

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 February, 2002 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Caborn (Chair): Councillors Mrs Boad, Davis, Dray, Mrs Evans, Mrs Leddy, Short, Thomas and Windybank.

Also Attended: Janet Alty - Old Town Business Association
Peter Sellers - Warwick Chamber of Trade

640. **ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Committee considered a report from Property Services providing members with an update of progress on the implementation of the Council's Asset Management Plan (A.M.P) and the main items that had been undertaken to date. These were detailed in Appendix "A" to the report.

Since the last meeting, the Council had received notification from the D.T.L.R that the first A.M.P had been rated as satisfactory. Realistically that was the best the Council could achieve as, along with many other authorities, the Council did not have the information the D.L.T.R. required in the format they required. The new integrated property management system that was scheduled for purchase in May 2002 should begin to address this problem. By achieving satisfactory status the Council's Basic Credit Approval had been increased by £25,000.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

641. **WORK PLAN 2001/2002 AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRIORITY AREAS**

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services updating the Scrutiny Committee's work plan for the year, and monitoring progress against the portfolio holder priority areas. It had been agreed to consider the Committee's work plan as a standing item in each agenda. The current work plan reflected items raised by the Committee at the meeting on 8 January 2002 and was detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. The Executive had agreed priorities and work programmes for each portfolio holder at its meeting on 25 June 2001. The relevant priorities and work programme for the portfolios covered by this Committee were also appended to the report.

RECOMMENDED that the progress against a portfolio holders priorities and work programme be noted.

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642. VIEW OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN PROCESS AND THE ROLE AND NATURE OF A LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (LSP)

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services and Councillor Mrs Evans on the review of the Community Plan process and the role and nature of the Local Strategic Partnership.

At its meeting in October 2001, the Committee had agreed that a survey of participants in the Warwick Community Plan process should be undertaken and the results used to inform the process before the next plan. In addition, the Executive had also asked the Committee to advise on Local Strategic Partnerships. Questionnaires had been sent to all Councillors, Senior Officers, of both District and County Councils and to those representatives of other organisations that had or had been invited to participate in the development of the Community Plan. A good level of response had been received and reflected the interest in the process and subject. Paralleling this review was the upsurge of interest in and pressure to establish local strategic partnerships. The Committee had previously received a summary of the non-statutory guidance on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's). These LSP's were required in 88 parts of England and were to receive neighbourhood renewal funding, but Warwick was not one of those areas. However, Government guidance currently suggested that all areas should be covered by LSP's and that they should be responsible for preparing Community Plans and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies. The guidance did seem to suggest that funding from various other schemes may depend upon there being an LSP in place.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) a joint seminar between the Council and key agencies be approved;
- (2) an audit of existing partnerships be undertaken; and
- (3) invitations for submissions from interested parties on the Community Plan and Local Strategic Partnerships be approved.

643. BUSINESS RATEPAYER CONSULTATION

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on an opportunity for consultation with the business community on the Council's budget plans for 2002/2003. The Council was under a statutory obligation to consult with the business community on its budget plans for the forthcoming year.

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The Committee had met with representatives of the business community in October 2001. Prior to that meeting, comments had been sought on the Council's financial strategy. The Council's budget plans in relation to the capital programme, general fund and housing revenue account were set out in Appendix 1 to the report. Peter Sellers and Janet Alty also attended the meeting.

RECOMMENDED that the comments and concerns raised by the business community, be taken into account by the Council and the Executive when they set the budget plans for 2002/2003.

644. CONSULTATION PAPER - COUNCIL TAX

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on a consultation paper regarding changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions had issued a consultation paper on proposals to give Local Government greater freedom to set Council Tax discounts and exemptions that were appropriate to its area. Comments on the proposals were required by 15 February 2002. The main proposals in the paper would give billing authorities discretion to:

- (A) Remove or reduce the existing 50% Council Tax discount for second homes.
- (B) Remove or reduce the existing 50% Council Tax discount for long term empty homes.
- (C) Remove or reduce Council Tax discounts and exemptions in response to local issues.

RECOMMENDED that the responses to the proposals made by the DTLR be as follows:

- (1) increase discretion to reduce or end discounts for second homes would be welcome;
- (2) given some of the definitional difficulties about long term empty houses and second homes it would be preferable for any discretion to apply to both categories;
- (3) local exemption and discounts be set nationally with local discretion as to how they were applied and the power to grant relief on a case by case basis would be welcomed;
- (4) any additional tax to be retained locally;

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- (5) the additional tax from both second homes and empty properties be retained locally;
- (6) money should not be ring fenced, but left free for the Council to make decisions at a local level; and
- (7) if the power to grant additional discounts on exemptions was provided, then Local Authorities should meet the costs of any they impose.

645. QUALITY PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS - A CONSULTATION PAPER

The Committee considered a report on the Council's response to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) consultation paper on the concept of the quality town or parish council. The responses were required by 14 February 2002.

Following the rural white paper issued in November 2000, DEFRA had issued a consultation paper on the concept of the quality town or parish council. The consultation paper had set out proposals for a model charter covering relations between all parish and town councils and their principal authorities, for the additional benefits that a quality Council expect, how the quality concept could work and the test Council should meet to achieve quality status.

Parish and town councils would be interested in all aspects of the consultation paper with only some elements of direct relevance to the District Council. The key elements that might affect the District Council were:

- (a) Establishing a charter which set out how principal authorities and parish and town councils would work in partnership. A copy of the proposed charter was attached as Appendix 1, to the report.
- (b) The Charter was to be agreed between the principal authority and parish and town councils in the area. The charter should be reviewed regularly (at least every 5 years) and a summary of the charter was to be included in the principal authority's best value performance plan.
- (c) In three tier areas, a joint charter was to be encouraged but the obligation to prepare the charter was on each principal authority.
- (d) DEFRA was to produce guidance on the principles that should govern the financial arrangements between principal authorities and local councils. This would include good practice on the prevention of "double taxation". Appendix 2, to the report, had set out DEFRA's proposals for the principles behind the financial arrangements between principle authorities and local councils.
- (e) Further guidance was to be issued on how principal authorities engage with parish and town councils on best value considerations on the

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delivery of local services. A statement on how authorities would do this would need to be included in the best value performance plan.

Members were aware that the council had already established a Code of Practice in relation to working with parish and town councils and the principles established within the existing Code of Practice were similar to those within the proposed model charter.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the broad contents of the consultation paper be welcomed;
- (2) the comments of the committee on the new standards framework and revised financial arrangements be raised with DEFRA; and
- (3) the need for additional guidance on the best value be not supported.

646. BUDGET CONSULTATION

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budget proposals made by the Executive at their meeting on 14 January 2002.

The Executive had agreed its budget proposals for 2002/2003 the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account at its meeting on 14 January 2002. In addition, a number of proposals relating to future financial year (2003/2004 to 2005/2006) had been made. Under the Council's constitution, the Executive was obliged to consult with the Scrutiny Committees on its budget proposals for the forthcoming financial year. The Executive's proposals for the General Fund budget were agreed at its meeting on the 14 January 2002. The key elements of this were:

- (1) savings of £332,180 and £421,240 set for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 respectively;
- (2) additions to the budget of £937,000 and £1,282,000 set for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 respectively;
- (3) a Council Tax increase of 11% taking the Band D Council Tax from £90.04 to £99.94 in 2002/2003; and
- (4) an additional contribution of £400,000 from the General Fund to the Capital Programme in 2002/2003 to facilitate the early completion of the play area improvement programme.

Details of the savings, growth and medium term funding projections were

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detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. The Executive's proposals for Housing Revenue Account budget had been agreed at its meeting on 14 January 2002. The key elements of this were:

- (1) a rent increase of 5.42% in 2002/2003 which reflected a general increase of 3.5%, which was in line with the Government's guidance, and a further increase of 1.92% as a result of rent restructuring;
- (2) savings of £32,650 and £24,050 set for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 respectively; and
- (3) additions to the budget of £27,500 and £15,000 set for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 respectively.

Details of the savings, growth, average rent and Housing Revenue Account were detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

RECOMMENDED that budget plans for 2002/2003 be supported.

647. EXECUTIVE MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the Executive held on Monday 14 January, 2002 which came within the remit of this Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the minutes be noted.

648. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)

Agenda Item Number 3 - Draft Best Value Performance Plan 2002/2003

The Committee supported the recommendation but were concerned about the timescale.

Agenda Item Number 4 - Performance Management Framework

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 5 - Best Value Review Timetable and Process

The Committee supported the recommendations but would like to see a larger group of members to share the workload of the Change Board and that it be politically balanced.

Agenda Item Number 6 - Council Tax - Calculation of Warwick District Council Element 2002/2003

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item Number 7 - Housing Rents 2002/2003

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The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item Number 15(A) - Royal Leamington Spa Town Council

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 15(D) - Benefits Update

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and made the following comments:

- (1) welcome the progress the Benefits Division has made; and
- (2) the issues raised in paragraph 1.2 need to be managed within existing budgets

Agenda Item Number 15 (F) - Myton School - Sports Facility Development

The Committee supported the recommendation, however, the Executive need to be certain that community access will be available out of school hours.

Agenda Item Number 15 (G) - Tachbrook Juniors Football Club - Sports Facility Development

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item Number 15 (K) - Implementing Electronic Government

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item Number 15 (L) - Royal Priors

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 15 (N) - Approved List of Building Contractors

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

649. 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 and 9 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

650. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)

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Agenda Item Number 17 - Printing Services

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 18 - Retail Development and Kenilworth Connection , Abbey End, Kenilworth

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report but would like investigations to be made into other avenues for partnership funding in respect of the Civic Centre.

(The meeting ended at 8.35 p.m.)

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