

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL - RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

held in the Council Chamber,  
Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough

10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

commencing at 6.30pm

Present: Councillor Pain (Chairman)

Councillors: Evans, Hart (Ex Officio), Johnson, Knowles and B. Smith.

Officers: L. Butler, S. Coe, K. Mehta and E. O' Neill.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fuchs and Mrs. Page

599 MINUTES

The Panel noted that an email had been sent to Members for information on who was involved with the Bowden's Trust (requested via Minute 500). The Panel requested that the Deputy Chief Executive check this information again and provide confirmation to Members.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Panel - Resource Development held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2011 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

600 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None were received.

601 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2010-11 QUARTER 3

This report was presented by K. Mehta, Deputy Chief Executive.

The Panel NOTED:

- (i) the potential for a budget under-spend of £362,254 currently exists.
- (ii) the layout of these monitoring reports is much improved and is now much easier to understand.
- (iii) Summary of Budget Changes: changes in periods will be retained on this appendix so that it is possible to see how the budget has moved between quarters.

The Panel RESOLVED to note the contents of the reports.

602 CORPORATE DEBT ANALYSIS UPDATE REPORT

This report was presented by L. Butler, Revenues and Benefits Manager. The purpose of the report was to provide Members with a detailed analysis of debts owed to the Council in relation to Council Tax, Non-domestic Rates, Housing Benefit Overpayments and Sundry Debts. The report drew comparisons with 2010/10 collection rates.

The Revenues and Benefits Service (a division of Financial Services) is responsible for the billing and enforcement of Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates, Housing Benefit Overpayments and Sundry Debt enforcement.

The net collectable debit raised for 2010/11, as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010, was:

Council Tax (Net of Council Tax Benefit)	£45,435,390.72
Non Domestic Rates	£33,805,810.98
Housing Benefit Overpayments	£261,142.39
Sundry Debt (Invoices raised)	£4,928,594.34

The Panel RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

### 603 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY (REVISED)

This report was presented by L. Butler, Revenues and Benefits Manager. The purpose of the report was to present the Council's revised Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Policy for the Revenue and Benefits Service.

The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 provides the statutory framework for the DHP scheme. Each year central government sets the Council a permitted total to spend on DHP awards. It is unlawful for a local authority to exceed its permitted total. Government contributes the first 40% of the permitted total so there is no cost to the Council when the total annual spend on DHP awards is below the government contribution. However, it is in the Council's interests to use the government's contribution because any under-spend is repaid to government and spend in previous financial years affects future allocation. For 2010/11 the government contribution (being 40% of the permitted total) is £5,839 and the permitted total being £14,598.

This scheme gives the Council a limited annual budget to grant an award to individuals where the Council considers that a person requires further help in addition to the Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit that they already receive.

A DHP award is not a payment of benefit and it is only available to someone who qualifies for some housing benefit or council tax benefit and where the Council considers that the person is in need of further financial help. Awards are potentially made in the following situations:

- a) meeting the shortfall between the rent charged and the restricted market rent that is used to decide housing benefit;
- b) making up for the effect of the means-test by covering the shortfall between benefit entitlement and rent or council tax that exists because income is too high to qualify for maximum benefit; and
- c) meeting the amount of a non-dependant deduction (a non-dependant is an adult living in the benefit claimant's household and the deduction is made to reflect an assumed contribution towards rent and council tax).

The Panel NOTED that:

- (i) the Council has never been in dispute regarding the awarding of this payment.
- (ii) Although the budget is small this is an allowance available for people experiencing hardship and the Council has a duty to administer it.
- (iii) this policy will continue to be used when the Council's Revenues and Benefits Service becomes a shared service.

The Panel RECOMMENDED that the policy be forwarded to Executive, as set out, for implementation.

The meeting ended at 7.20pm.