather than decrease) the number of Government related transactions that people can undertake at Post Offices.**
 - The Government direct and/or negotiate with the Post Office so that small Post Offices and sub Post Offices are able to undertake the maximum range of transactions, rather than reducing them (for example car tax transactions).**
- (e) Ask the community development and IT sections to explore the practicality and cost of providing IT facilities in Post Offices to:**
 - Attract people into Post Offices.**
 - Improve our population's access to IT.**

- Give people access to Council information and services.

(f) Write to Post Office Counters Limited, suggesting that they:

- Accept the offer by Southern Electric to install an unbranded key charging facility at the One Stop Shop/Post Office at Queens Square, Oldfield Park, Westbury.
- Increase, rather than decrease, the number of transactions that small Post Offices can deal with.

193 TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS BEST VALUE REVIEW

Cllr While presented a report which detailed the outcome of the cross cutting Best Value Review on Taking Care of Business. The purpose of the review was to critically analyse the way in which the Council managed itself and how Members interfaced with the organisation. It looked particularly at areas of perceived weaknesses and where it felt that improvement and efficiencies might result. The review looked particularly at a number of specific areas.

Details of the main findings of the review and suggested course of action as outlined in the Improvement Plan were presented.

Members congratulated the Head of Commercial Services and the Best Value Review Team for the superb work undertaken on the review.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

That the Taking Care of Business Best Value report and Improvement Plan be adopted.

RESOLVED:

That quarterly progress reports be presented to both Cabinet and the Internal Overview Committee.

194 REVIEW OF FORWARD WORKPLAN

Cabinet received the Cabinet Forward Workplan for the period November 2003 to February 2004.

Additional items:

Southwick Country Park - January 2004
Choice Based Lettings - January 2004.

(Meeting started 7.15 pm – Meeting finished 10.10pm)

These minutes were prepared by Yamina Rhouati, Member Support Officer
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