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THE EXECUTIVE

24 August 2005 – 6.30 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor Coleman (in the Chair); Councillors Lawley, Smith and Stone.

Councillors Castle, Wainwright and Williamson attended by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Collins, Page and Shrimplin.

Mr R Packham, (Chief Executive Officer), Mr M Barrow (Corporate Director - Environment and Economy), Mr M Burns (Head of Housing Needs and Welfare Services), Mr J Hemsworth (Head of Environment and Health), Mrs D Wright (Commercial Manager) and Mr R Hodds (Member Services Manager).

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2005 were confirmed.

2. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY, POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATORY COMMITTEES

(a) Review of Homelessness and Housing Benefit

Following the review of Homelessness and Housing Benefit carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members were advised that the review had resulted in the following issues/concerns being highlighted as needing attention:-

- The need to create interim accommodation around the district and to remove houses in multiple occupancy
- The need to create the team of permanent staff
- Regeneration to develop different types of accommodation to meet demand
- The need for co-operation across the organisation to create private investment confidence.

Accordingly, the Executive were asked to consider the following recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-

- (i) To address the current problems of short-term contracts by investment in starting levels to ensure continuity of existing arrangements to create long-term stability and to address any liability on the Council.
- (ii) To consider the need for balanced communities and to support public and private investment.
- (iii) To maximise development of “affordable housing” including social housing and first time buyer (owner occupiers).
- (iv) To consider the need for a co-ordinated positive approach to bidding for funding, and therefore investment in staffing to enable savings to be created by avoiding the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, and to support expansion and prevention work.
- (v) To produce a five year action plan and carry out a cost effective business risk assessment.

In considering the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet Member (Social), made the following points:-

- The Government was forcing Councils to discontinue using bed and breakfast by a combination of sanctions and withdrawal of housing benefit entitlement.

The two main ways of reducing this responsibility would be to reduce the number of homeless acceptances and to use leased accommodation instead of bed and breakfast for those families that had been accepted. The Council had no choice but to use leased accommodation and to not do so would be financially devastating.

- Great Yarmouth has a high number of dwellings that were designed for the tourism industry. As economic trends have changed they had the potential to become used more for residential purposes and that the concentration of this type of letting does not lead to balanced sustainable communities.
- The Council had agreed to the establishment of an Affordable Housing Working Group to look at this issue.
- There was a need to bid for other funding to increase the amount of prevention work carried out. The Government expects the Borough Council to help more with institutionalised clients such as people from Armed Forces, hospital discharge, mentally ill etc.
- The Council currently has a homelessness strategy and the Housing Needs Manager had drafted a Business Risk Assessment.

A question was raised with regard to the present situation with regard to the processing of DHSS claims and related insurance cover. The Head of Housing Needs and Welfare Services reported that there had been difficulties but the Housing Needs Manager had been proactive and that the Council now had 95 leased dwellings with a further 75 in the pipeline.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as outlined above be accepted.

3. FORWARD PLAN – 1 AUGUST TO 30 NOVEMBER 2005

Members noted the current position in relation to those items included on the Forward Plan for the period 1 August to 30 November 2005.

4. FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2005/06

Members considered the Food Safety Service Plan for 2005/06.

RESOLVED:

That the Food Safety Service Plan 2005/06 be referred to Council for approval.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2005/06

Members considered the Health and Safety Service Plan for 2005/06.

RESOLVED:

That the Health and Safety Service Plan for 2005/06 be referred to Council for approval.

6. ITEMS FOR EXECUTIVE ADVISORY GROUPS/POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members were advised that there were no items for consideration by the above.

7. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS/OUTSIDE BODIES – 2005/06

Members agreed to recommend to Council the following appointments:-

- Councillor Ames to replace Councillor Smith on the SeaChange Board
- Councillor Ames to replace Councillor Smith on the Norfolk Broads Partnership
- Councillor Burroughs to be appointed to serve on the Overview and Scrutiny and Policy Development Committees.

8. CLOSURE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm.