

WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the: **CABINET**

Held on: **WEDNESDAY 14 JANUARY 2004**

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

Present:

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

Also present: Councillors Brice, John Clegg, Marion Clegg, Conley, Hames, Osborn, and Squires

Officers: Acting Chief Executive, Corporate Officer (Democratic Services), Head of Financial Services, Leisure Manager, Housing Needs Manager, Register Support Team Leader, Community Development Team Leader and Member Support Officer (YR)

214 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

215 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

216 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bower declared a prejudicial interest in the item referred to in minute no. 218 - Council Tax Base Report 2004/05 in relation to the recommendation on Second Homes Discount and left the room whilst the item was discussed and therefore took no part in the discussion or voting on it.

217 ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE LEADER & UPDATES FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Announcements from the Leader

Bradford on Avon Flood Defences

The Leader referred to a paper from the Bristol Avon Local Flood Defence Committee of the South West Region of the Environment Agency held on 12 January 2004 regarding the Bradford on Avon flood defences.

A copy of the report was circulated to Cabinet Members and would be circulated to WWDC Members representing Bradford on Avon.

That Committee had been recommending to cease the current investigations on flood defence work in Bradford on Avon and to remove the scheme from their programme. It was stated that the reason for this was that the scheme did not meet the criteria and was not economically justifiable.

However, the Leader explained that he had been able to secure agreement not to abandon the scheme at this stage, but to set up a working group with representatives of this Council, County Council and emergency services to look into the matter further.

He was concerned that maintaining a dry route through the Town would not only assist the Town's economy, but would ensure easy passage for emergency services and ambulance crews getting to the Royal United Hospital in Bath.

Updates from Portfolio Holders

Councillor Newbury - Planning

Councillor Newbury explained that as this Council had been substantially below the national targets for determining planning application, it had been set standards by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. He was pleased to announce that for the quarter ended 31 December 2003, the Planning Department had met all 3 standards as follows:

major applications : 58% which was 8% above the standard, 2% below national target
other applications : 77% which was 7% above the standard, 3% below national target
minor applications : 61 % which was 1% above the standard, 4% below national target

Cllr Newbury reported that the department was aiming to meet the national targets by the next quarter.

Cabinet was pleased with the progress being made.

Councillor Wiltshire – Defra Grant

Councillor Wiltshire reported that the Council had been awarded a grant by Defra along with all other district councils in the country in the sum of £38,303. A grant had been awarded by Defra for home composting in Warminster.

Councillor Bower – Local Strategic Partnership

Councillor Bower reported that he had been appointed to the Local Strategic Partnership. He would be assisting officers to revitalise the Partnership and would be meeting all partners to assess strengths and weaknesses and consider what could be done to develop it and make it more effective.

Councillor Manasseh – Policing

Councillor Manasseh referred to Cabinet's decision at its last meeting concerning policing in the district. Cabinet had adopted the recommendations of the External Overview Committee and also resolved to make strong representations to the Wiltshire Police Authority and the Home Office, via the MP for retaining a Constabulary for Wiltshire.

He reported that the Police Liaison Committee had met with representatives from this Council together with Councillor Brice. The meeting had referred to the success of community policing particularly at Studley Green, Trowbridge and feared that this service could be lost or compromised if Wiltshire no longer had its own constabulary.

218. COUNCIL TAX BASE REPORT 2004/05

Councillor While presented a report which sought approval of the calculation of the Council's tax base for 2004/05

This is the average number of 'band d' equivalent properties in the district after adjustment for bad debts and second homes discount.

Cabinet at its meeting held on 19 November 2003 had agreed a second homes discount of 0% subject to this being allowed for in forthcoming guidance. The Regulations came into force on 18 December which set a minimum discount of 10%

RESOLVED:

- That:**
- (a) the second homes discount is set at 10%**
 - (b) the empty homes discount continues unchanged**
 - (c) the calculation of the Council's tax base for the whole and parts of the District as set out in Appendix A for 2004/05 be approved.**
 - (d) In accordance with the Local Authorities (calculation of the tax base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by West Wiltshire District Council as its tax base for the whole of the area for the year 2004/05 shall be 45,064.02.**

Note: Declaration of Interest

Councillor Bower declared a prejudicial interest in the above item in so far as it related to the second homes discount and left the room whilst the item was discussed and therefore took no part in the discussion or voting on it.

Statement of reasons for recommendation	To approve the tax base calculation for 2004/05
Options considered and rejected	Statutory requirement
Date for implementation	1 April 2004

219. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY DRAFT PAPER

Councillor Mounde presented a report in which he sought Cabinet's agreement of an economic development policy for the Council. He reported that he wanted to build upon the extremely good work carried out by the former Chief Executive and previous administration.

He explained that the Council was now developing its 10 Year Vision and Strategy within which all policy must lie. The report presented was intended as the economic development contribution to that process.

The policy stated “To achieve and retain a balanced and robust economy”. The report also referred to the economic development strategies and the importance of working in partnership with other agencies in particular the West Wiltshire Economic Partnership.

It was considered timely to set out the long term economic development policy for the Council which is influenced by regional, sub-regional and local factors. The individual strategies to effect that policy were also long term in nature but emphasis on each would change over time. Within the limited resources available, the Council would concentrate on fulfilling its enabling function and would contribute to the delivery function.

A discussion ensued on the policy and strategies.

RESOLVED:

- (a) **That Cabinet agrees the Economic Development policy as follows as the basis for consultation with the wider business community:**

“To achieve and retain a balanced and robust economy”

- (b) **That the Cabinet agrees that the Economic Development policy and Strategies are implemented, as a discretionary function, according to the Council’s priorities of the time and the resources available.**

Statement of reasons for decision	The Economic Development Policy and Strategies will help to further promote the local economy by continuing to work with the West Wiltshire Economic Partnership to ensure the district's economic viability
Options considered and rejected	To continue without a specific Economic Development policy.
Date for Implementation	As soon as practicable.

220. LONGFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE, TROWBRIDGE

Councillor Clark presented a report which proposed the transfer of Longfield Community Centre to Trowbridge Town Council on terms as outlined in the report.

The terms of the transfer were in line with the Council’s policy dated September 1999, which had since seen the transfer of the five public halls to the respective town councils.

The Cabinet at its meeting in February 2003 agreed to the transfer of the Community Centre to Trowbridge Town Council.

Subsequently Trowbridge Town Council requested a capital contribution from the District Council as part of the transfer.

The Town Council requested £55,500 from the District Council as a contribution to the £133,000 of repair and maintenance work to the building, which had been identified.

WWDC officers negotiated with the Town Council a reduced contribution of £45,500.

RESOLVED:

That the Longfield Community Centre is transferred to Trowbridge Town Council on the following terms:-

The transfer will be completed by 31 March 2004 at the very latest

- (a) A total sum of £45,500 will be paid to Trowbridge Town Council as a one off capital contribution for the maintenance of the property.**
- (b) West Wiltshire District Council will develop the legal documentation for the transfer.**
- (c) West Wiltshire District Council will make a contribution of £250 towards Trowbridge Town Council's legal fees.**
- (d) There are clauses in place that will prevent the Town Council from selling or disposing of the premises to a third party for financial gain.**
- (e) That the Capital Programme for 2003/04 is increased to accommodate the additional £45,500 payment to Trowbridge Town Council.**

Statement of reasons for key decision	To obtain Cabinet approval for the transfer of the Longfield Community Centre to Trowbridge Town Council
Options considered and registered	Community ownership has been considered but not achieved. West Wiltshire District Council could retain ownership but this would be contrary to the practice of the District Council to date.
Date of application (not less than 5 days after date of decision)	31 March 2004 at the latest.

NON-KEY DECISIONS

221. HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

Councillor Manasseh presented a report which updated Cabinet on the homelessness service performance. The Housing Needs section had worked extremely hard on preventative work and since November there had been no families at all in bed and breakfast, and due to putting in increased efforts to reduce the amount of vulnerable people in B&B, there were now only 8 vulnerable people in B&B.

The Team would be concentrating efforts on those single and vulnerable people who were still in B & B and would hopefully try and to reduce this figure. In answer to a question, Councillor Manasseh acknowledged that there were more people 'sleeping rough' in Trowbridge and that the Council would be working to address this problem with other agencies.

As predicted expenditure on B & B had been reduced to £14,500, compared to £107,000 in August 2003. With continued improvement on our preventative work we hope to continue to reduce this even further.

A Christmas party was held at Kingsbury Square, Melksham and was a huge success and enjoyed by all who attended.

Cllr Manasseh referred to the campaign to encourage benefit take up. A request was made for a report on this campaign to be presented to a future meeting, to which Councillor Manasseh agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) **That the report be noted.**
- (b) **That a report be presented to a future meeting on the campaign for benefit take-up.**

222. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

Councillor Mounde presented a report which updated Members on the review of the Council's allocation policy and sought approval to carry out initial research on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL).

Under the Homeless Act 2002 it will be necessary for the Council to widen choice in its allocations policy. Under a Government Pilot scheme, CBL had been operating in 27 authorities and the Council had been taking an interest in how successful these had been.

Investigations to date had shown CBL schemes to be a fairer system. The Register Support Team Leader explained how the scheme operated. It placed the onus on the applicant to express their interest in a property with it generally being awarded to the longest registration date. The Council's current policy did not take into account length of time on the register and applicants can wait an unknown length of time. The CBL scheme looked mainly at need and this could still be taken into account with a banding and priority card system.

The Housing Society had already agreed to work closely with the Council and it should benefit the wider community.

RESOLVED:

- (a) **That the Cabinet endorses further investigative work on choice based lettings.**
- (b) **That the Cabinet notes that a further report will be prepared with the final recommendations.**

223. WORKING WITH PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Councillor Clark presented a report which sought Cabinet's views for a new structure for working and relating with Parish Councils and the wider community.

This was presently being carried out by Area Committees, Area Community meetings and Parish Forum. Area Committees had been left without a clear purpose since the removal of the planning function from their delegation. The opportunity was therefore taken to consult with district, town and parish councillors as well as other interested

parties on how best to interact between them. The outcome of the consultation was presented.

The Leader explained that the report had been considered by the Corporate Team that Morning. He emphasised that this was merely a starting point and that consultation would be undertaken.

Details of a proposed framework were presented.

RECOMMENDATION TO FULL COUNCIL:

- (a) That this Council develop a policy framework for working and relating to town and parish councils and the wider community as outlined in the report presented to Cabinet, based around the five key groups/meetings.**
 - ? **Town and parish councils**
 - ? **Parish forum**
 - ? **Area Parish Clusters**
 - ? **Five Area partnerships (recognising other relevant partnerships, neighbourhood groups and organisations)**
 - ? **Five district council Area Forums**
- (b) To recognise that would take time for external partnerships to be firmly established and that this will govern the timescale for when the proposed framework will be fully operational.**

224. BUDGET UPDATE 2004/05

Councillor While presented a report which gave details of the draft Local Government Finance Settlement and progress on the draft revenue and capital budgets.

The provisional settlement announced on 19 November for West Wiltshire the settlement was a disappointing 2.5% compared to 12.5% in the previous year. However, the Chancellor made a further announcement on 10 December allocating an additional £340m of grant support. The share for Districts went mainly to ceiling authorities and West Wilts received a further £250k reducing the revenue budget shortfall and equating to 7%.

Although the additional £250k is welcomed, West Wilts is still having a further £741k withheld under the 'floor and ceilings' mechanism. The Council was actively lobbying for our full entitlement through the MP, Local Government Association, the South West Regional Assembly and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The draft revenue budget stood at £11.4m. The likely Council tax increase would be in the region of between 4 - 5%, although Cabinet will be reviewing this and other issues as part of the on-going budget process.

The draft capital programme stood at £4.1m and included the conclusion of the 'set up costs' at £1.3m

It was noted that the detailed budget report will be presented to Cabinet on 11 February.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet notes the progress on the draft revenue budget and draft capital programme.

225. DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2004-2007

Councillor While presented a report which outlined the likely financial position to 2008 and provides a framework within which decisions relating to the future could be made. Looking ahead is always difficult and the plan will be subject to regular review.

The plan considered a number of key issues and assumptions that will impact on the resources of the authority; in particular:

- ? successful conclusion of the housing set up costs
- ? uncertainty around the local government settlement due to the ceiling
- ? phasing out of grant funding for planning delivery and implementing electronic government

This is a draft plan and was subject to the final determination of the 2004/05 local government finance settlement.

Further scrutiny of the underlying assumptions will take place between now and the Cabinet meeting in February.

The Leader reported that he together with Councillor While were planning on visiting each of the Town Councils to explain this Council's financial position and grant settlement.

RESOLVED:

The Cabinet notes the current position on the draft financial plan.

226. CULTURAL STRATEGY

Councilor Clark presented a report which sought the adoption of a Cultural Strategy for the Council as presented. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has encouraged local authorities to develop local cultural strategies which were also seen as a best value performance indicator.

The draft Cultural Strategy brings together a wide range of subjects and services that contribute to the cultural environment for the residents of West Wiltshire and has involved a number of officers from across the Council.

Once the Cultural Strategy has been adopted it would become an integral part of the Council's Community Strategy.

In the discussion which ensued, it was suggested field sports be included within the Strategy.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft Cultural Strategy be adopted subject to inclusion of reference to field sports being included.**

Note: Recorded Votes

Councillor Clark requested that his vote against the decision to include reference to field sports in the Strategy be recorded.

Councillor Payne requested that his abstention from voting on the inclusion of reference to field sports in the Strategy be recorded.

- (b) **That the Portfolio Holder (Councillor Clark) be authorised to make minor changes to the Cultural Strategy if required.**

227. REVIEW OF FORWARD WORKPLAN

It was noted that the following item had been deferred from the January meeting to the February meeting:

Southwick Country Park

These minutes were prepared by Yamina Rhouati who can be contacted on direct telephone line 01225 770322 or email yrhouati@westwiltshire.gov.uk