

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT COUNCIL
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY 31 MARCH 2005**

MEMBERS

* Cllr M F Saltern – Chairman

* Cllr P H Cook - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr N A Barnes	* Cllr E T Mitchell
∅ Cllr H D Bastone	* Cllr J O'Connell
* Cllr J S Beer	∅ Cllr C M Pannell
* Cllr B J Boughton	* Cllr J T Pennington
* Cllr J Brazil	* Cllr P J Prudden
∅ Cllr B F Cane	* Cllr M C Ramsay
* Cllr B E Carson	∅ Cllr S L Rankin
* Cllr R J Carter	* Cllr M A Roadknight
∅ Cllr R F Croad	* Cllr G Rothwell
* Cllr G Date	* Cllr R Rowe
∅ Cllr B C Evans	* Cllr J W Squire
* Cllr S M Fairman	* Cllr I P Steer
* Cllr G J Fielden	* Cllr M Stone
* Cllr R W Hallett	* Cllr D W S Thorning
* Cllr V A Harvey	* Cllr R J Tucker
* Cllr J D Hawkins	* Cllr A R Vale
* Cllr P W Hitchins	* Cllr A Ward
* Cllr I Longrigg	* Cllr J A Westacott
* Cllr D W May	* Cllr R O Yonge

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

80/04 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 10 February 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

81/04 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council noted a list of recent civic engagements, from which the Chairman highlighted his concert in aid of the Tsunami Disaster Appeal, which had been held in conjunction with the Ivybridge branch of Save the Children. A total of £800 had been raised and the Chairman expressed his thanks to those involved in organising and hosting the event.

82/04 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting, but none was made.

83/04

PRESENTATIONS BY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

The Chairman advised Members that the Political Structures Working Group had recommended that Executive Members present to Council on their respective roles and topical matters within their areas of responsibility. This would be piloted prior to constitutional amendment.

a) Cllr Richard Yonge, Leader of the Council and Executive Member with responsibility for Value for Money and Improvement.

Cllr Yonge made reference to:-

- (i) the numerous tasks associated with the role of the Leader, which included the specialist responsibility for value for money and improvement. It was noted that a number of changes had taken place within the Council in the last year, including the introduction of a new management structure;
- (ii) the need for the Leader to have an overview of all issues and events affecting the Council in addition to the specific portfolio responsibility. In this respect, the importance of regular liaison with officers and Members was highlighted;
- (iii) the opportunity for Member development offered by the Devon Improvement Programme and the introduction of new performance management software;
- (iv) the budget setting process, which was one of the principal tasks associated with the Leader of the Council;
- (v) the development of public relations strategies and the importance of not involving party political issues within this;
- (vi) issues to focus on in the coming months, including Member development and a greater focus on the Council's second corporate priority, prosperity.

Following Cllr Yonge's presentation, there was an opportunity for questions. A Member referred to the Council's representation on the South West Regional Assembly and his concern that this did not represent value for money. In response, Cllr Yonge reiterated his view that the Council should retain its involvement and seek to influence from within. He also pointed to the opportunity to appoint both Members and officers to regional bodies and to scrutinise the work of the Regional Development Agency.

**Cllr Nicky Barnes, Executive Member with responsibility for
Access to Services**

Cllr Barnes made reference to:-

- (i) the scope of the Access to Services portfolio, which included the new approach to customer services, developments in technology, including the Council's web site, the Devon Portal and community access points, and legislative requirements arising from the Freedom of Information and Disability Discrimination Acts;
- (ii) progress with the implementation of the Customer Services Unit, with the offices now completed and staff recruitment commencing in April 2005. All Members were encouraged to visit the new offices;
- (iii) the launch of the Council's new web site in February 2005 which enabled a link to the Devon Portal to be established;
- (iv) future plans for customer services and the aim to resolve 80% of all first time enquiries at the first point of contact. The web site also presented the opportunity for customers to serve themselves, without contacting the Council directly. Members were reminded that the implementation of new access channels was about giving customers more choice rather than neglecting traditional methods of contact.

Following Cllr Barnes' presentation, there was an opportunity for questions when reference was made to:-

- (i) the importance of training for officers, Members and customers in use of new technology. Members were advised that officers working within the Customer Services Team would have a 6 week training course;
- (ii) Members' appreciation of the recent refuse collection roadshows;
- (iii) a Member's concern at what he regarded as a disproportionate spend on technology to improve access through new channels as opposed to focusing on basic access issues such as public transport. Members were advised of the need to identify and invest in technology to improve customer service;
- (iv) the transfer of responsibility for dealing with Freedom of Information Act requests from legal services to customer services in view of the simplistic nature of the majority of requests.

84/04

NOTICE OF MOTION

It was noted that one notice of motion had been received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.1:-

By Cllrs Boughton and Ward:

“That this Council:

Welcomes the Government’s statutory target for improving the energy efficiency of our homes by 20% by 2010;

Notes the government’s admission, in their Review of the UK Climate Change Programme, that meeting this target “will require even greater levels of energy efficiency improvement”;

Notes that experts agree that a Stamp Duty Rebate is the best incentive to stimulate demand for energy efficiency among owner-occupiers;

Further notes that stamp duty is becoming an increasing burden for home buyers – particularly for first time buyers.

Council therefore supports the Stamp Duty (Lower Rate for Energy Efficiency Measures) Bill and calls on the Leader of the Council to write to:

- *local MPs urging them to sign Early Day Motion 492 in support of the Bill and pledge to attend the House of Commons to support the Bill at Second Reading on 8 April*
- *John Healey MP, the Treasury Minister responsible, urging him to support this measure”*

Having been **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED**, the proposer of the motion referred to the effect of greenhouse gases on global warming and the recently signed Devon Declaration on Climate Change. Central government had set new targets on greenhouse gas emissions and Early Day Motion (EDM) 492 linked energy efficiency measures within homes to a rebate on the level of Stamp Duty payable.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (i) the energy wasted as a result of approximately 10 million poorly insulated homes;
- (ii) a Member’s concern that a rebate on Stamp Duty was not the best incentive to improve energy efficiency within homes. Members were advised that a number of national associations, including the Energy Saving Trust, had backed the EDM;
- (iii) a Member’s view that a rebate on Stamp Duty would not be of significant assistance to new home-seekers and that the

affordability of housing remained the central issue. In view of this, the Member proposed an amendment to the motion which deleted the support to the EDM and sought the support of local MPs to raise at ministerial level the lack of funding for affordable housing. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.6, the Chairman ruled that this would negate the motion and therefore disallowed the amendment.

On being put to the vote, the motion was declared **LOST**.

85/04

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY – 2005 / 2006

Members considered a report which set out the expected activities of the Council's Treasury function in 2005 / 2006 and sought the adoption of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (i) the long term prospects for economic growth exceeding the European average. Members were also advised that external advice regarding interest rates pointed to an expected fall in 2006;
- (ii) the opportunity to invest in treasury gilts which, as with other investment opportunities, was kept under review;
- (iii) the view of some Members that the Council should invest in property and land. Other Members suggested that this would increase the level of risk and that the Council should be prudent in its investment strategy.

RESOLVED

That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2005 / 2006 be adopted and that the categories of specified and non-specified investments, as set out in Appendix B of the report presented to the Council, be approved.

86/04

REPORTS OF BODIES

RESOLVED

That the minutes and recommendations of the undermentioned bodies be received and approved subject to any amendments listed below:-

- (a) Scrutiny 17 February 2005

- (b) Business Board 17 February 2005
(Leisure, Car Parks and Markets)
- (c) Development Control 23 February 2005
Committee
- (d) Council Tax Setting Panel 25 February 2005
- (e) Standards Committee 1 March 2005
- (f) Executive 3 March 2005

E.111/04 – Harberton Flood Management

RESOLVED

That the Council increase its contribution to the Harberton Flood Management Scheme from £35,000 up to £57,500 with the proviso that Devon County Council and the beneficiaries increase their funding allocation to cover the remaining cost.

- (g) Personnel Panel 16 March 2005

**PP.25/04 – Single Status and Local Pay Review
and PP.27/04 – Annual Review of Early Retirement
Activity for 2003 / 2004**

A Member enquired as to why Members who were not members of the Personnel Panel were not entitled to attend meetings or receive agenda items on general matters rather than those which related to individuals. Members were advised that case law existed regarding Members' access to matters relating to an individual. However, matters which were of a general nature were available to Members on request.

(Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.15 pm).

Chairman