

# EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 8 March 2004 in the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00p.m.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Crowther (Chair), Councillors Mrs Begg, Boad, Ms Flanagan, Gifford, Holland and Tamlin.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Caborn (Chairman of the Audit and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee);

Councillor Mrs Compton (Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee)

Councillor Cockburn (Acting Chairman of the Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Councillor Mrs Falp (Chair of Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Councillor Coker (Conservative Group observer);

Councillor Kirton

Councillor Hammon

## 966. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

### Minute Number 972 – Discretionary Rate Relief

Councillor Holland declared a personal and prejudicial interest and left the room for this item because of his wife's employment at the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

### Minute Number 973 - Service Level Agreements with the Voluntary and Community Sector

Councillor Boad declared a personal and prejudicial interest and left the room for this item, because he was a member of the Ocean Drop in Centre Management Committee and declared a personal interest because his partner was a member of the Relate Management Committee.

Councillor Gifford declared a personal interest because his wife was a member of Victim Support.

Councillor Holland declared a personal and prejudicial interest and left the room for this item because of his wife's employment at the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Councillor Tamlin declared a personal interest because he was a member of the Probation Board.

Councillor Coker declared a personal and prejudicial interest and left the room for this item because he was a member of the Race Equality Management Committee.

967. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 19 January & 9 February 2004, having been printed and circulated were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

968. **CLOSURE OF BRUNSWICK STREET POST OFFICE, LEAMINGTON SPA, PROPOSAL FOR FUTURE OF POST OFFICE SERVICE**

The Executive considered a report from Councillors Evans, Gill and Knight on the closure of Brunswick Street Post Office, Leamington Spa.

On 9 February 2004 the Council received notice from the Area Head of Post Office Ltd. of a proposal to close Brunswick Street Post Office on a permanent basis. The letter explained that this was not part of the Network Reinvention programme, which had led to a number of other closures in the area last year. This proposal arose because the Sub-Postmaster had tendered his resignation and had advised the Post Office that his premises were no longer available for Post Office use. The Post Office closed on 25 February.

Brunswick Street Post Office had been a very well-used office, particularly for benefits by a high proportion of elderly people in the area and a significant number of parents. Although the Government was urging a change in the method of payment of benefits, there was still a significant number who relied on drawing them from the Post Office. There was no alternative banking facility within Brunswick Ward. The Brunswick Street office was also well-used for its core postal business and was a National Lottery outlet.

The consultation period in respect of this closure ended on 18 March 2004, after which there would be a gap of three weeks while the Post Office decided whether to proceed further. If they did so, the franchise opportunity would be advertised and the Councillors hoped to be in a position to respond.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) a letter be sent to Post Office Ltd. in response to their letter of 6.02.04, to indicate the Council's regret at the closure of Brunswick Street Post Office; and
- 2) the efforts of local councillors, working with Regenesys, to develop a proposal for a replacement Post Office outlet at the Brunswick Healthy Living Centre, be supported.

(This item was taken as a matter of urgency because the consultation period deadline was imminent).

970. **SRB 5 SCHEME FOR LEAMINGTON OLD TOWN 2004/2005 DELIVERY PLAN**

The Executive considered a report from the Strategic Director (Customer Information and Advice) on the Delivery Plan for the SRB 5 Scheme for Leamington Old Town 2004/2005.

For each financial year Regenesys had to submit to Advantage West Midlands for its approval, a Delivery Plan. This plan had to set out progress over the past year; the anticipated achievements of the next, key milestones and the proposed financial spend of the SRB grant by quarter. The plan also showed achievements in terms of the outputs expected against those delivered. As the Council acted as the Accountable Body for the scheme, the plan was also submitted each year to this Council for approval.

The plan indicated that although there had been difficulties with the progress of two projects the scheme as a whole was delivering largely as intended. Progress on the two schemes – the Althorpe Business units and the Spencer Yard scheme was expected to be resolved this coming year. The mid term evaluation reported to the Council this time last year clearly indicated that the local community also felt that progress was being made.

The only alternative was to not approve the Delivery Plan. This would then delay or prevent the drawdown of SRB 5 grant money and place the Council at greater financial risk as it was the accountable body and employer of most of the staff deployed to implement the projects. Moreover there were no apparent reasons for not approving the Delivery Plan.

The Delivery Plan enabled the area to draw in a significant sum of money from Advantage West Midlands to fund most of the scheme. The Council's commitments to the scheme were within the agreed revenue and capital budgets. No new money was involved. For the most part the Council's contributions had involved the direction of existing sources of funding.

It was reported verbally at the meeting that the bid to the Arts Council for England for funding had not been successful.

The Audit & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

The Economic Overview & Scrutiny Committee made no comment on this item.

**RESOLVED** that the Delivery Plan for the SRB 5 Scheme for Leamington Old Town 2004/05, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved subject to appropriate amendments being made to reflect the failure to obtain Arts Council funding.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Tamlin)

971. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY PLAN FOR 2004/2005**

The Executive considered a report from the Responsible Financial Officer and Finance on the Treasury Management Strategy Plan for 2004/2005.

The Council was required to have an approved Treasury Management Strategy within which its Treasury Management operations could be carried out.

There were no alternative options considered because the approval of an Annual Treasury Management Strategy was a requirement of the C.I.P.F.A. Treasury Management in the Public Services Code of Practice, which had been adopted by the Council.

The Treasury Management Strategy had a potentially significant impact on the Council's budget through its ability to maximise its investment interest income and minimise its borrowing interest payable.

The Audit & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

**RESOLVED** that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2004/2005, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

**RECOMMENDED** that the 2004/2005 Annual Investment Strategy, as detailed in Appendix B to the report, be approved.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Crowther )

#### 972. **DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF SCHEME**

The Executive considered a report from Finance on a suggested addition of an introduction to the guidance for discretionary rate relief. The suggested addition was as follows:

- “ 1.1 Groups that are registered as charities are entitled to mandatory relief – equivalent to 80% of their rating liability. Discretionary relief in those cases refers to the possible granting of the additional 20%.
- 1.2 Amateur sporting organisations can register with the Inland Revenue as a Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) in order to qualify for 80% mandatory relief from their rating liability. This process was fairly simple and the criteria were consistent with what the Council might expect from an organisation that it supported e.g that club membership was available to the whole community, and all facilities were available to members without discrimination. The Council therefore expected that sporting organisations would be registered as a CASC before considering further discretionary relief. Exceptional cases would be brought to the Executive for special consideration”

The Audit and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee had received a report covering the assistance provided by the Council to Voluntary Organisations. The Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme was an important element of this support. Having received details of the assistance available to Sporting Organisations from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004, the Scrutiny Committee recommended that the Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme should be amended accordingly. The application form that needed to be completed was detailed in appendix B to the report.

The Scrutiny Committee had considered the various schemes of assistance to Voluntary Organisations. No further amendments were recommended to the schemes.

This action could save the Council £16,000, without affecting the total level of assistance available to sporting organisations. An organisation's contribution to the Council's aims and objectives was a criterion for rate relief.

The Audit & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

**RESOLVED** that the addition of an introduction to the guidance for approval of discretionary rate relief in the form set out above, be approved.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Crowther)

#### 974. **NEW AND ENHANCED PAYMENT CHANNELS**

The Executive considered a report from Community Information and Advice on new and enhanced payment channels for the Council.

The procurement of facilities to allow for internet payments, more secure telephone payments and to give greater choice to residents as to where and when they could make payments accorded with the Council's strategy of being more focused on citizens needs and on meeting its Implementing Electronic Government targets.

The new and enhanced payment channels was commissioned as part of the Best Value Review of Customer Access. A further report would follow in April. However given the nature and timing of the proposals contained in the report, it had been felt that the new payment channels proposed should be offered as soon as possible to potential customers once approval had been secured.

The total capital cost to be met from the BVEG budget was £57,000. In addition there would be ongoing revenue costs estimated at £44,200 for 2004/5 onwards. This was contained within the proposed Budget for 2004/5. However, there was expected to be a saving within 04/05 year of £50,000 and a larger saving in subsequent years. This would be outlined in more detail as part of the Customer Access Best Value Review to be reported in April 2004.

It was apparent that there were no suitable alternatives that would fit the Council's needs, but those which might nearest fit were detailed in the Appendix to the report.

The Audit and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report and recommended that joint working with other local authorities in Warwickshire be investigated with the possibility of achieving cost reductions.

The Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) the purchase of software and services that will allow two new payment channels to be adopted along with upgrading the existing pay over-the-telephone facility be approved as follows:
  - a) £32,000 from the BVeG capital budget to finance the purchase and set up of a secure internet site and 'touch tone' telephone service hosted by Academy from their operations centre;
  - b) £25,000 from the BVeG capital budget to purchase services and set up costs from the AllPay organisation for the provisions of payment cards that can be used at Post Offices and other designated retail outlets; and
- 2) the removal of the 'Easypay' facility in the Town Hall once the new payment channels go live be approved.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Crowther)

**975. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2004/2005**

The Executive considered a report from Policy and Performance on the Best Value performance Plan for 2004/2005.

The Council was required to publish a summary of its Best Value Performance Plan by the end of March each year. The format and means of distribution for this was flexible. This year it was proposed that the text detailed in appendix 1 to the report, would be drawn together into a 24 page booklet to be distributed to partners and made more widely available through the website and through libraries and one stop shops.

It was intended that this would be a readable, carefully designed and informative document with sufficient information to enable people to see clearly what the Council was achieving and what the priorities and targets were for the future. Given that this was the first BVPP following the publication of the 2003-2007 Corporate Strategy, it had been felt it was vital to give space to the proposed priorities and targets to underline the linkages. A very brief summary of performance would also be included in the Council Tax leaflet.

The Council was also required to produce a full Best Value Performance Plan by the end of June each year detailing performance on all Best Value Performance Indicators which set out specific targets for the next three years.

It was proposed that this performance data be appended to the Best Value Performance Plan summary to form the full Best Value Performance Plan. This would be an effective way to maintain consistency between the documents and provided the opportunity for those who were interested to delve further into the Council's performance at the same time as providing a link back to Council

priorities. This option was also likely to provide a cost effective solution to the production of the two documents.

Other options considered included a leaflet which could be more widely distributed. However this was not taken forward, partly because this was not likely to be able to achieve very much more than the Council Tax leaflet summary and partly because it would not provide the opportunity to underline the links between priorities, targets and performance in the way that the proposed 24 page booklet would do.

The Audit and Resources, Economic, Environment and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committees supported the recommendations in the report.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) the draft Best Value Performance Plan Summary, as detailed in appendix 1 to the report, be approved for publication in March 2004;
- 2) the 2003/2004 performance data be appended to the Best Value Performance Plan Summary to form the full 2004/2005 Best Value Performance Plan for publication in June 2004; and
- 3) the performance results for 2004/2005 be reported in full to the Executive in July 2004 as part of the normal quarterly performance reporting cycle.

(The Portfolio Holders for this item were Councillors Mrs Begg, Boad, Crowther, Ms Flanagan and Tamlin)

979. **PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**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 the paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as set out below.

Minute No.	Para No.	Reason
14	9	Any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods or services  [for so long as disclosure would be likely to advantage a person contracting, or seeking the contract, with the Council]

980. **REVIEW OF ASSETS**

The Executive considered a report from the Asset Management Steering Group on the Council's review of assets.

The Asset Management Plan required the Council to review its Property Portfolio in the interests of achieving best value in Property Management, which took into account the financial, community and strategic benefits of the asset to the District.

The Audit & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations in the report and with regard to para 5.2.10, recommended that a reserve sale figure should be set.

**RESOLVED** that the recommendations of the Asset Management Steering Group, as detailed in Section 5 of the report, be approved.

(The Portfolio Holder for this item was Councillor Crowther)

(The meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.)