

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

FINANCE AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC CENTRE, STOURPORT-ON-SEVERN

14TH DECEMBER 2005 (4PM)

PRESENT:

Councillors: G W Ballinger (Chairman), M A W Hazlewood (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, Mrs H E Dyke, M B Kelly, Miss S C Meekings, Mrs F M Oborski, M W Partridge, Mrs J L Salter, K J Stokes.

OBSERVERS:

Councillors: J-P Campion, J C Simmonds

FCA.36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M M G Oborski.

FCA.37 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Mrs F M Oborski was a substitute for Councillor M M G Oborski.

FCA.38 COMPOSITION AND ATTENDANCE OF PANEL

AGREED:

The attendance of the Panel, as per the Attendance Record Sheet appended to the Agenda be noted.

FCA.39 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs F M Oborski declared a personal interest in agenda item number eight relating to the funding of Neighbourhood Wardens as she is a Council Representative on the Community Housing Group and is Chairman of Wyre Forest Community Housing.

Councillor Mrs H E Dyke declared a personal interest in agenda item number six relating to the funding of Neighbourhood Wardens because she is on the Community Housing Board.

FCA.40 MINUTES

AGREED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th October 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

FCA.41 REVIEW OF THE BASE BUDGET (2005/06)

Members considered a briefing paper on the work of the Budget Review Group and its recommendations to the Panel regarding base budget priorities.

The Financial Services Manager (Accountancy and Revenues) explained that the Budget Review was a three year process and that the priorities attached were the outcomes of the first year of Budget Review.

Members re-considered the priorities and agreed that they should remain the same as had been agreed at the Budget Review Group meeting on 16th November 2005.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

- 1) **Concessionary Travel be a high priority for the basic scheme and medium priority for any improvements to be made.**
- 2) **Committee Section Administration be a high priority.**
- 3) **SPU Administration:**
 - **Chief Executive's Office be a high priority.**
 - **Corporate Performance be a high priority.**
 - **Partnerships be a high priority.**
 - **Community Safety be a high priority.**
 - **E-Government be a medium priority.**
 - **Information Management be a medium priority.**
 - **Communication be a high priority.**
- 4) **Highways:**
 - **Street Furniture and nameplates be a high priority.**
 - **General cleansing be a high priority.**
 - **Maintenance of verges be a high priority.**
 - **Residual function be a medium priority.**
- 5) **Street Market be a medium priority.**
- 6) **Industrial Estates and other Property be a medium priority.**

- 7) **Play Leadership be a high priority.**
- 8) **Parks and Open Spaces be a medium priority.**
- 9) **Public Conveniences be a high priority.**
- 10) **Community based activities be a medium priority.**
- 11) **SPU General Economic Development:**
 - **Regeneration be a high priority.**
 - **Business Development be a medium priority.**
 - **Town centre regeneration be a high priority.**
 - **Partnership working be a high priority.**

FCA.42 INCOME SERVICE OPTIONS (2006/07)

Members considered a briefing paper from the Financial Services Manager (Accountancy and Revenues) presenting income service options. She explained that the current financial strategy in respect of Fees and Charges was to increase in line with inflation or slightly above. The target increase proposed for 2006/07 was 3%, a level slightly above the current level of annual inflation.

The proposed increase for Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services was above the 3% for cemetery fees where interments for children had increased by 10% and also purchased graves, monuments and grave stones had increased by 10%. This was due to market factors. The Management Accountant explained that the rates in Wyre Forest were lower than rates in neighbouring areas such as Redditch and Dudley. A Member suggested that Wyre Forest Rates should be compared with other Worcestershire authorities rather than borough Councils.

A Member asked what criteria was used to determine the minimum or maximum charge for use of Kidderminster Town Hall. The Management Accountant agreed to send this information to Members.

Members noted that Play Development had a large increase of 53%. This was because the Council had been drastically undercharging previously. Even with the 53% increase, the Play Development scheme was still good value for money.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

The increases in fees and charges and consequential income outlined in the Income Service Options be approved.

FCA.43 **THE FUNDING OF NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS**

Members considered a briefing paper from the Acting Scrutiny Officer on the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens Task and Finish Group.

The Group had written to the Police Authority to find out whether there would be any future contributions and the response was that they would be funding the Police Community Support Officers and would not be able to fund the Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme as well.

Members of the Task and Finish Group had considered three sources of additional funding, which were Parish Precepts, the Local Area Agreement and the funds from the Right to Buy proceeds.

Members discussed the unfairness of the scheme and highlighted that the use of parish precepts as a source of funding would also be an unfair system as Kidderminster did not have a Parish Council but it made up two thirds of the district's Council taxpayers. Members also stated that tenants pay both Council tax and rent and therefore if it was covered in Council tax, some people would be paying for the service twice and those paying twice would be among the poorest section of the population. Another issue was that some areas did not have wardens and therefore it would be unfair on them if wardens were funded through Council tax as they would receive no benefit from it.

The Cabinet Member told the Panel that £60,000 had been incorporated into the budget for 2006/07 and Members were pleased to hear it was his intention to allocate a contingency for 2007/08 to ensure that the Neighbourhood Wardens scheme would continue to be supported.

The Group agreed that the sum of money required from the Right to Buy proceeds for the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme was £100,000. This would increase the Council's contribution to approximately two thirds of the annual cost.

Until the Task and Finish Group had more information regarding the Local Area Agreement and the Housing Transfer Receipts, the Group would be unable to progress further.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

The amount of annual funding that the Council request from the Right to Buy proceeds for the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme be £100,000.

FCA.44 **NOISE ACT 1996**

Following the referral from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 9th November 2005, Members of the Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel considered a briefing paper from the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager

regarding noise nuisance.

A Member had stated that noise nuisance had been a serious issue in Stourport and that no officers had been available at night when problems were reported.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Council could not afford to provide twenty-four hour cover and the Head of Service had perceived that there was no need for such a service.

The Council received an average of 425 complaints per year and approximately half a dozen of these were only real emergencies. If the Council adopted the Noise Act, it would allow the Council to issue fixed penalty notices.

The Council used Remote Recording Devices, which enabled complainants to record any noise. The recordings were then analysed to decide how great the noise nuisance was. Unfortunately, there was often a five or six week waiting list for the equipment. If the Council had more Remote Recording Devices, it would not need to employ more staff

Members explained that when they received emergency calls from residents within their ward, Councillors were not aware of action that could be taken with regard to noise nuisance. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Community Housing Group had a phone number that could be called in an emergency and any member of the public could use this line. The Community Housing Group only contacted Council Staff in real emergencies such as raves and noisy parties that would disturb many people. Council staff did not work out of hours but if, for example, an officer was warned that at 10pm every night, there was a noise nuisance, the officer would go out at 10pm to investigate the problem.

Alarms were a major issue. Problem premises had been identified and the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager had a list of directors' numbers to contact. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager told Members that they could be pro-active and contact him to point out the problem areas.

Police were no longer offering burglar alarm registration of key holders but the Council did offer this service. Members agreed that there should be more publicity about the registration of burglar alarm key holders and the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager agreed to send this information and a registration form to Members.

Members felt that an increase in staff was not necessary but that the length of time to wait for equipment was too long and therefore felt that the Council should provide more funding for new equipment.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:

The funding of new remote recording equipment be considered.

FCA.45 FINANCIAL STRATEGY PROCESS 2006 – 2009

Members considered and noted the timetable and process for the forthcoming Budget Process.

The Financial Services (Accountancy and Revenues) explained that at Cabinet on 22nd December 2005, there would be:

- Consideration of Base Budget reports
- Recommendations from the Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny panel
- Cabinet would announce their three year budget Strategy proposals.
- Gershon savings identified
- Agree consultation strategy
- Key commitments proposal

From 23rd December 2005 to 30th January 2006, there would be a consultation of the budget strategy by stakeholders. The Budget Review Group would scrutinise the Initial Budget Strategy and the alternative Budget Proposals. The Budget Review Group would make recommendations to the Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel, which would then make recommendations to Cabinet on 16th February 2006.

The Cabinet would consider the recommendations and Consultation and final determination of the Rates Support Grant settlement before revisiting and determining its Final Budget Strategy, which would be considered by the Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel on 17th February (if required). If the extra Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel meeting was required on 17th February, the Cabinet on 20th February would meet to consider the final scrutiny and make recommendations to Council.

AGREED:

The financial strategy process 2006 – 2009 be noted.

FCA.46 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered its work programme for the current municipal year with regard to the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan, Annual Priorities and the Forward Plan.

AGREED:

The work programme for the current municipal year be approved.

The meeting ended at 5 pm.