

WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the: **CABINET**

Held on: **WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER 2005**

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

Present:

Councillors: Content (Leader), Brown, Carbin, Cox, Hames, James and Osborn

Also present: Cllrs Bryant, Knight, Manasseh and Phillips

Officers: Chief Executive, Corporate Director (PW), Head of Finance (IJ) (part meeting), Community Leadership Manager (RR) (part meeting), Policy and Communications Service Manager (PM) and Member Support Officers (MS, SK)

645. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received although Cllr Hames would arrive late to the meeting.

646. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 23 November 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

647. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

648. Announcements from the Leader

Cllr Conley

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Leader expressed sincere sympathy to Cllr Conley following the recent death of her father.

Neighbourhood Policing Team

A meeting was held last night to discuss how the Council could assist the Police with this issue. More would be known over the next few weeks but at this stage it sounds very positive.

Temporary Gypsy Site Report

The 'Temporary Gypsy Site' report, scheduled for the next meeting of Cabinet, was being prepared. Ward members and local councils affected would be sent a copy of the report as soon as it was available. The next meeting of Cabinet would commence at an earlier time of 6.30pm.

Constitution

The adoption of the new Constitution would be discussed at a Special Meeting of Council on 15 December. Implementation would be after the completion of the budget, but before annual Council. Training would be provided in the New Year.

Government Settlement

This had been welcomed as WWDC had been under funded for a considerable amount of time and would enable the budget to include some investment into the Council priorities. Details had been circulated to all members via MIS and a press release had been issued. A Cabinet report in January would include full details.

Local Area Agreement

Work was underway on a Local Area Agreement (LAA) in time for Government deadlines next autumn. The LAA would involve all the Wiltshire Council's, various agencies including Heath and Police, as well as the business and voluntary sectors.

A new project group had been established and AP to represent WWDC. The group would report to the Wiltshire Strategic Board. The aim would be to ensure the LAA reflected District and County priorities as well as other matters of local concern in the community strategies. It would help lever Government support but the implications for future funding were not yet clear. The Government was aiming to simplify funding streams through this process.

Crag Rats Training Event

Cragrats had completed the 3rd training session. The training was for the benefit of all managers and focused on top performing teams including the link between a no blame culture and top performance. The sessions had been well received by managers. The final training session would be on 17 January.

Staff Briefings

The Chief Executive had completed the latest round of staff briefings. 4 sessions had been arranged for all staff in the Council Chamber. The importance of informing ward members had been emphasised. The briefings also included a session to acquire ideas to help inform the LGA backed reputation project.

Police and the Probation Services

The Council was very concerned about the re-organisation of both the Police and the Probation services, which involved the disappearance of dedicated organisations for Wiltshire. The proposed legislation would abolish local Probation Boards with effect from April 2007 and with this, the Boards statutory responsibility for the delivery of services to offenders would be removed and given to the Secretary of State. The Leader and the Chief Executive would be writing on behalf of Cabinet to express these concerns.

Cabinet Open Morning

The next Cabinet Open Morning would be held tomorrow in the 8Trium from 9.30am – 12.30pm

649. Update from the Finance Portfolio Holder

Housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Scheme

Business Case

The business case was submitted in September and it had been hoped that a decision from Government would be received in December or January. This date had now slipped due to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister needing to reach agreement with the Treasury about how to consider land issues that were specific to housing PFI schemes.

It is now known that securing development land would be key to the success of the scheme. Other housing PFI schemes are facing similar issues and because of this, the ODPM are being supportive of the scheme.

The land issue is expected to be resolved this month, so that the business case could go forward for approval, hopefully in February 2006. The Portfolio Holder would keep Cabinet Members informed and Chris Trowell would update members via the Members' Information Sheet.

Short listing bidders

Nicole Smith was heading up a working group to decide on the process and criteria for choosing three bidders to compete for the PFI contract. Three bidders were normal for PFI schemes because of the cost and time of tendering.

Once the business case had been approved, the tender would be advertised in the European Union journal. This would start the procurement process running.

Council owned sites

Council would need to make a decision to agree the list of Council owned sites and submit planning applications for them. This would probably be at a special

Council meeting in February or March. Members would have some difficult decisions to make about the best use of the Council's resources and local issues. In the meantime officers were continuing to identify alternative sites. However, given the nature of the Council's landholding, the options were very limited.

Members Risk Management Training

This was scheduled for 24 January 2006, in the Council Chamber at 7pm. It would provide Members with an opportunity to update themselves with the Council's progress on Risk Management. During the last CPA inspection, risk management was highlighted as an area which required development. Significant progress had been made to advance the 'Use of Resources' agenda. The session would include:

- Overview of Risk Management and its Relevance at West Wiltshire
- The Risk Register – use and importance
- The Way Forward and the Role for Members

It was important for Members to be involved in the Risk Management process; therefore Members were encouraged to attend.

650. Write off Report

Cllr Carbin presented a report to propose the write-off of various debts as of 31 October 2005.

The external bailiffs for the Council, Ross and Roberts, had commenced work in January 2005 and had collected the following amounts for the period up to the 31 October 2005: -

	£
Council Tax	168,478.92
Non Domestic Rates	<u>60,284.62</u>
Total	<u>228,763.54</u>

The Council took a long-term view of debt, so that if a debtor absconded with no forwarding address, the account would be left active for a considerable time in case they return to the district or another address becomes available. As the exercise progressed it became evident that some of the debt was unlikely to be collected.

The four main categories of debtors are:

- i) Council Tax
- ii) National Non Domestic Rates
- iii) Sundry Debtors
- iv) Housing Rents

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet

- i) notes the action of the Section 151 Officer in writing off the debts under £300 totalling £32,159.87
- ii) approves the write off of the debts over £300 totalling £134,164.63
- iii) notes that the total amount of debt written off from the proposals above equals £166,324.50

651. Budget Update

Cllr Carbin informed Members that the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced on Monday 5 December and presented a report which outlined the impact of the settlement and updates on progress towards the draft revenue budget and draft capital programme for 2006/2007.

Further work was still being carried out to complete the detailed budgets. Cabinet would be considering those issues as part of the on-going budget process with detailed reports going to Cabinet in January.

A copy of the report was request to be included in the MIS.

RESOLVED:

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

652. Update from the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder

Green Bins

The green bin roll-out in Warminster had gone well with very few problems. Phone call volumes were significantly lower than when the green bins were introduced in Trowbridge and Melksham. The Council would shortly be working on the next phase of the roll-out for Westbury, with Bradford-on-Avon following in the spring.

Refuse/Recycling Collections

Christmas collections would be simpler than in 2004. Grey and green bin collection services would operate one day later than normal.

Recycling Figures

Recycling figures for November were extremely encouraging and had not yet benefited from the roll-out of green bins in Warminster. Total recycling = 25.16% (annual average to date = 25.93%). Kerbside recycling = 15.41% (annual average to date = 13.75%). Compost recycling = 9.75% (annual average to date = 12.18%).

Year to date the BVPI 199 performance is on target. With successful service bids, the Council should be able to improve on the current position.

Colin Talmarsh

A depot employee, Colin Talmarsh, was involved in a serious road traffic accident at Staverton, during work time. He had sustained severe leg injuries and is currently in Frenchay hospital, Bristol undergoing reconstructive surgery. It was hoped that Colin would be home for Christmas. The police were investigating the accident and had no reason to believe that the accident was caused by the Council driver. Members wished Colin a speedy recovery.

Streetscene Maintenance Officer

Interviews for the post of Streetscene Maintenance Officer were scheduled for next week. It was hoped that someone would be in post early in the New Year.

653. Recommendation from Trowbridge Area Seminar: Public Conveniences in Trowbridge

This item was brought before the Committee and presented by Cllr Knight. Members of Trowbridge Area Seminar were concerned at the lack of 'drivers/non shopper' toilets. Trowbridge town had adequate facilities for the pedestrian shoppers and Park visitor, however if an individual was passing through Trowbridge or making a delivery there were no facilities to use unless a fee was paid to park. Additionally the Train Station did not have any public convenience facilities, the nearest being in the Shires which was very inconvenient, especially if someone had children or luggage. Trowbridge had poor public convenience facilities In comparison to the other major towns in the district, especially as it was the County Town.

All members supported and agreed that Trowbridge lacked in public convenience facilities. Those provided in the Shires were of a variable standard and not always clean. The toilets in the park did not always attract desirable characters.

In previous years there had been meetings with the rail authorities, concerning toilets, but nothing had developed. There had also once been a luxury loo near the railway, which had since been demolished.

Members felt that the best and most cost effective way forward would be to work in partnership with the LSP and Voluntary Action West Wiltshire. Voluntary Action West Wiltshire was hoping to extend its building near the railway station and it could be proposed to include a public convenience facility within this building.

Resolved:

Officers explore the opportunities to provide toilets at the station and report back

Cabinet seek advice from the retained consultants on this project; if advice is received that this will benefit the overall project, the Distinct Council should also seek to discuss this issue further with the County Council

654. Recommendation from Scrutiny: Task and Finish Group – Street Cleansing and Ground Maintenance

Cllr Manasseh, as a member of the Task and Finish Group, presented this report to Cabinet., which presented the recommendations of the task and finish group of the Scrutiny Committee, that was set up to investigate the issues affecting street cleansing and grounds maintenance.

The task and finish group considered a wide range of both written and verbal evidence over the course of their investigation. Councillor Brown, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services attended each of the four meetings of the group, as did the Interim Service Manager for Commercial Services.

The task and finish group reported its findings to the Scrutiny Committee on 30 November. A number of both short term and long term recommendations were made, which were fully endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee.

Those recommendations were presented to Cabinet for consideration. Each detailed recommendation has been prioritised as being either essential or desirable and the resource implications of each recommendation had been added to the report. Cabinet was asked to consider each of the individual recommendations and to consider reporting back to the Scrutiny Committee in March 2006, to address progress against the detailed recommendations and the Commercial Services Improvement Plan.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Brown, acknowledged the work of the Scrutiny Committee and of the Task and Finish Group.

It was felt that most of the recommendations would not be able to be instigated until the next financial year, after the budget had been set. Therefore bringing a report back in March 2006 was too early, although it was accepted that those recommendations that had little cost implications could be introduced now.

Another area that needed to be addressed was how to deal with graffiti on private property.

Resolved:

That Cabinet

Consider the detailed recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee, as listed in the report

Consider how it will take into account the strategic policy and resource implications of the Scrutiny Committees recommendations and request

that a further report in brought back to Scrutiny in due course and that a further report is brought back to Cabinet in May 2006.

655. Update from the Policy Coordination Portfolio Holder

Cllr Hames informed Cabinet that he had been to several meetings with colleagues and Service Managers as part of the Resource and Service Planning Process, as well as attended the Wiltshire and Swindon Economic Partnership Annual Meeting in Corsham.

Cllr Hames had further meetings to attend regarding the budget, a Lafarge Liaison Group meeting and an Annual Grants Panel meeting.

656. Performance Monitoring Quarter 2005-2006

Cllr Hames presented a report to Cabinet that summarised the Council's performance for the second quarter of 2005-06 (July to September 2005).

He informed Cabinet that the performance of the Council was strong and that considerable progress had been made on delivering the critical tasks in the Corporate Plan. In respect of a number of performance indicators, service managers had been addressing a range of specific issues to improve the performance.

In quarter two the position regarding performance indicators was summarised as:

- 27% hit the target
- 18% missed the target
- 42% unable to be categorised (some are new and a baseline is being set, some are measured annually)

The majority of critical tasks in the corporate plan were on target or showing only a slight delay.

A number of specific performance issues had been highlighted in the report, including:

- CPA indicators and those reserved for 2004-05
- Indicators which are not expected to hit the target by the year end, and
- Those indicators where the information was not yet available or there were concerns about the target

The performance indicators, and the actions being taken to improve performance, were being closely monitored. Discussions were ongoing with the Audit Commission and internal audit, KPMG about the reserved performance indicators. Action was being taken to ensure that any reservations were not repeated in future years. Work was also ongoing to review the targets set. In some cases the targets that were felt to be unrealistic would be reviewed as part of the work on service plans for 2006-07.

It was felt that performance indicators were something that the Council should use as a positive exercise, although it was felt that some of the local performance indicators needed to be reviewed as some areas of the Council were being monitored whilst others may be being overlooked.

Members were keen for officers to be informed of how well the Council was progressing with the performance indicators as officers had worked hard to achieve these. It was agreed that information would be put into the next edition of Corridors and West Wilts Matters.

Resolved:

That Cabinet

Review the summary performance report and raise issues for follow up or further action

Consider the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee asking Cabinet to:

Keep under close review the following indicators: -

- 1. BV109a - % of major applications processed within 13 weeks. This indicator is important for CPA and had planning standards authority implications**
- 2. BV183(I) and BV183(ii) – average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation and hostels. The indicator is important for CPA and has been reserved for 2004 -05**
- 3. Number of dwellings empty for 6 months or more. Important for CPA and whilst not a national indicator, a corresponding statutory return has been reserved by the Audit Commission**
- 4. AS02/4 – calls to switchboard answered in 20 seconds. This indicator was highlighted by the Customer Focus Inspection as being an area of concern**

Report back to Scrutiny Committee through the portfolio holder on the progress being made, following the publication of the quarter three statistics

657. Customer First – Complaints Process

Cllr Hames presented a report which informed members of the new complaints process. This would supersede the complaints process which the Council had been operating for several years.

Putting customers first was one of the Councils key priorities and handling complaints well was an essential element of good customer care. It was important that the Council had in place a robust and effective complaints process.

The previous complaints process had been reviewed and updated to make it work more effectively for both the public and the Council. The objectives were:

- To provide the public with a simple way of making and resolving complaints
- To learn lessons from complaints to improve services and prevent reoccurring problems

The process had three main stages and externally there was the Local Government Ombudsman. It was a sequential process and escalated complaints as required to more senior officers. Stage 1 was dealt with by case officers, stage 2 by service managers, and stage 3 by the Chief Executive. It was envisaged that very few complaints would be dealt with at stage 3. If a complaint had been through the process and it was still not resolved, people would be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

All complaints regarding members would be forwarded to the Standards Board for England and would not be dealt with by the Councils complaint process.

A key feature of the new process was the monitoring of complaints and ensuring that common lessons were learnt across the Council. Information on complaints would be included in the quarterly corporate performance monitoring reports.

The complaints process was being promoted internally and externally using a variety of channels including a leaflet in reception areas, information on the website, briefings, and detailed guidance. It would also form a part of the induction process for all new staff.

Members felt that the use of plain English was good and that it was important that complaints monitoring information would be included in quarterly corporate performance monitoring reports to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and that lessons would be learnt and shared via regular service manager meetings.

Resolved:

That Cabinet note and support the revised corporate complaints process for the Council

658. Update from the Community and Leisure Development Portfolio Holder

In the absence of the portfolio holder, the leader updated members.

On the 18 May 2005, Cabinet requested a feasibility study to be carried out, to explore the possible options for the development of Southwick Country Park. Kit Campbell Associates were approached to carry out this study as they already

had knowledge of the site through their work on the Leisure and Recreational needs analysis.

The methodology used was to first examine Southwick's role as a country park, comparing it to similar sites in Worcestershire and other examples of good practice which have achieved Green Flag Awards for 2005-6 as country parks. This included consideration of the costs of introducing basic infrastructure and revenue costs to be expected in operating Southwick as a low key country park.

An examination was then carried out of the demand for, feasibility and indicative costs of possible activities, which if introduced would occupy a substantial land area on Southwick Country Park. Activities requiring smaller areas of land or occasional use of larger areas were then considered. Consideration was given to the use of the site by dog walkers and their impact upon potential users. Finally, other possible options were explored including disc golf and children's story trail.

The report recommended that apart from the work being carried out by Hope and some minor improvements to the site, no further development should take place. While recognising that this may be a disappointing message for some members, every possible alternative was considered.

The report had already been discussed by the corporate Management Team who supported the recommendation. At the request of Cllr Content, a full report would be brought to Cabinet in March 2006.

659. Children and Young People – Way Forward (key decision)

As Youth Champion, Cllr Bryant presented the report.

Cllr Bryant informed Members that the report was not an attempt to treat young people differently but to increase accessibility to the Council and provide support.

According to the CPA the Council was already doing many things well, but criticised the Council for a lack of comprehensive analysis of young people's needs, a lack of corporate focus on youth and an undeveloped approach to social inclusion.

Those areas were already being tackled and Richard Rogers was currently the Council representative on the Young People and Children Trust Board. The aims of the Trust sat well with those of the District Council and its current consultation around areas such as Leisure and Recreational Needs Analysis.

In his new role as Youth Champion, Cllr Bryant had met with local youth clubs, attended democracy events, supported grant applications and spoken to young people to hear their concerns. Cllr Bryant was intending to invite schools into the Council Chamber to host citizenship lessons and school council events.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

- Supports the approach to improve engagement with young people as outlined in this report
- Adopts the five tests described in the report and drafted by the National Youth Agency, that should be applied to Local Authorities' policies and provision directed towards young people
- That a quarterly report be presented to Cabinet by the Youth Champion including any additional recommendations, as necessary, to progress its workplan

Statement of reason for key decision	This is a key decision because it would have an impact upon all service delivery as well as the way the Council decides on its policy.
Options considered and rejected	Do nothing – This would not address the increased duty that the Council has to place greater emphasis upon children and young people. Employ Young person officer – This would have a drain on the Councils. In addition, Children and young people would inevitably become the responsibility of one person who would struggle to deliver any results. It needs to be the responsibility of the whole Council.
Date of implementation (not less than five days after date of decision)	January 2006

660. Update from the Planning and Development Portfolio Holder

Meetings

A meeting was held in the Council Chamber, last week, with planning agents and contractors to discuss the changes to the buildings regulations.

There had also been a meeting between the Economic Development Committee and the District Council Planning and Policy department to discuss Bradford on Avon.

A meeting would be held next Tuesday with the ODPM to discuss the number of application that were called in and the effects on performance.

Waterside Project

The outline plan had now been submitted.

Conservation Document

The Trowbridge Central Area Conservation document had now gone out to consultation.

661. Recommendation from Scrutiny concerning the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio

Councillor Osborn had attended a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 19 October to present the issues and challenges within his portfolio. A number of questions had been raised by members of the Committee and were given further consideration at the following Scrutiny Committee meeting on 30 November.

On 30 November the Scrutiny Committee reaffirmed its view of the need to ensure all PDG is used to support the work of the planning function and not for other purposes.

The support of the Scrutiny committee was welcomed although it was left that the recommendations within the report were too premature. It was therefore

Resolved:

That Cabinet take into account Scrutiny's recommendation during the budget process

662. Update from Housing Portfolio Holder

Employee of the Year

The Grand Final Award Evening for Trowbridge Employee of the Year was held at The Arc in Trowbridge on 23 November. The evening was a huge success. Adele Ludwig won the competition and was the first local authority employee to be short listed.

Regional Choice Based Lettings

The District Council bid has not been successful. The reasons that the ODPM had given was due to the competitive field, that Choice Based Lettings was already embedded in the area and that the Council should be able to progress without grant aid. Encouragement was given to bid again in the New Year.

Pilot Sanctuary Scheme for West Wiltshire

Funding had been received from the ODPM to assist with the prevention of homelessness. Some of the funding had been allocating to provide a Sanctuary Scheme in West Wiltshire. The Sanctuary Scheme is a good practice example published by the ODPM which looks at providing enhanced security measures within the homes of victims of domestic violence. The Council, which is working in partnership with the Bobby Van and Domestic Violence Unit, started piloting the scheme in November and would continue until the formal launch in April 2006.

Landlords Fair

The first landlords fair was held on 28 November with a number of different exhibitors attending, including, South West Landlords Association, The Rent Service, Citizens Advice Bureau and Housing Benefit. It was a great success with the highest number of prospective landlords attending.

Housing Rural Enabler

Continued funding had been agreed to allow the rural enabler to continue. It was agreed that next year the focus would be around development and putting forward exception sites. Agreed objectives would need to be met to secure the funding for a second year.

PFI

Chris Trowell had short listed for the position of lead technical advisor and design advisor. There had been 28 expressions of interest. Interviews would take place on 12 – 13 January. The revised Outline Business Case was due to be submitted to the ODPM by 14 January. Dependant on the decision from the Treasury the Council could receive a conditional acceptance based on a second phase review around the concerns on land holdings.

Housing Services Manager

Since the departure of Graham Hogg, Nicole Smith had accepted the post of Housing Services Manager.

663. Update from Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Lafarge Liaison meeting

The second meeting would be on Thursday 15 December. Margaret White, Mayor of Melksham Town Council, would chair the meeting. The main point of discussion would be the company's plans to apply to burn Biomass Carbon Neutral Fuels and to construct a Solid Recovered Fuel Plant at Brook Lane, Westbury.

Compton's permit application

Compton's had lodged an appeal following the council's refusal of its application for a pollution control permit for an animal rendering process. The appeal would be heard at a public inquiry in June 2006.

Local residents had been advised of the appeal and informed that they could make comments on the appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

664. Update from the Communications Portfolio Holder

In the absence of the portfolio holder, the leader updated members.

West Wilts Matters

Cabinet was reminded that the deadline for suggesting items for inclusion in the February edition of West Wilts Matters was 30 December

665. Cabinet Forward Work Plan

Resolved:

That the Cabinet Forward Work Plan be approved with the addition of:

A further report regarding the Scrutiny Committees, Task And Finish Group recommendations on street cleansing and ground maintenance (see minute 654) be brought back to Cabinet in May 2006.

A quarterly report be presented to Cabinet by the Youth Champion including any additional recommendations, as necessary, to progress its workplan

666. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of Cabinet was scheduled for Wednesday 11 January 2005 at **6.30pm** in the Council Chamber, at the Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge.

(7.03 pm – 8.38 pm)

These minutes were prepared by Melanie Stimpson, who can be contacted on 01225 770322 or email mstimpson@westwiltshire.gov.uk