

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5th November 2009

PRESENT:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Jones (Chairman), Councillor Mrs. Farrington (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Atkin and Mrs. Hood.

Labour Group

Councillors Bambrick, Lane and Mrs. Mead.

OS/6. **APOLOGY**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (Conservative Group).

OS/7. **PRESENTATION ON SWINE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY**

Mark Alflat, the District Council's Director of Community Services, provided a presentation on this item. He advised that he was the Responsible Officer for Emergency Planning. It was clarified that an emergency could be qualified by its effect on the work of the Council or other businesses. It was noted that a number of incidents requiring the implementation of Emergency Planning procedures had occurred during the last 12 months. Examples of emergencies that had previously occurred included flooding, foot and mouth outbreak, lost gas supply, lost water supply and the current swine influenza pandemic. Reference was made to the Emergency Plan held in the offices, used as a Business Continuity Plan to quantify and plan for outcomes of various measures and scenarios. Within the Plan, Heads of Service were required to quantify the importance of their services and to assess various levels of importance. This would enable Officers to be aware in advance in an emergency situation of what services needed to be concentrated on, together with the different levels of staffing required.

With regard to the ongoing swine influenza pandemic, it was advised that the initial Government advice had been to seek containment of persons diagnosed with the illness, followed by a prescription of Tamiflu to reduce the length and severity of the symptoms. It was noted that the Government was currently working on a vaccine for key workers and those with underlying deficiencies and health conditions. It was anticipated that approximately ½ million people in the country would exhibit symptoms of the illness but the situation had now spread beyond the containment stage.

It was noted that staff briefings within the Council had been undertaken to advise of the current situation. Hand-wash/handwipes, together with nappy

disposal sacks for used tissues, had been issued to staff. Note had been taken of staff suggestions, including the use of disposable handwipes next to photocopiers. Members of staff visiting the public had also been provided with additional supplies of handwipes. Only the first two or three members of staff showing symptoms had been diagnosed with the illness; the remainder of staff experiencing symptoms had then had to resort to self-diagnosis. It was estimated that approximately 30 members of staff in total had experienced some symptoms. For most staff, it had been a mild illness, reduced in part by taking Tamiflu.

Nationally, the few deaths caused by the illness had related to elderly people or those with underlying illnesses. There was, however, concern that the virus could mutate into a different strain, although at present, it appeared that the number of people suffering from the illness had reduced.

The availability of the influenza vaccines was queried. It was confirmed that there would be two separate vaccines, one in respect of the annual seasonal influenza and the other for the mutating influenza virus. Priority would be given to frontline health workers, children under five years old, the elderly and those with immunity deficiencies.

The percentage of staff absence levels to require action to be taken was questioned. It was noted that average sickness levels equated to 8% and that anything above 10% would be critical and therefore dependent upon undertaking actions set out in the Business Continuity Plan. Staffing levels were monitored in conjunction with the District Council's Head of Organisational Development. Should significant staff absence prove to be problematic, it would be possible to work with other authorities, for example East Staffordshire Borough Council, in terms of staff sharing.

It was questioned whether key staff members involved in community working required vaccination against the swine influenza. It was confirmed that any staff members would be low down the list of priorities for vaccinations, although it was hoped that the vaccination would be rolled out to more people from next year onwards. The Chairman advised that there were insufficient stocks of vaccines for everyone in the country, since the vaccine was produced in one factory in France. The Government had predicted that 30% of the population would acquire the illness at some point and it was considered that, of the deaths occurred, 65% would have benefited from the vaccine.

With reference to the Business Continuity Plan, it was noted that, should the Director of Community Services be unavailable due to illness, the District Council's Head of Environmental Services and Emergency Planning Officer, together with Heads of Service were trained to carry out the requirements of the Business Continuity Plan. The contents of the Plan were reviewed annually, including contact telephone numbers and the last review had been undertaken two months ago. Officers practised different emergency scenarios three or four times each year. The last Swine Influenza emergency scenario was undertaken four months ago.

Reference was made to the provision of hospital beds for those suffering from Swine Influenza and it was noted that there was a national shortage of

intensive care beds. The wearing of masks for staff entering homes was queried and the Government's advice was that these were not effective. It was advised to keep a safe distance of one metre to ensure that symptoms could not be transferred.

The Committee was satisfied that a support structure existed in respect of business continuity and was reviewed on a regular basis. Officers undertook Emergency Planning exercises on a regular basis, looking at the worst-case scenarios. No further recommendations were considered necessary and the report was therefore noted as a position statement.

OS/8. **ROSLISTON FORESTRY CENTRE – UPDATE ON BUSINESS PLAN**

The Committee was reminded that, on 17th September 2008, Members had received a presentation from the partners of Rosliston Forestry Centre on the management and operation of the Centre (Minute No. OS/10 refers). Following the presentation, a report had been submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee in support of the partnership work at the site and recommending that a further update report on the Rosliston Business Plan be submitted to this Committee.

Members were reminded of the content of the initial presentation and advised of the subsequent developments and changes that would impact on future business planning.

The 2008/09 income and expenditure totals were very close to budget, which meant that, for the first time, the partners expected subsidy to the site was less than budgeted. It was noted that the day visitor numbers for 2008/09 had fallen by approximately 15,000. This was attributable generally to poor weather, particularly during peak visitor periods. A sum of £6,915 had been received from the income share lease arrangement with the café, which was held outside of the Business Plan. It had originally been intended that this should cover the risk of a claim on initial investment by the new café leaseholder. However, since this was highly unlikely, partners were now looking to utilise the money for long-term re-investment in the site infrastructure. There had been a rise in costs for electricity and equipment and tools, highlighted by the £70,000 income received from the use of the cabins against a target of £74,000. A revised budget and marketing strategy had addressed these matters for 2009/10.

The Committee had previously recommended that the partners should seek to maximise the potential for increasing income and reducing costs on an ongoing basis. Consequently, a number of future developments had been progressed successfully. The building of five wooden construction demonstration standard business units was now at contract letting stage, with a view to work starting on site in mid-November and tenants being secured around May 2010. The value of the work was in the region of £500,000. Improvements, lighting, sound, security, flooring, signage and fit-out had been undertaken to The Glade in the Forest Area, which had commenced a performance programme. A new crazy golf facility uniquely based on the last cycle of the trail had been created. Further feasibility into the potential of a wind turbine was being conducted and a nanometre to measure wind speed

was currently on site. Accurate on-site measurements would indicate whether capital funding should be secured for installation of the turbine. A marquee had also been purchased for weddings and other activities in The Glade.

The Business Plan performance was monitored on a monthly basis, both internally and at a project management meeting of partners and contractors. Performance to date in 2009/10 was on track for both income and expenditure. Income was achieved from the use of the cabins and car park. The cabins had benefited from additional marketing support to bring them closer to target and the car parking income was performing as expected. Additional costs anticipated for electricity, equipment and contractor services had been absorbed by savings elsewhere, together with additional income from the crazy golf facilities and weddings. Overall, the partners' projection was that the Business Plan would perform as expected and to budget.

Additional income in future years was anticipated, due to the crazy golf facility, wedding and marquee-related hire, The Glade use and business unit lettings. Aurora Country Developments Limited was continuing attempts to secure cabin contracts with specialist disability providers, which would increase income levels. Associated costs of management, staffing, maintenance and marketing were required to be offset against the income figures. As an example, some of the cultural activity at The Glade in the Forest Arena was temporarily subsidised by the Arts Lottery Grant and future programming needed to reflect the funding arrangements.

The 2010-15 Strategic Vision and Business Plan had been delayed in order to focus resources on The Glade and business unit capital projects. The five-year financial forecast for the Centre had therefore not been revised significantly, but had been adjusted to take into account current known factors. Therefore, as previously reported, it was anticipated that the Centre would perform at the same costs to the two funding partners as budgeted. A full-scale update would accompany the new Strategic Vision and Business Plan scheduled for 2010.

Partners had identified an opportunity to develop a family cycle skills area and associated trails and had secured some external finance for further planning and initial works within the current financial year. Following the Committee's recommendation to consider increased contributions to the Business Plan's marketing budget, an additional £1,500 had been identified from efficiency savings.

Members showed particular interest in the Centre's current and long-term financial situation and new ventures, including the crazy golf course, The Glade Arena and wedding and marquee-related hire. The external marketing of the marquee was queried and it was noted that a wedding fayre had been held in May 2009. In addition, The Glade had been featured on a BBC3 TV programme entitled "Don't Tell The Bride" and on breakfast TV. Adverts and articles of future events were published on the Internet and marketing was also undertaken by word of mouth from other users.

It was questioned how the numbers of visitors were known. A formula was used based on car parking receipts, annual ticket sales, visitors to cabins and

activity use. Bike rack provision was queried and it was noted that, due to the high cost, this was not provided at the Centre. However, the cycling club that visited the Centre two to three times per week normally fixed bicycles to the railings around the café. CCTV was also provided on site. There had been no cycle theft reported within the last ten years at the Centre.

The occupancy levels for cabin lettings was queried and it was noted that the target was 70% occupancy, although it was anticipated that an occupancy level of approximately 55% would be achieved this year. It was noted that two additional two bedroomed cabins had been acquired this year which skewed the figures. Consideration was being given to the possibility of awarding loyalty bonuses for return custom.

Other information was sought on the family cycle skills area and it was questioned whether this could be linked to the Sustrans cycle route 66 which passed close by the site. Reference was also made to the potential use of the former railway line from Bretby to Drakelow as a cycle route.

The success of The Glade was questioned. The most recent events held had included 'Last Night of the Proms' and 'Alice in Wonderland' productions. The latter had been very successful in attracting approximately 150 people. It was noted that three-year funding had been secured from the Arts Lottery to subsidise The Glade. Discussion was undertaken regarding the proportion of revenue/staffing costs on which the funding was based. A programme of events for 2010 would be available at the beginning of the year.

Note: At 6.50 p.m. Councillor Atkin left the Meeting.

It was queried whether solar energy could be enhanced at the site. It was intended to investigate the possibilities of such provision in relation to the new business units. Other energy efficiency savings could be acquired from the potential provision of a wind turbine as discussed earlier in the Meeting.

It was agreed:-

- (1) To submit a report to the Housing and Community Services Committee advising of this Committee's satisfaction with the progress made by the Forestry Centre, together with its vision for the future.**
- (2) That a further review in 2010/11 be undertaken of Rosliston Forestry Centre's Business Plan for 2009/10 and that, in particular, the 'Get Active in the Forest' and Environmental Education work be addressed as part of the review.**

C. JONES

CHAIRMAN

The Meeting terminated at 7.00 p.m.