

FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

28th April 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Wilkins (Chair), Councillor Pabla (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Dunn (substitute for Councillor Lauro), Shepherd (substitute for Councillor Carroll), Southerd, Southern and Whyman, M.B.E.

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin (substitute for Councillor Mrs. Wheeler), Harrison, Lemmon and Nalty.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Carroll and Lauro (Labour Group) and Councillor Mrs. Wheeler (Conservative Group).

FM/124. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th March 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

FM/125. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Atkin declared a personal interest in respect of the agenda item on Complaints as he had been involved in one of the reported complaints, as the Ward Member. Councillor Whyman M.B.E. and Councillor Nalty declared personal interests in respect of the Burton and Swadlincote Area Transport Strategy: Objectives and Priorities.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

FM/126. **RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION WORKING PANEL**

RESOLVED:-

That the Open Minutes of the Recruitment and Selection Working Panel Meetings held on 2nd, 15th and 16th March 2005 be received.

FM/127. **IMPROVEMENT PANEL**

RESOLVED:-

That the Open Minutes of the Improvement Panel Meetings held on 16th February and 8th March 2005 be received.

FM/128. FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES DIVISION – SERVICE PLAN 2005 TO 2008

The Committee received the Finance and Property Services Division Service Plan for the period 2005 – 2008. The Plan reflected the integration of the Finance and Property Service functions to the Council following the Senior Management restructure in 2004. The aim of the Plan throughout each section was to focus on key issues. More detailed information surrounding individual issues was available from other documents produced by the Division and examples were provided. These documents were reported to the Committee regularly, in accordance with statutory timescales and to provide greater detail on the main work areas of the Division.

Members noted that the vacant Estates Officer position had been a cause of difficulties for the Section. With regard to asset management, questions were submitted about the rate of return on assets and it was noted that land sales seemed to be taking a long time to be completed. The Director of Corporate Services explained that a fundamental review of asset management was planned and a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee. Councillor Southerd sought further information about the partnership working with Derby City Council. With regard to opportunities and challenges, Councillor Atkin asked about the backlog of work on estate management and the strengthening of risk management. There was a need to provide training for both Members and Officers, to take on board guidance from the District Auditor. The Leader looked forward to proposals for a review of this area of work. Councillor Harrison sought a more detailed reply regarding the clearance of the estate management backlog. The Chair suggested that Members await the Review report. In response to a further question from Councillor Harrison, it was confirmed that the Accountancy Unit monitored both Council spending and income.

RESOLVED:-

That the proposed Service Plan for the Finance and Property Services Division for 2005 – 2008 be approved.

FM/129. PARLIAMENTARY AND COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2005 – DESIGNATED POLLING PLACES

The Committee was asked to consider the designated polling places to be used for the Parliamentary and County Council Elections on 5th May 2005. It was reported that a review had been undertaken of the proposed polling places and details were provided of suggested replacement polling stations for certain locations.

In response to questions from Councillor Southerd, the Chief Executive explained his role as the Acting/Deputy Returning Officer for the combined Parliamentary and County Council Elections. Information was also provided on the proposed use as a Polling Station of a club room to the rear of a public house. Councillors Harrison and Lemmon voiced concerns about a lack of polling stations in certain parts of the District. The Chief Executive explained that a review had been undertaken of polling places and the efforts to identify suitable locations for polling stations. The Leader felt there was a need to be reasonable and he was aware of other areas where polling stations were not available. Councillor Southern also referred to the availability of postal votes.

Councillor Harrison requested that for future elections, the schedule of Designated Polling Places be considered at an earlier stage.

RESOLVED:-

That the designated lists of polling places for the 2005 Parliamentary and County Council Elections be approved as submitted.

FM/130. **BURTON AND SWADLINCOTE AREA TRANSPORT STRATEGY: OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES**

It was reported that the Burton and Swadlincote Area Transport Strategy was being revised to take account of changes since the publication of the first version of this document in 2000. Objectives and priorities proposed for inclusion were appended to the report.

The Strategy was being prepared by Officers representing Derbyshire and Staffordshire County Councils, following consultation with Officers at the appropriate District Councils and the National Forest Company. It would inform the respective County Councils' second Local Transport Plans, but it was emphasised that the proposed objectives and priorities did not represent the policy of either County Council at this stage. Whilst Leicestershire authorities were not part of the formal Joint Strategy Partnership, account had been taken of cross boundary transport issues.

In addition, it was intended that the Strategy in its final form should set out details of progress towards meeting the objectives of the first Joint Transport Strategy, identify transport issues of cross-border relevance and set out the national, regional and local policy background. It would be made generally available with the provisional Derbyshire Local Transport Plan for public consultation later this year. The report set out the particular priorities of importance to South Derbyshire. Members were reminded that many of the objectives were included in other District Council strategies. Others had been introduced in response to Government guidance on the preparation and content of the second round of Local Transport Plans.

It was recommended that the objectives and priorities be supported generally. However, it was considered that a number of amendments should be requested and the report explained particular areas of concern, together with proposed modifications to the Strategy.

Members referred to previous endeavours to introduce the National Forest rail line. However, it was noted that Leicestershire County Council was not willing to provide funds for this scheme.

Councillor Atkin welcomed the proposals in general, but voiced concerns about weight restrictions on the various bridges crossing the River Trent. He questioned whether a review of the weight restrictions was needed to ease current traffic problems. The Chair commented that this was an issue for the Highways Authority. The Deputy Chief Executive referred to the planned regeneration route to bypass some or all of the Woodville area. This would serve potential new and existing sites.

Further reference was made to the National Forest rail line and whether it would be possible to move this project forward without the assistance of Leicestershire County Council. Reference was made in particular to the

Conkers Visitor Centre and the Rosliston Forestry Centre. Councillor Southerd spoke about the regeneration route and the involvement of Derbyshire County Council in this initiative. He recognised the potential increases in traffic, the benefits for the local economy and the potential impact for villages between the A38 and M42 trunk roads. Councillor Harrison voiced support for the National Forest rail line plans and noted the need to protect existing rail infrastructure. He questioned how the Council could pursue this initiative, suggesting a meeting with local Members of Parliament and the Derbyshire County Council. He then referred to a section of the report on reducing the environmental impact of transport, seeking further clarification. He noted that the strategy concerned the Burton and Swadlincote areas and questioned arrangements for the rest of the District.

Officers explained that to date North West Leicestershire District Council had been the lead authority on the National Forest rail line. An explanation was given of the area covered by this joint transport strategy. The remainder of the District was covered by two local Transport Plans and Members' concerns were noted with regard to the Swarkestone Causeway. Councillor Harrison reiterated that this 13th Century structure was not able to cope with 21st Century traffic. A further report would be submitted to Members later in the year on the local transport plans.

Councillor Lemmon referred to the railway line between Burton and Swadlincote and the efforts to reintroduce a passenger service for many years. This line was no longer used frequently, there were high maintenance costs and this posed a risk of the lines falling into disrepair. Councillor Southerd explained that rail heads were located at a number of large commercial sites within the District. Discussions could take place with the companies concerned, but the need for support from the Strategic Rail Authority was recognised. With regard to the National Forest rail line, the Leader felt that sadly, this project would not progress without financial support from Leicestershire County Council. There might however be the opportunity to introduce a rail service incrementally, such as providing a route between Burton and Swadlincote.

RESOLVED:-

That general support be expressed for the objectives and priorities to be included in the Joint Transport Strategy, but that amendments be requested as set out within the report.

FM/131. **COMPLAINTS**

The Committee received an informative report, which summarised the official complaints received by the Council. A number of tables compared the Official Complaints over the last full financial year and the last six months of that year. They identified which departments the complaints related to and gave information on decisions made by the Ombudsman. A review of the complaints procedure was in its final stages and would include feedback from the Corporate Complaints Review Group. It was also noted that the current Complaints Procedure did not encourage comments or compliments.

The Chair asked whether a staff suggestion box scheme could be introduced. The Leader felt it would be useful to have a comparison to other local authorities. This was a positive and encouraging report, as many of the complaints were resolved at the first stage.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee notes the report.

FM/132. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)**

RESOLVED:-

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th March 2005 were received.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION WORKING PANEL (Paragraph 1)

The Committee received the Exempt Minutes of the Recruitment and Selection Working Panel Meetings held on 2nd, 15th and 16th March 2005.

BENEFIT FRAUD BUSINESS PLAN 2005/06 (Paragraph 5)

The Committee received the Business Plan for the Benefit Investigations Unit and approved prosecution policies for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT (Paragraph 1)

The Committee approved revisions to the establishment of this Section and requested a further report on the delivery of the service, towards the end of the current financial year.

STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (A REVIEW OF THE ACCOUNTANCY UNIT (Paragraphs 1 and 11)

The Committee approved changes to the establishment of the Accountancy Unit and changes to the salaries of staff within it.

RESHAPING OF COMMERCIAL AND LICENSING SECTION (Paragraph 11)

The Committee approved the reorganisation of the Commercial and Licensing Section, together with regrading applications.

REGRADE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANT (POLLUTION) (Paragraph 1)

The Committee approved the regrading of this post.

PROPOSED USE OF HOUSING CAPITAL RECEIPTS AND IEG MONEY TO IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SECTION (Paragraph 9)

The Committee authorised funding for the purchase of IT equipment for this service area.

STRATEGY FOR THE PROCUREMENT OF PLAY EQUIPMENT (Paragraph 8)

The Committee authorised the suspension of the Contract Procedure Rules, to enable the appointment of a contract.

OUTCOME OF REGRADING REVIEWS – LEISURE SERVICES (Paragraph 1)

The Committee approved the regrading of one post following a market testing exercise.

P.J. WILKINS

CHAIR