

# CENTRAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

24<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2005

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PRESENT	Councillor Hayton (Chair) Councillors Mrs Brown, Mrs Burn, Grogan, Harrison, Kingston, Laurie, Mowbray, Mrs Seabury, Taylor and Mrs Todd
APOLOGIES	Councillors McKellar, Mrs Pinkney and Stonehouse
ADVISERS	S Reid, Head of Finance; Mrs C Prest, Head of Legal Services and S Elliot, Administration Officer.

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## MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Central Resources Committee held on 26th January 2005 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

As members of the public had indicated their wish to speak it was **AGREED** that the following items be taken at this stage of the meeting.

**437. LAND ADJACENT TO 17 FARNHAM CLOSE, AUCKLAND PARK, BISHOP AUCKLAND**

Consideration was given to a request from Mr M Smith, the owner of 17 Farnham Close, to purchase land adjacent to his property in order to extend his existing garden.

Mr Smith spoke at Committee to confirm that the land in question would only be used as a garden and under no circumstances would the area be used for parking.

Councillor Mrs Burn was in favour of the land being sold to Mr Smith as it would reduce the Council's maintenance liability and would stop people from using it as a short cut.

Councillor Taylor, seconded by Councillor Mowbray, moved that the land be sold to Mr Smith.

**RESOLVED** that the land hatched black on Annex G to the report be sold to Mr Smith, subject to the terms and conditions detailed at paragraph 18 of the report.

**438. LAND ADJACENT TO 12 WESTCOTT DRIVE, AUCKLAND PARK, BISHOP AUCKLAND**

Consideration was given to a request from Mrs K Fenwick of 12 Westcott Drive to purchase land adjacent to her property in order to extend her existing garden.

Mrs Fenwick re-iterated her intention to use the land as an extension to her garden and not for the purposes of parking.

Councillor Mrs Burn, seconded by Councillor Mowbray moved that the land be sold to Mrs Fenwick.

**RESOLVED** that the land edged black on Annex F to the report be sold to Mrs Fenwick, subject to the terms and conditions detailed at paragraph 17 of the report.

**439. LAND ADJACENT TO 2 WESTERN HILL, FROSTELEY**

Members considered a request from Mr and Mrs Richardson of 2 Western Hill, Frosterley to purchase land adjacent to their property. They noted that officers recommended refusal of the request in view of concerns relating to highway safety.

Mr Richardson stated that the access to the parking area would not be compromised as he was willing to erect a small wall 1 metre back from the parking area.

Councillor Mews was aware that the land in question was used by local as common land. Its loss would be detrimental to the community as well as causing access problems for emergency vehicles.

Councillor Grogan, seconded by Councillor Mowbray, moved that the request be refused.

**RESOLVED** that the application to purchase the land hatched black on Annex E of the report be refused for the reasons detailed at paragraph 12 of the report.

**440. LAND ADJOINING 88 HEATHER LANE, CROOK**

Members considered a request from Ms D Knox to purchase land adjacent to 88 Heather Lane, Crook. They noted that the Director of Regeneration was unable to support the request as he considered the area to have amenity value and contributed towards the open character of the estate. The sale of the land was likely to be contrary

to policy BE14 of the Local Plan which stated “Open spaces which contribute to the character and amenity of the area within the defined development limits... will be protected against development”.

The Leader of the Council, seconded by Councillor Mowbray, moved that the request be refused.

**RESOLVED** that the request to purchase the land shown on the Plan at Annex D, be refused for the reasons detailed in paragraph 6 of the report.

**441. COMMUNITY FUND – HOWDEN LE WEAR METHODIST CHURCH**

Members considered a request from Howden le Wear Methodist Church for a contribution from the Community Fund towards the provision of a new sound system for the Church and Village Hall.

Following assessment from Wear Valley Disability Access Forum both the Church and Village Hall required improvements in order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. The majority of these improvements had been effected and the installation of the sound system would complete the necessary work.

The Leader of the Council commended the work the Church and Community had done to make both Church and Village Halls “disabled user friendly”. She fully supported the request.

Seconded by Councillor Harrison she moved that a contribution of £1328 be made from the community fund to Howden Le Wear Methodist Church.

**RESOLVED** that the request for funding of £1,328 from Howden Le Wear Methodist Church towards the provision of a sound system for the Church and Village halls, as detailed in the report, be granted.

**442. HOMEWORKING POLICY**

Consideration was given to an addition to the Authority’s Homeworking Policy, which was originally agreed at Committee in March 2003. As part of the e-government priority service agenda Homeworking policies were required to specify the level of I.T support given to homeworkers.

The proposed I.T support for staff who worked from home for an average of 2 days per week would come in the form of:

- (i) Personal computer/laptop (no minimum specification);
- (ii) Keyboard;
- (iii) Monitor;

- (iv) I.T. operational support in terms of workstation set up, problem resolution etc;
- (v) Relevant software; and
- (vi) Dial up access.

Councillors Grogan, Kingston and Laurie asked why the Authority was using pay as you use, Dial Up access, as it was felt that paying a monthly subscription for Dial up or Broadband would be cheaper and save the Council money. The Head of Finance explained that the estimate for time online by members of staff working from home would only be £5.00 per day and that usually the costs would be significantly less. The costs quoted would be reviewed to identify whether reductions could be achieved.

**RESOLVED** that the addition to the Homeworking Policy, as detailed in the report, be approved.

#### **443. BENEFIT TAKE-UP STRATEGY**

Members considered a proposed Benefit Take-Up Strategy which would encourage residents on low income who were eligible for benefit, but who had not claimed. The majority of those who had not claimed benefits to which they were entitled were believed to be pensioners, particularly owner occupiers. The main reasons listed for the lack of take-up was stigma, complexity of the application process and lack of awareness.

Part of the Council's five-year plan was to make take-up a priority to enable residents to have a better quality of life, lifting many out of the poverty trap.

The Take-Up Strategy would form part of the Annual Benefits Business Plan, which contributed to fulfilling the objectives of the Council in areas of health, economy, crime and population. The benefits service had drawn up the strategy, to pro-actively seek out those residents who were not in receipt of benefits, but were eligible for benefits, and encourage them to claim.

The Leader of the Council and Councillor Taylor both commented on the report and thought this was a good idea as it showed a commitment to customers that the Council would try to ensure better living standards, which should in the long run help reduce health problems within the District.

**RESOLVED** that Benefits Take-Up Strategy, as detailed in Annex A of the report, be endorsed.

#### **444. CENTRAL RESOURCES SERVICES PLAN 2005/06**

Members considered the Central Resources Service Plan for 2005/06, which set out the activities of the Central Resources Department and how those activities related to corporate objectives. The plan followed the corporately agreed format contained within the Performance Management Framework, which sought to achieve the Authority's corporate objectives.

**RESOLVED** that the Central Resources Service Plan, as detailed in Annex B be of the report, be approved.

**445. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2005/06**

Members were advised on the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2005/06. The Local Government Act 2003 required the Authority to set out its Treasury Strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy, setting out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments. The strategy covered:

- treasury limits in force which will limit the treasury risk and activities of the Council;
- Prudential Indicators;
- the current treasury position;
- the borrowing requirement;
- prospects for interest rates;
- the borrowing strategy'
- debt rescheduling; and
- the investment strategies.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted, and the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2005/2006 be approved.

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined under paragraph number 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act .

**446. NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES WRITE OFF**

Consideration was given to the write off National Non-Domestic Rates. As the debtor was now retired and had no assets it was considered futile to commence committal proceedings as the court would have no alternative to remit the debt under these circumstances.

**RESOLVED** that National Non-Domestic Rates, as detailed in the report be written off.

**447. NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES WRITE OFFS**

Consideration was given to the write off of National Non-Domestic Rates. Efforts to trace one debtor had proved futile and in the second case the company had ceased trading which meant that there was no recourse to recover the debt. No further action could be taken in either case.

**RESOLVED** that National Non-Domestic Rates, as detailed in the report be written off.

The meeting concluded at 7.20pm

CHAIR