

# **POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Date:** 9 December 2009

**Venue:** East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

**Time:** 7.30 pm

**Present:** Councillors:-

**Robin Underwood (Chairman)**  
**Wendy Brackenbury (Vice-Chairman)**  
**Andy Mercer (Leader of the Council)**

**Albert Campbell**  
**Roger Glithero**  
**Philip Hardcastle**  
**Glenn Harwood MBE**

**Sylvia Hughes**  
**Steven North**  
**John Richardson MBE**

## **PART A ITEMS**

### **267. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2009 were approved and signed by the Chairman, subject to the last sentence of the preamble in minute 228 (Brookside, Glapthorn Road Improvement Project) being included as a second part of the resolution.

### **268. APOLOGIES**

Councillors David Brackenbury, Pauline Bradberry JP, Lisa Costello, Richard Lewis and Anna Sauntson sent their apologies.

### **269. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Andy Mercer declared a personal interest in item 9 (Proposals for Changes to Cash and Cheque Payment Arrangements) as he supplied appropriate software to local authorities.

### **270. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3**

There were no questions.

### **271. MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEE AND WORKING PARTY MEETINGS**

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Licensing Panel held on 3 November 2009 were received and noted. As set out in Appendix 7 at pages 379 to 380.

**272. STANWICK VILLAGE HALL**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

**273. FEES AND CHARGES - VAT INCREASE – 2009/10 CHARGES**

Further to minute 262 (8 December 2008) a report was submitted seeking an increase in VAT on the Council's fees and charges from 15% to 17.5% again from 1 January 2010 in line with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's revision. The change would not apply to fees and charges -

- Where the fee is stated as VAT inclusive.
- Where the fee is a round amount usually collected in cash.
- For merchandise sales where the administration of re-pricing outweighs the benefits of doing so.

**RESOLVED:**

That fees and charges for 2009/10, with the exception of those listed above, be adjusted to take into consideration the revised rate of VAT applicable from 1 January 2010, and that the Chief Finance Officer be authorised to revise the fees and charges in the event of any further changes to the rate of VAT.

**274. PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO CASH AND CHEQUE PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Executive Directors outlined the benefits to both customers and the Council of diverting cash and cheque payments from current in house collection through alternative methods. Currently, cash payments accounted for 6% of all customer payments and cheque payments 8%, and the bank charges associated with the processing of these payments were estimated at £11,000 and £15,000 respectively. Over 70% of the transactions related to Council tax and National Non-Domestic Rates (NDDR).

It was considered that savings could be made by reducing the overall volume of payments made by cash and cheque, and then by channelling the remaining cash or cheque payments away from payment at Council venues to alternatives such as banks and post offices. The following measures were proposed in relation to 2010/11 and 2011/12, mainly relating to Council Tax/NNDR:-

- Targeted Telephone/Postal Direct Debit Take Up campaign run by Customer Services (using MOSAIC data to target appropriate route for each household) to be run between mid December 2009 and February 2010, to increase direct debit take up to 80% (which represents 76% of all payments).
- For those who decline to take up direct debit, Bank Giro Credit slips would be produced together with information on where to find the Barclays Bank branches where these could be paid in for free (with a warning that other outlets might charge). This would build on the recent change of behaviour from posting cheques to the Council to paying in at banks during the postal strike.
- No cash would be taken at any Council venue from 15 March 2010 – alternative payment arrangements would be available for cash and cheques at other outlets and cheques or card payments for services at Council Offices.

- Exception to be made for Concessionary Fare Road shows for 2010/11 only to take cash (no additional cost to the Council under the current cash and cheque collection contract)
- Repeat of the Take-Up campaign for 2011/12 followed by a review in January 2011 as to when cheque payments should be stopped.
- Review of the cash and cheque collection contract in May 2011 and the staff costs associated with the processing of cheque and cash payments, with scope for higher savings in 2012/13.
- Amend the Fees and Charges requirements for all Council services (not just Council Tax and NNDR related payments as at present) to pass on to the customer the handling charge of 1.8-2.3% for payments by credit card.

It was

**RESOLVED:**

That, in order to divert customers away from cash and cheque payment at Council venues over the next two years, the actions outlined above be implemented.

**275. DRAFT TOURISM POLICY – APPROVAL FOR CONSULTATION**

Members considered a paper from the Executive Directors introducing a draft Tourism Strategy to complement and support the Economic Development Strategy agreed earlier this year. It recognised the importance and potential of tourism within the local economy and provided for a sustainable focus for development over the next five years.

The paper drew attention to the possibility that some or all of the features that were cherished about the area (such as shops or pubs or the character of the landscape) would be lost if the Council did not promote tourism. A coherent vision for tourism was needed to ensure that all Council policies - from planning to grant-aid support for tourism - acted in a holistic manner to avoid decisions unnecessarily and adversely impacting on local communities and the local economy.

The draft strategy – produced by a multi-disciplinary officer team with input from some Members – proposed a three stage approach under the following heads:

- A Taste of the Country (2009-11)
- The Green and Blue (River Nene) Ways – Active Enjoyment of East Northamptonshire (2011-2015) and
- Review and Expand promotion beyond sub region (2015-2020).

Members noted the implications for 2010/11 in relation to the Oundle Customer Services Centre/TIC function; policies and grants; and promoting the availability of Rural Development Plan funding for tourism related businesses in the area, and the need to secure some of this funding for development of the Green and Blue Ways.

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft Tourism Policy be approved for stakeholder consultation.

**276. EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL AND BOROUGH COUNCIL OF WELLINGBOROUGH ICT STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the ICT Strategy for the Shared Service between this Council and the Borough Council of Wellingborough, as submitted by the Head of ICT. The ICT Shared Service had begun on 1 April 2008 and had been regarded as successful and had delivered a number of savings for both authorities.

Currently the ICT Executive Board was the main consultation body for the ICT Strategy. Following any further consultation, a joint prioritised action plan would be created and attached to the strategy. The action plan would be the main delivery method for the strategy with each outcome added to the ICT Service Plans. A detailed action plan would be created independently by both Councils, jointly agreed by the ICT Executive Board, and then form the main part of the ICT programme plan.

**RESOLVED:**

That, subject to the following minor changes, the Joint ICT Strategy for the Shared Service be approved and adopted:-

Para. 3.1 – the insertion of the word “digital” between the word “of” and “databases” in the first bullet point of Policy

Para. 4.3 – heading to read “Improved technologies for Members”.

**277. LOCAL ASSET BACKED VEHICLE (LABV)**

Further to minute 134 (14 September 2009), the Chief Finance Officer reported following the Members’ Workshop held on 12 November. Members again considered this matter – which was designed to generate investment to deliver projects in the town centres, particularly Rushden, and on other sites in the Council’s ownership - and had before them the report submitted to the meeting on 13 July 2009.

The Committee did not feel that it was appropriate for the Council to proceed with the creation of a LABV, but favoured the setting up of a small Member Working Group to examine various options.

**RESOLVED:**

That a small Working Group of Members be formed to examine ways of working in partnership to deliver projects to regenerate town centres in the District, and submit appropriate proposals to the Committee.

**278. EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE GREENWAY PROJECT**

Further to minute 179 (12 October 2009), Members considered a report from the Head of Planning Services giving details of progress on the above project and seeking early release of part of the Council's agreed contribution to enable the project to continue.

Officers had been advised that it was necessary to provide a 3 metre wide path along the route’s length. Whilst for the less urban parts of the route this could be accommodated, the revised width created particular difficulties along John Clarke Way, Rushden.

The project team had hitherto been working on the basis of a 2.5 metre path width. If the full 3 metre width could not be provided the whole of the anticipated Links to Schools funding may be lost.

The Leader of the Council and the Head of Planning Services reported on meetings which had been held since the despatch of the report, and it was noted that two options were being considered. Members expressed concern at the new requirement and it was felt that a further report should be made to the next meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That up to £20,000 of the Council's contribution be released to fund the continued work to resolve the footpath width issue affecting John Clarke Way to secure the full Links to Schools contribution.
- (2) That subject to agreement, the contribution subsequently be recouped from the Links to Schools funding and only re-released when all other project funding has been secured.
- (3) That a more detailed report be presented to the next meeting.

**279. IRTHLINGBOROUGH CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW**

Further to minute 224 of the last meeting, it was reported that a workshop of Irthlingborough Members had now been held and the Committee again considered revised proposals for the designation of the Irthlingborough Conservation Area.

**RESOLVED**

That approval be given to the revised proposals to designate the Irthlingborough Conservation Area in accordance with the documents submitted to the Committee.

**PART B ITEMS**

**280. TAXBASE 2010/11**

Consideration was given to the estimated taxbase to be used for calculating the Council Tax for 2010/11. Members noted that the target for collection of council tax – of 99.2% - was still the highest in the County. The Committee thanked the Officers for this achievement.

**R.6 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:**

That the Council determine a taxbase of 30,100 for 2010/11, as set out in **Appendices 1 and 2** at pages 326 to 327.

**281. GAMBLING POLICY STATEMENT AND CASINO RESOLUTION**

The Committee considered the report of the Commercial Health Manager indicating that the Gambling Act 2005 required each Local Authority to review, consult on and publish a statement of its licensing policy every three years and make a resolution on its approach to

casinos. The statement had to set out the principles the authority proposed to apply in order to fulfil its responsibilities under the legislation.

Members considered a reviewed policy statement, produced by Daventry District Council on behalf of the seven councils in Northamptonshire. The policy document had changed in layout since the last revision based on the latest template produced by the Gambling Commission and LACORs, but the content was in essence the same as the previous policy.

**R.7 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:**

- (1) That the Statement of Licensing Policy, as set out in **Appendix 3**, be adopted and published.
- (2) That the option not to pass a casino resolution be chosen as the Council's option under Section 166 of the Gambling Act 2005 and published within the Statement of Licensing Policy.

**282. DRAFT SINGLE EQUALITIES SCHEME – APPROVAL FOR CONSULTATION**

The report of Policy & Performance Manager, with a draft Single Equalities Scheme, was considered. This combined various requirements; in order to be compliant with current equalities legislation, the Council was required to have an up to date Race Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme and Disability Equality Scheme. The Single Equalities Bill (currently going through Parliament and due to come into effect in April 2011) also required that the other equalities strands (Age, Religion/Belief and Sexual Orientation) were covered. The general Equality Duty would require the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Bill, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations across all six equalities strands.

The evidence base suggested that social exclusion and rural isolation were also issues that should be considered as important for East Northamptonshire in terms of how easy people found it to access Council services and enjoy a good quality of life.

One of the 16 equality outcomes was “strong community leadership on equalities issues” and it was proposed to identify a Councillor champion for equalities. The Leader of the Council put forward the name of Councillor Pauline Bradberry.

It was **agreed**, under the Committee's delegated powers –

That the Draft Single Equality Scheme, as submitted, be approved for public consultation.

It was further

**R.8 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:**

That Councillor Pauline Bradberry be appointed as the Council's Equalities Champion.

## **283. CONSTITUTIONAL & PROCEDURAL CHANGES**

The Committee considered a joint report from the Democratic Services Manager and Development Control Manager on changes to the Council's Constitution and Procedures, following consideration by the Constitutional Review Group and Development Control Committee and with endorsement by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 December 2009 subject to some minor changes to Part 5.4 of the Constitution.

The proposals for changes and improvements covered –

- Member access to confidential papers
- Ability for Members not serving on particular Committees and Sub-Committees to remain in meetings after the exclusion of the public
- Determination of Licensing matters (non liquor and gambling) and conservation area adoptions and reviews
- Protocol for Involving Members in Pre-application discussions, (and other documents identified in the Development Control Improvement Plan – Development Control Charter; Enforcement Policy; Major Application Protocol).

The Committee **agreed**, under its delegated powers, that the documents identified in the Development Control Improvement Plan should be approved for publication. However, the changes to the Constitution would require full Council approval. The Committee endorsed these changes and it was

### **R.9 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:**

The proposed changes to the Council's Constitution shown in **Appendices 4 and 5**, (incorporating the minor amendments suggested by the Scrutiny Committee) and the changes to the Terms of Reference of the Planning Policy Committee and Licensing and Taxi Panels shown in **Appendix 6**, be approved.

**Chairman**