

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3 December, 2002 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Caborn (Chair); Councillors Mrs Boad, Darmody, Davis, Mrs Evans, Gill, Thomas and Windybank.

Councillor Gill substituted for Councillor Dray

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Crowther (Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Strategic Leadership)

626. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Minute No. 629 - Discretionary Rate Relief Budget Allocation - 2002/2003

Councillor Caborn declared a personal interest as he was a Board member of the Sikh Community Council.

Councillor Davis declared a personal interest as he was a member of the Bath Place Community Venture and a member of Regensis.

Councillor Mrs Boad declared a personal interest as she was a member of the Lillington Community Centre Management Committee, a member of the Board at Relate and her husband was the Chair of the Ocean Drop-In Centre.

Councillor Darmody declared a personal interest as he was a member of the Mid-Warwickshire Yacht Club.

Councillor Mrs Evans declared a personal interest as she was a Director on the Bath Place Community Venture and a member of Regensis.

Councillor Gill declared a personal interest as he was a member of the Sikh Community Council and the WDC representative at the Westbury Centre.

Councillor Windybank declared a personal interest as he was the President of Kenilworth Old Folks Club.

Minute No. 632 - Leamington Spa Credit Union - Progress Report

Councillors Darmody, Davis and Mrs Evans declared a personal interest as they were members of the Credit Union.

Minute No. 634 - Sierra Leone Local Authority Links

Councillors Crowther and Davis declared a personal interest as they were members of the One World Link.

Councillor Mrs Evans declared a personal interest as her husband was heavily involved in the Sierra Leone Local Authority Link Scheme.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

627. PRINTING REVIEW

The Committee considered a report from Members' and Customer Services on the Council's printing arrangements.

In September 2001, the Executive had agreed a series of actions that should be taken as an alternative to introducing a managed printing service.

Every effort was being made to ensure that all print and design work was sourced through the print unit. This requirement had been emphasised to all units within the Council. As a result, the Printing Manager was able to monitor the Corporate style of leaflets and a wide variety of other documents and to ensure that a standard style was always used. The Printing Manager was liaising with the Communications and Information Officer on issues relating to the publicity and design of the Website to ensure that a consistent, corporate style was followed.

The new Printing Manager, Ema Townsend, had been appointed in April this year and her expertise in graphic design had made it possible for an enhanced graphic design service to be established in house. The amount of work which had been produced by external designers and printers had reduced considerably and this had had an effect of reducing costs.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted and a progress report be submitted to the Committee in six months.

628. CITIZENS' PANEL - 2002

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services providing Members with feedback on the Citizens' Panel during the period December 2001 - September 2002.

The Citizens' Panel was made up of approximately 1,200 residents of Warwick District who had agreed to answer questions relating to their views of Warwick District and the Council in particular, on a quarterly basis.

Each panel questionnaire related to broad themes. The report gave a summary of the key findings from December 2001, April 2002 and July 2002. Information from the Panel from October/November 2002 had not yet been analysed.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted and that the information contained in it be reported to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

629. DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF BUDGET ALLOCATION - 2002/2003

The Committee considered a report from Finance outlining the allocation of the Discretionary Rate Relief Awards for 2002/2003.

Section 47 of the Local Government & Rating Act 1988 permitted local authorities to grant discretionary rate relief to charities and non-profit making organisations. Details of the criteria used in considering such applications was attached as an appendix to the report.

Under the regulations, it was mandatory for the Council to award 80% rate relief to charities at no loss to the Council and could also give discretionary relief in respect of the remaining 20% with the Council funding 75% of the 20%. In respect of non charitable organisations, the Council could give discretionary relief of up to 100% of which only 25% was funded by the Council with the remainder funded by the government.

The number of organisations who had applied during the current year and had been granted some degree of rate relief was currently 140 with a potential 8 who had applied in 2001/2002 and were still to apply. Details of these applications were detailed in an appendix to this report. It had not been possible to find significant funds for virement this year due to competition from other budgets.

A decision had therefore been taken, that in order to try and remain within budget and still be fair to all organisations applying for rate relief, some reduction in the generally 100% relief previously applied would have to be made but targeted on those organisations who it had been felt had some means of generating significant additional external support, e.g. by profits, hiring fees, subscriptions. In the main this category included sports and social clubs, village halls/community centres and cultural groups, e.g. theatres. There had not been a blanket approach to the reduction and an assessment had been made in each and every case of an organisation's finances before the reduction had been implemented.

The approach taken for non charitable organisations had been to reduce the level of relief awarded in increments of 25%, e.g. from 100% to 75% and from 75% to 50% depending on what percentage they had enjoyed in 2001/2002. In the case of other charitable organisations who received 80% mandatory relief it was decided to remove the 20% discretionary relief where it seemed appropriate. The total number of organisations affected was 67.

A number of organisations (9 out of the 67) had appealed against the reduction in their rate relief. They had been asked to supply further information, particularly two year financial forecast in order that the true effect of the reduced rate relief on their future finances could be assessed clearly. However, given the current position of the budget, without additional resources, there was little prospect of additional relief being granted.

RECOMMENDED that

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) a review be undertaken of rate relief, grants and other support to the voluntary sector and a report be submitted to the Committee.

630. RIVERSIDE HOUSE - STAFF CATERING

The Committee considered a report from Leisure and Amenities on the staff catering service at Riverside House after six months following the termination of the contract with Eurest.

The catering service at Riverside House had been provided by Kelly Baylis since April 2002. In taking over the service originally provided by Eurest, Miss Bayliss, previously a Eurest employee, had been able to offer hot and cold snacks, drinks and confectionery service for employees and visitors at Riverside House and a hospitality service to support meetings and courses.

There had been ongoing technical problems with the hot/cold vending machines over the summer months which had led to the machines being out of action for a significant period of time. However, the machines were now fully operational. Some of the technical problems were thought to be due to the limited time that Miss Baylis had available to service the machines whilst operating the catering service.

Discussions were currently taking place with Vendepac, a Birmingham based company, investigating the option of them taking over the maintenance and filling of these machines in the future. There would be a small cost to the authority for this service.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the report be noted and
- (2) a further report be submitted to the Committee giving further information including details of the get out costs, the need for the vending machines and the cost of the cold water machines.

631. AN AUDIT COMMITTEE FOR WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Interim Strategic Director reported that the Standards Committee was making a recommendation to Council on 2 January 2003 that the Resources Scrutiny Committee be reconstituted as the Audit and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to take effect immediately after Council.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

632. LEAMINGTON SPA CREDIT UNION - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on the latest developments with regard to the work of the Leamington Spa Credit Union

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

(LSCU).

LSCU had been set up in August 2000 to serve the area of Leamington Spa. Since that time, it had expanded to the point that there were now some 230 members. Statistics show that the average credit union in this country would typically have around 300 members, but this generally took seven to eight years to achieve.

It had been envisaged that LSCU would take over the management of one of the workers at a later date once the operation had become established, with its relationship with the Council to be managed by means of a service level agreement. However, although the allocated credit union officer worked very closely with LSCU's volunteers on a daily basis, direct management had not been effected by the time that officer left the Council's employment in May 2002.

Since that time, all efforts to employ a replacement had proved to be unsuccessful. A national advertisement produced only two applicants, neither of whom had been appointed.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) a further report be submitted in 3 months; and
- (2) the LSCU volunteers be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss the problems they are having.

633. EXECUTIVE MEETING - MONDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2002

The Committee received a report from the Chair on the meeting of the Executive held on Monday, 11 November 2002.

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on Monday, 11 November 2002, which came within the remit of the Committee was submitted for information and scrutiny.

RECOMMENDED that the Chair's report and the minutes be noted.

634. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)

The Committee considered items 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 14A & 14G on the agenda for the meeting of the Executive to be held on Monday 9 December, 2002.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

Agenda Item Number 2 - Approval of General Fund Estimates 2002/2003 Revised and 2003/2004 Estimates

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and felt that the overspend should be vigorously managed with consideration being given to how the net effect will be funded.

Agenda Item Number 3 - Council Tax Base 2003/2004

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 4 - Change to the Officer Structure

The Committee supported the recommendation to recruit to the vacant Strategic Director post, but there was no strong consensus either way for the structure on page 50 or that indicated in Appendix 'A', as there were good arguments for both.

Agenda Item Number 5 - Freedom of Information Act 2000 - Adoption of the Council's Publication Scheme

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 8 - Newbold Comyn Golf Course Lease

The Committee supported the recommendation and in the report and asked the following questions:

- (i) Will the lease have an effect on the Grounds Maintenance contact?
- (ii) What will be the effect on the charges and will the Council retain control of the charges?
- (iii) As a £300,000 investment need has been identified in the report, will this have an effect on the tenders we receive?

Agenda Item Number 9 - Warwick Tree Nursery Planning Permission

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report but commented that if the Council are granting peppercorn rent, then the Council should not incur any costs.

Agenda Item Number 14(A) - Sierra Leone Local Authority Links

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

Agenda Item Number 14 (G) - Changes to the Operation of Markets Within Warwick District

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report but commented that the location of the market will be near to the Site 'E' development and the noise and dirt may put people off going. The Committee also asked where does this sit in the budget programme?

635. WORK PLAN 2002/2003 AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRIORITY AREAS

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services updating the Committee's work plan for the year, and monitoring the progress against the Portfolio Holder priority areas.

It had been agreed to consider the Committee's work plan as a standing item on each agenda. The current work plan reflected items raised by the Committee at previous meetings, and was detailed in an appendix to the report.

The Executive had agreed service plans relating to the work of each Portfolio Holder at its meeting on 5 March 2002.

Development priorities and work programmes for the Portfolio Holder, covered by this Committee, were detailed in an appendix to the report.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the progress against the Portfolio Holder's Priorities and Work Programme be noted; and
- (2) the progress and implementing actions from Best Value Reviews be included in the Performance Management report.

636. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraphs 1, 8 and 9 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

637. THE BAND FACTORY

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on the background to the Band Factory project and the present situation.

The Band Factory was an SRB5 project that involved the purchase of a building in Althorpe Street that would be available to the community for the purposes of

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

music practice and related cultural activities. In particular, the building would house Brass 2000 a local brass band organisation that effectively lost its home as a result of the 1998 flood. Financial contributions to the project included £40,000 from Warwick District Council, £150,000 from SRB5 sources via Regenesys and the remainder from Brass 2000, including the ongoing costs of running the premises.

The SRB project process can be summarised as follows:-

- (1) Project Developed - Project development form (pdf) completed
- (2) pdf sent to Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnerships for technical appraisal. Questions, clarifications and further information may be requested.
- (3) pdf subject to discussion at an Appraisal Panel. A panel of Board Members and a WDC Officer in most cases, look at pdf for technical appraisal/and can make recommendation not to approve/approve and can ask for conditions.
- (4) Board make final decision on whether to go ahead
- (5) Grant Offer Letter sent to project.

All projects involving over £250,000 SRB5, Advantage West Midlands were the decision makers.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

638. **EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)**

The Committee considered items 16, 17 & 18 on the agenda for the meeting of the Executive to be held on Monday 9 December, 2002.

Agenda Item 16 - Cultural Quarter Spencer Yard Leamington

The Resources Scrutiny Committee supported recommendations 1.1 and 1.3, but did not form a strong consensus either way for recommendation 1.2.

Agenda Item 17 - Early Retirement

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item Number 18 - Sale of Open Space

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

(The meeting ended at 9.25 p.m.)

I:\secs\members\Minutes\RESOURCES 312.doc