

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Date: 18 January 2010

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)

David Brackenbury
Pauline Bradberry
Albert Campbell
Lisa Costello
Roger Glithero
Philip Hardcastle

Glenn Harwood MBE
Sylvia Hughes
Richard Lewis
Steven North
John Richardson MBE
Anna Sauntson

PART A ITEMS

319. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2009 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

320. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

321. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillor declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the agenda item indicated and was not present during the discussion and voting on the item:-

Councillor	Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Robin Underwood	6	Mother-in-law uses the Nene & Ouse Community Transport (NOCT)

Councillor Underwood left the room during the discussion and voting on item 5(a) and the Chair was taken for this item by the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Wendy Brackenbury.

The following Councillors declared a personal interest in the agenda items indicated but remained in the meeting during the discussion and voting thereon:

Councillor	Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Wendy Brackenbury	6	Observer on NOCT
Steven North	8	Role working for a Member of Parliament

322. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

There were no questions.

323. MINUTES OF THE ASSET MANAGEMENT PANEL

The minutes of the meeting of the Asset Management Panel, held on 26 November 2009, were received, and the recommendation contained in minute 5.5 considered. The minutes appear at pages 411 to 413 and form part of this minute.

RESOLVED:

That the following recommendation be approved:-

Minute 5.5 (Revenue and Capital Budgets)

- (1) *That the Capital Programme for 2009/10 and the five year Asset Management Capital Repairs and Renewals Programme (as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 to these Minutes), be approved for inclusion within the respective capital and revenue budgets.*
- (2) *That approval be given for the release of amounts included within the Capital Programme for 2009/10.*

324. MINUTES OF THE PERSONNEL SUB-COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee, held on 14 December 2009, were received. The minutes appear as pages 414 to 419 and form part of this minute.

It was noted that the Chief Executive and Head of Organisational Development had met with Unison regarding the proposed changes to employee pay and benefits and were awaiting the union's response. Members were also pleased to note that East Northamptonshire Council's average number of days lost to sickness per full time equivalent were the lowest in the county.

325. NENE AND OUSE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT (NOCT)

The Committee considered a report which set out the options for future funding for NOCT. Members noted that the Council had provided funding support for NOCT since 2007 due to an awareness of rural isolation and poor transport services in some parts of the district. NOCT provided a ring and ride minibus service as well as a volunteer car service for medical trips. Members noted that the Committee had approved a new model for how the Council would fund the voluntary sector to be introduced for April 2011 so any funding offered to NOCT would be for 2010/11 only. The Chief Finance Officer advised that in accordance with earlier policy decisions the proposed revenue budget for 2010/11 did not include any provision to support NOCT and therefore any financial support offered for the next year would have to be met from the £100,000 contingency provision included in the revenue estimates considered and approved under Minute Number 332.

Members discussed their concerns that the service enabled members of the public to travel and spend money outside the district and that the minibuses were primarily used for social outings. The availability of bus passes and travel tokens for social and other trips was noted. The Committee also expressed concern about NOCT's business plan.

The voluntary car scheme enabled people to get to medical and other essential appointments. This scheme had cost £6000 to run during 2007/08. Members agreed that this was an important service to support. The Committee were referred to the policy statements relating to community transport that had been approved on 18 February 2008 (minute 320a refers) and noted that these included an aim to fund voluntary car schemes for medically related trips.

RESOLVED:

That Nene and Ouse Community Transport be offered £6000, plus the increase in transport costs since this estimate was given to the Council in 2007, for transport for medical purposes through the Voluntary Car Scheme for 2010/11.

326. FEES AND CHARGES – NEW CHARGING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered a new charging policy framework and proposals for its implementation by 2011/12. The new framework was the outcome of a corporate project set up to ensure the Council had a robust policy for charging for services. The project had been initiated because there had not been a wide review of what services the Council charged for and the level of charges for a number of years. The new framework was designed to ensure that charges were consistent with the Council's corporate outcomes, that income was maximised, and that any subsidy provided was as a result of a clear and conscious decision.

It was noted that officers would review all services upon which the Council could legally levy a charge but the final decision on charges would be made by the Committee. Members were given assurance that officers would get a policy steer early on in the process should they consider a new area for charging and that the final decision on all charges would be made by the Policy and Resources Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed order of implementation detailed in the report and the new charging policy framework, as set out in pages 420 to 427 be approved.

327. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

Members considered a revised Housing Allocation Policy. The Council's previous Housing Allocation Policy had been amended in 2006 to take into account the introduction of Nene Valley Homechoice and the introduction of Choice Based Lettings. The key changes that had been made to the policy since its last review in April 2009 concerned use of Medical/Social Priority Card Status, a reduction in the number of offers which would be made before an application for housing was deferred, the introduction of a statement regarding anti social behaviour in order to strengthen the policy in this area, and a change in approach regarding the assessment of applicants with rent arrears.

Members noted a few typographical errors for correction and amended the statement on equal opportunities to read, 'Our aim is to ensure that no person applying for housing is treated less *or more* favourably on the grounds of their race, colour, ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, age, physical appearance, disability, gender, sexual orientation or marital status.'

The Committee discussed the issue of anti social behaviour in depth and considered how the Housing Allocation Policy could help mitigate the problem. Members requested that in future the statement on anti social behaviour be strengthened but made no further changes to the revised policy.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the amendments suggested by the Committee, the revised Housing Allocation Policy at pages 428 to 451 be adopted to take effect from 1 February 2010.

328. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN CONSULTATION

Members had received a presentation about the Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Plan at the Council meeting on 11 January. The Committee did not wish to make representation.

329. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

It was

RESOLVED;

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business because exempt information, as defined under paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, may be disclosed.

330. NON DOMESTIC RATES – REVIEW OF RATE RELIEF

The Head of Revenue and Benefits presented a report on a five yearly review of Rate Reliefs to Members. The legislation provided for charities, not for profit organisations and certain businesses situated in rural settlements to receive relief of rates. The Members noted that central government reimbursed the full cost of granting mandatory relief. Where relief was 'topped up' with additional discretionary relief it would reimburse 25% of the additional relief. Where only discretionary relief was given it would reimburse 75% of the relief given. The remaining costs were borne by the Council's Revenue Budget.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the mandatory relief given to the organisations listed in the appendix to the report be approved for a further five years from 1 April 2010 subject to each organisation submitting a valid application and remaining eligible for relief based on revised rateable limits;
- (2) That the Guidance Notes be approved;

- (3) That existing discretionary rate relief given to the organisations listed in the appendix to the report be approved for a further five years subject to the organisation remaining eligible based on a revised rateable value.

331. NON DOMESTIC RATES – DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

The Committee considered an application for discretionary rate relief from an organisation. After discussion of the application, it was

RESOLVED

That no additional relief be granted to the applicant (rate reference: 600900898).

PART B ITEMS

332. MINUTES OF THE FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meetings of the Finance Sub-Committee, held on 14 December 2009 and 4 January 2010, were received, and the recommendations in 5 and 6 (14 December 2009) and 4 and 5 (4 January 2010) were considered. The minutes appear at pages 452 to 470 and form part of this minute.

RESOLVED:

That the following recommendations be approved:-

Minute 5 – 14 December 2009 (Revenue Monitoring)

That the maximum amount transferred from general fund revenue reserves for 2009/10 be capped at £1,617,147 and any future funding requests, for additional revenue expenditure, be financed from savings elsewhere in the approved budget.

Minute 6 – 14 December 2009 (Medium Term Financial Strategy 2010/11 to 2013/14)

That the Medium Term Financial Strategy (outlined in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 attached to these minutes) be approved, subject to:

- (i) the plans to bring the Medium Term Financial Strategy back into balance be brought back to a future meeting of this Sub Committee;*
- (ii) the maximum use of revenue reserves over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy be set at £2m; and*
- (iii) a minimum level of £1.7m for revenue reserves be approved.*

Minute 5 – 5 January 2009 (Revenue Budgets 2010/11)

- (1) That the draft Revenue Budget for 2010/11 (outlined in Appendices 1, 2 and 2a attached to these minutes), including the use of earmarked*

reserves to fund certain items, be approved, subject to further savings which may be agreed at the Policy and Resources Committee on 22 February 2010.

- (2) *That a Contingency Reserve of £100,000 be approved for inclusion within the Revenue Budget.*

It was further

R.10 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:

Minute 5 – 5 January 2009 (Revenue Budgets 2010/11)

That the Prudential Indicators (outlined in Appendix 3 attached to these minutes) be approved.

Minute 6 – 5 January 2009 (Capital Programme 2009/10 to 2017/18)

That the Capital Programme for 2010/11 to 2017/18 (outlined in Appendices 4, 5 and 6 attached to these minutes), be approved.

Chairman