

STRATEGY AND POLICY EXECUTIVE SUB COMMITTEE
24 SEPTEMBER 1997

Present: Councillor Bettison (Chairman)
Councillors Angell, Birch, McCormack and Wheaton

1. Statement of Accounts 1996/97. (Item 1)

The Borough Finance Officer submitted the Council's Statement of Accounts for the year 1996/97 and further advised that the Statement had to be approved by resolution of a Committee within six months of the year end. The Committee noted that the Statement, as submitted, had not yet been confirmed by the Council's external auditors and that discussions with the auditors were continuing in relation to the classification of capital spending of £3.6 million. Subject to agreement on the classification of that expenditure, the external auditor was unlikely to have any reservations. The Committee further noted that the audited accounts would be brought before the Audit Performance and Scrutiny Committee in January 1998.

RESOLVED that the Statement of Accounts for 1996/97 be approved as submitted.

2. New Building for Berkshire Archives. (Item 2)

The Committee noted progress being made with regard to the proposed replacement building to house the Berkshire archives following the sale of Shire Hall. It was reported that the existing accommodation at Shire Hall had to be vacated by 31 March 2000 and that the new building had to be constructed by 10 December 1999 to allow for fitting out and transfer of material. A steering group had been appointed by the Shadow Authorities and currently two sites were being investigated by the appointed consultant. Agreement would be needed by the six districts to the detailed design and planning application and acceptance of the main tender.

RESOLVED that

- (i) Councillor Ward be nominated to represent the Council on the Archives Steering Group for the purpose of approving the detailed design and planning application for the new archive building and accepting the main contractor's tender;
- (ii) the Acting Borough Leisure Officer and Borough Surveyor be nominated to attend the Archive Steering Group for the same purpose; and
- (iii) attendance at meetings of the Steering Group be classified as an approved duty for the purposes of the scheme of members' allowances.

3. **Bracknell Forest Help Bus. (Item 3)**

The Borough Administrator reported on the current position in relation to the Bracknell Forest Help Bus which had been set up as a pilot scheme jointly by the County and Borough Councils and funded accordingly. Notice had been served by the County Council that, as a result of staff losses, the County Council would be unable to continue to provide staffing with effect from 1 October 1997. The Committee noted that withdrawal of the service from that date would facilitate an opportunity to review the delivery of information services to residents and others in the lead up to transition to the unitary authority. The views of members with regard to alternative ways of information provision would be sought.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the Help Bus be withdrawn with effect from 1 October 1997;
- (ii) the service be relaunched in January 1998 in a new form primarily to assist in communicating customer information regarding the migration of Borough and County Council services to the unitary authority; and
- (iii) in August 1998 the service be retargeted and focused to meet the marketing and information needs of the unitary authority

4. **Best Value - Pilot Scheme. (Item 4 - tabled)**

The Chief Executive reported on the emerging proposals by the Government to introduce a framework of Best Value in Local Government and proposed a number of initial action points.

The proposals had been described in major speeches by Ministers during July and supported by the issue of guidance papers issued during the last week of that month. The broad intention was for local authorities to introduce a framework for the review of all services over a four year cycle, which would include significant elements of competition. Compulsory competitive tendering, as currently defined, could in time be replaced by the proposed Best Value framework. The thrust of the proposals was that local authorities should act as commissioners of services, responsible for ensuring service delivery to quality standards but with arrangements for delivery being selected according to assessment of best value.

A pilot programme would be established by the Government to commence in April 1998 and local authorities had been invited to submit bids for inclusion in that programme by 1 October 1997. A pilot project in Bracknell Forest had been developed which would be capable of implementation whether or not it was accepted for inclusion in the pilot programme. The proposal involved focusing attention on services where the Council had regular contact with businesses in providing information and regulation by examining ways of integrating the Council's service contact. The theme would be the Council's intention to reduce bureaucracy, duplication and effort by co-ordinating services to provide a focused "one-stop shop" service for business tailored to their needs. The approach should prove more cost-effective for the Council whilst improving access to information and reducing the burden of bureaucracy for legal businesses throughout the Borough.

The Committee went on to discuss the emerging Best Value framework which was welcomed by the Committee as an extension of the market testing concepts contained within the

compulsory competitive tendering policies, but which would enable full recognition to be given to service quality issues. Following further discussion it was

RESOLVED that

- (i) approval be given to the submission of a bid to become a pilot authority for the development of Best Value, with delegated authority for the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman to develop the Council's bid and take other necessary action; and
- (ii) a Seminar be arranged for members and officers dealing with Best Value concepts and its implications and that attendance by members be regarded as an approved duty for the purposes of the scheme of members' allowances

5. Parish/Town Council Elections. (Item 5)

It was reported that, following the Local Government Review of Berkshire, the Berkshire (Structural Change) Order 1996 made provision for Borough Council elections to be held in 1997, 2000, 2003 and every four years thereafter. The Parish and Town Councils, however, had not been included in the arrangements and Parish Council elections were scheduled to continue to be held every four years from 1999. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions had proposed that an Order should be made to require the date of Parish Council elections to coincide with elections to the unitary authority and this would provide economies for all the authorities concerned. Five of the six existing Parish or Town Councils had expressed support for this proposal and a response was awaited in the remaining case.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the responses received from the Parish and Town Councils be noted and forwarded to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions; and
- (ii) the Borough Council confirm support for the proposal for Parish/Town Council elections in May 2000 coinciding with elections to the Borough Council, and for both elections to take place in 2003 and every four years thereafter.

6. Representing People : the Role of Councillors. (Item 6 - tabled)

Consideration was given to a tabled paper describing arrangements for a series of regional seminars organised jointly by the Audit Commission and the Local Government Association to present and discuss the findings of a recent management paper which analysed the way Councillors work and made recommendations to improve effectiveness.

RESOLVED that

- (i) approval be given to the appointment of 6 delegates to the Audit Commission, Local Government Association Regional Seminar "Representing the People : The Role of Councillors" in London on 28 October 1997 and that such attendance be accepted as an approved duty for the purposes of the scheme of members' allowances; and
- (ii) the leaders of the two political groups be requested to nominate a total of six delegates as aforesaid.

7. Thames Valley Regional Conference. (Item 7 - tabled)

The Chief Executive submitted proposals for a Thames Valley Regional Conference to be held in High Wycombe on 10 November 1997 which would include presentations from the Henley Centre for Forecasting and from Richard Caborn, Minister for the Regions.

RESOLVED that the Committee approve a delegation of up to 10 members accompanied by appropriate officers, at the Thames Valley Regional Conference to be held in High Wycome on 10 November 1997 and that such attendance be accepted as an approved duty for the purposes of the scheme of members' allowance.

The meeting commenced at 7.30 pm
and concluded at 8.30 pm

CHAIRMAN