

STRATEGY & POLICY COMMITTEE
11 FEBRUARY 1998

Present: Councillor Bettison (Chairman), Councillors Adams, Angell, Mrs Ballin, Bayle, Birch, Good, Jones, Mrs Keene, McCormack, North, Sargeant, Wade, Ward, Wheaton.

Also present: Councillor Flood

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Mills

489. **Councillor Mrs Hirst**

The Chairman advised members that Councillor Mrs Hirst had been admitted to hospital over the previous weekend and members expressed their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

490. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 October 1997 and of the special meeting held on 21 October 1997 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

491. **Urgent Action taken under Delegated Powers**

The Committee received details of urgent action taken under delegated powers to appoint Councillors Mrs Ballin and Ward, together with the Chief Executive, as the Council Administrators representatives to the South-East regional forum and to nominate Councillor Mrs Ballin to attend the SERF Conference on 11 February 1998.

492. **Unitary Structures Sub Committee**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Unitary Structures Sub Committee held on 17 October, 11 November and 16 December 1997, as set out in Appendices A, B and C hereto be received and noted.

493. **Unitary 1998 Interview Committee**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Unitary 1998 Interview Committee held on 22 October 1997, as set out in Appendix D hereto, be received and noted.

494. **Strategy and Policy Executive Committee**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Policy Executive Sub Committee on 27 November 1997 as set out in Appendix E hereto, be received and noted.

495. **Finance and Property Sub Committee**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Property Sub Committee held on 19 November 1997, as set out in Appendix F hereto, be received and noted and that Councillors Barnard, Egan, Good, Wade and Wheaton, be appointed to serve on the Special (Insurance Tenders) Sub Committee with delegated power to accept the most cost effective tender for the provision of insurance services from 1 April 1998.

496. **Town Centre Sub Committee**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Town Centre Sub Committee held on 27 January 1998, as set out in Appendix G hereto, be received and noted and that the recommendation at Minute 19(ii) (Town Centre Refurbishment - Development Agreement) be adopted.

497. **Finance and Property Sub Committee**

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Property Sub Committee held on 27 January 1998, as set out at Appendix H hereto, be received and noted;
- (ii) in connection with Minute 39 (2) proceeds from the sale of Category 2 (clawback) and Category 3 (surplus) properties be divided between the unitary authorities according to a combination of the respective council tax bases and population.

498. **Personnel Sub Committee**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 29 January 1998, as set out at Appendix I hereto, be received and noted and that the recommendations contained in Minutes 29 (Introduction of a no-smoking policy) and Minute 30 (Consultation arrangements) be approved and adopted.

499. **Access Committee**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Access Committee held on 3 December 1997, as set out in Appendix J hereto, be received and noted.

500. **Members' Allowances Scheme 1998-99 (Item 1)**

In accordance with the terms of Minute 54 of the meeting held on 20 May 1997, the Director of Corporate Services submitted a report reviewing the scheme of members' allowances for the forthcoming year.

The Committee particularly noted the information on members' workload provided in a confidential questionnaire, comparisons with the other Berkshire Authorities and that the Council's current scheme resulted in a significantly lower cost than the average payment to unitary Councillors participating in a national survey undertaken in 1997. Attention was also drawn to one of the principal findings in the Audit Commission Report entitled "Representing the People - the Role of Councillors" which had recommended that members' allowances schemes should properly reflect the level of constituency activity undertaken by all members.

The Committee also considered the need to revise the allowances paid to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor having regard to the wider range of Council functions and responsibilities as a Unitary Authority.

RECOMMENDED that the scheme of members' allowances be amended by increasing the basic allowance (inclusive of contributions to telephone rental and calls) to £1523.64p and retaining the attendance allowance in respect of approved duties at £30 and the special responsibility allowances paid to Group Leaders, Deputy Group Leaders, Committee Chairman and Vice Chairman and Sub Committee Chairman and Vice Chairman as set out in Schedule 1 of the existing scheme; and

- (ii) the allowances paid to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor be increased by £3000 (to £10,189) and £1000 (to £3,396) respectively.

501. **Financial Plans and Revenue Budget 1998-99 (Item 2)**

Following on from previous consideration by the Committee of the Council's overall financial position in preparing the first budget for the Unitary Authority, the Director of Corporate Services submitted a comprehensive report which contained details of the draft base budgets agreed by each spending Committee together with proposals to adjust these budgets to meet unavoidable price increases, provide for service developments and introduce potential economies. The report also contained details of the amounts required by levying bodies the cost arising from debt charges in respect of the Council's responsibility for inherited debt from the County Council, income arising from the effects of Housing Revenue Account negative subsidy and the requirements for an adequate level of contingency provision taking account of the potential risks associated with the first unitary budget. The Committee noted the total expenditure proposed amounted to £78.082 million compared to a capping limit of £76.118 million. As a result the Committee considered the possible funding arrangements including the use of balances, and the transfer of surpluses from Direct Service Organisations, that might be necessary to meet this level of expenditure. A revised provisional budget summary statement was circulated at the meeting as Annex E to the Report.

RECOMMENDED that :

- (i) the adjustments included in Annex A of the report submitted are included within the base budgets for the Finance and Property Sub Committee and Social Services and Housing Committee;
- (ii) the inflation allowances shown in Annex B of the report submitted be added to Committee budgets;
- (iii) the Education Committee's budget be increased by £812,000 to reflect the cost of meeting the teachers' pay award and other inflation;
- (iv) a further one off addition of £89,000 be made to the Education Committee's budget to fund out of Borough special education placement;
- (v) each Committees' proposed service development shown in Annex C of the report submitted be agreed;
- (vi) each Committees' proposed economies shown in Annex D of the report submitted be agreed;
- (vii) a contingency provision of £500,000 be agreed to be controlled by the Finance and Property Sub Committee;
- (viii) provisions for major structural maintenance work be excluded from the revenue budget and financed from the Council's capital programme;
- (ix) the contribution of £1,406,000 be made from revenue balances to support all expenditure on services;
- (x) a contribution of £500,000 be made from revenue balances to support capital expenditure;
- (xi) the Council's total requirement for the collection of funds, excluding parish council precepts, be set at £23,614,000;

- (xii) an application be made to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to transfer £150,000 of surpluses made by the Direct Service Organisations to the Housing Revenue Account;
- (xiii) the Council tax for the Council's services for each valuation band be set as follows:

Band	Tax Level Relative to Band D	£
A	6/9	388.71
B	7/9	453.49
C	8/9	518.28
D	9/9	583.06
E	11/9	712.63
F	13/9	842.20
G	15/9	971.77
H	18/9	1,166.12

- (xiv) service committees be requested to submit proposals for inclusion in the Council's program to the next meeting of the Structure and Policy Committee.

NOTE: *The various adjustments referred to above have been incorporated in the Draft Revenue Budget 1998/99 book which is submitted to the Council meeting as a separate item including the formal Council Tax resolution.*

502. Statement of Accounts 1996-97. (Item 3)

The Borough Finance Officer referred to the provisional approval to the Statement of Accounts for 1996-97 by the Executive Sub Committee on 24 September 1997 (Minute 1 refers) and reported on the adjustments necessary to meet audit requirements. Revised pages were submitted incorporating the adjustments necessary.

RESOLVED that the amendments to the Statement of Accounts 1996-97 submitted to the Committee be approved and adopted.

503. White Paper to Establish Regional Development Agencies (Item 4)

The Director of Planning and Transportation reported on the regional economic framework now proposed by the Government to be established under the Regional Development Agencies Bill with effect from 1 April 1999. The Committee noted that the new South-East office would be separate from the Government Office for the South-East and would draw on existing agencies and resources.

Details of the objectives, role and functions of the regional development agencies were submitted together with the structure and membership and related matters. The Committee further noted officer comments on the proposed tasks and responsibilities of the regional development agencies together with additional issues which had been proposed. These were endorsed by the Committee with the exception that members did not consider that it would be appropriate for the regional assembly to be responsible for regional co-ordination of transport, land use and sustainability issues.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the contents of the report insofar as they relate to the establishment of a South-East regional development agency and the likely future implications for the Borough.

504. **The “New Deal” Initiative and its Relevance to Bracknell Forest (Item 5)**

The Committee noted a report by the Director of Planning and Transportation on the proposed arrangements under the Government’s “New Deal” which was aimed primarily at young people claiming job seekers allowance with the objective of achieving a sustainable reduction in long-term unemployment. It was noted that locally the new arrangements would be led by the Employment Service and that the role of the local authority was likely to be limited in the initial stages although there would be opportunities for active participation by the Borough Council in the future.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that officers be requested to continue to investigate the Borough Council’s likely input into the various local new-deal partnerships which emerge, in consultation with the Employment Service, and to act as a means of contact with other organisations and companies.

505. **The Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Enterprise Agency (Item 6)**

The Director of Planning and Transportation reported on the work of the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Enterprise Agency and the arrangements proposed to ensure its continued existence following local government reorganisation. A service-level agreement had been prepared which would guarantee funding for the three years following reorganisation and would maintain the same level of service in the area of each unitary authority. Details of the cost in 1998-99 were submitted which had been disaggregated on the basis of acquired usage and which resulted in a total contribution by the Council for 1998-9 of £12,309.

RESOLVED that the officers be authorised to sign the Service Level Agreement with the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Enterprise Agency to secure its services for the benefit of the Borough for the next three years, subject to final agreement on the costings.

506. **Borough Council Residents’ Newsletter (Item 7)**

The Head of Policy Development submitted a report dealing with possible changes to the Borough Council’s current residents’ newsletter “Forest Link” distributed to all residential and most business premises in the Borough.

The newsletter would be a particularly important vehicle for raising awareness amongst the residents, the voluntary sector and the business community on service delivery by the unitary authority. Details of the proposed changes to be investigated were reported to the Committee and would include possible sponsorship arrangements and possible changes in production processes which would allow for an increased number of issues each year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that approval be given to :

- (i) seeking sponsorship/advertising to contribute towards feature costs;
- (ii) the name of the Council's newsletter be changed from Forest Link to Town & Country to reflect the urban and rural character of the Borough.

507. **Crime and Disorder Bill (Item 8)**

Consideration was given to a preliminary report on the responsibilities which would fall on the Council arising from the Crime and Disorder Bill published by the Home Office in December 1997. The Committee noted particularly that the Bill would place a number of new responsibilities on local authority, particularly the Social Services and Housing Department. There would be a statutory duty on local authorities and chief police officers to work together to improve and implement a 3 year strategy for reducing crime and disorder in the area.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the Committee notes the issues arising in the Crime and Disorder Bill; and
- (ii) requests officers to bring forward a report to a future meeting outlining proposals for the Council's response.

508. **Annual Council Meeting (Item 9)**

The Committee considered proposals to rearrange the date of the Annual Council Meeting in 1998 and to arrange a separate Mayor-making ceremony to mark the creation of the new Unitary Authority for the Borough.

RECOMMENDED that the Annual Council Meeting be rescheduled to 25 March 1998 to allow a separate Mayor-making ceremony to take place on 2 April 1998.

509. **References from Other Committees (Item 9)**

The Committee received the following references from other committees:

Leisure Services Committee - 16 September 1997 - Minute No. 280

Leisure Services Committee - 13 January 1998 - Minute No. 446

Education Transition Committee - 22 January 1998 - Minute No. 474

RESOLVED that:

- (i) approval be given to the recommendations and references from other committees as set out in the report submitted; as
- (ii) in relation to Minute No. 280, the following terms be agreed and that the Borough Solicitor be authorised to enter into a formal agreement;

Interest rate to be the capital issues Public Works Loan Board Non-Quota - A rate for the relevant loan period, plus ¼% for administration. Interest to be calculated annually on the anniversary of the loan advance based on the relevant published interest rate as at the end of the preceding month.

510. **Office Relocation - Removals Costs for Staff Moves. (Item 11)**

The Director of Planning and Transportation reported on the proposed arrangements for removal costs in connection with staff relocations at Seymour House and Fitzwilliam House. It was proposed to proceed by way of a single quotation.

RESOLVED that, in accordance with Standing Order 62, the requirements of Standing Order 60 be not applied on the grounds that the nominated contractor provided the lowest price in competitive tendering for the major move to Time Square for a sum which indicated that competitive quotations for the further moves would not be beneficial.

511. **Weather Watch Project. (Tabled Item)**

The Chairman had previously agreed that this Item should be considered on grounds of urgency in order to finalise proposals for a revised submission to the Millennium Commission within the required timescale.

Consideration was given to a report by the Director of Planning and Transportation which referred to the decision of the Leisure Services Committee (Minute No. 427 refers) and the subsequent discussions with representatives of the Millennium Commission. Arising from those discussions the Weather Watch project had been reviewed and a revised phasing was now suggested which would provide for the tower and a smaller un-manned visitor centre to be built as a first stage at a total estimated cost of £1,400,000. The second phase of the project would comprise the fitting-out of the visitor centre and had yet to be determined and programmed. Discussions had taken place with the consultant architect and other parties concerned. In the event of 50% Millennium Commission funding being obtained, the Council's contribution of £700,000 would be made up of the funding already secured together with allocations in existing budgets, covering preliminary work already carried out and IT support in linking the weather-watch project to the Council's new public electronic information system and the proposed IT network to schools.

RESOLVED that :

- (i) the proposal to phase the implementation and reduce the size of the scheme be confirmed as meeting the Council's objectives and that a further representation be made to the Millennium Commission accordingly;
- (ii) in the event of the Millennium Commission's agreement to continue to fund a reduced phase 1 scheme, the actions needed to implement this part of the works be put in hand without delay;
- (iii) the Strategy and Policy Executive Sub Committee be specifically authorised to deal with consultant appointments, detailed timetabling, variations to the Millennium Commission Agreement and selection of tenderers.

The meeting commenced at 7.30pm
and concluded at 11.25pm.

CHAIRMAN