

Report from the Executive Committee

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Summary: To report on the discussions and decisions of the Executive Committee held on 15th May.

1. The provisional financial outturn for 2006-07 showed a small surplus.
2. Natural England had offered a core grant offer of which was an increase of 3%. The grant offer for projects was £32,000, a 55% cut compared to 2006-07. The SDF grant was cut to £70,000 from £80,000.
3. It was resolved to award staff an interim annual cost of living increase of 2% pending settlement of the national pay award to local government employees.
4. A report was received showing good progress on implementing the Board's Sustainability Plan.
5. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Board that it should seek to be carbon neutral by 2011.
6. The Board should allocate a budget of £20,000 for the review of the Management Plan by summer 2008.
7. The Board should support the bid for an EU funded LEADER programme for the Chilterns to provide grant aid for rural development initiatives.
8. Annette Venters, Access Officer, will be going on maternity leave from July 2007 - April 2008.

Purpose of Report: To report decisions made under delegated authority and to seek agreement to aim for carbon neutrality for the Board by 2011

Finance

1. The Committee received a statement showing that there would be a small surplus on the core budget of approx £15,000. This was achieved due to:
 1. Converting the Admin Assistant post from full time to part time.
 2. Savings on the audit fee
 3. Increased income from bank interest, merchandise sales and sponsorship.

Grant aid from Natural England

2. It was reported that Natural England has made a core grant offer of £467,620 (74.4% of costs) for 2007-08 which is a 3% increase on 2006-07. The application for grant aid of £12,000 towards to additional costs of publishing a revised management plan was refused.

3. It was also reported that Natural England proposed to only provide grant aid of £32,000 towards projects (The application was for £98,000) which represented a cut of 55% compared to the £71,000 offered in 2006-07. The Committee agreed a revised projects programme drawing on the reserves allocated by the Board at its meeting in March 2007 for the Land Management Fund (This is covered more fully in Item 11)
4. Natural England had also indicated that it would only be offered grant aid of £70,000 towards the Sustainable Development Fund (£80,000 was offered in 2006-07) and bids had been invited of up to £100,000.
5. The committee was concerned about the Natural England grant offers on several grounds including the cuts, timing and lack of discussion on the bids. It was decided to issue a press release and write to the chairman of Natural England seeking restoration of cuts next year and suggesting that improvements are made to the grant award process. The Chilterns had not been treated any differently from other AONBs. The National Association of AONBs was now raising these issues with Natural England and Barry Gardiner, the relevant DEFRA minister.

Cost of Living Pay Award 2007-08

6. The Committee resolved to award staff an interim cost of living increase of 2% backdated to 1st April pending the outcome of the national negotiations on a pay award for local authorities (The Board has already decided to mirror the pay scales of Wycombe DC which is party to the national agreement).

Sustainability Plan

7. A report was presented on the progress on implementing the Board's Sustainability Plan on its use of resources and energy. In general excellent progress has been made, with a couple of areas where more could be done including reducing car mileage and further reductions in use of energy for the Board's offices.
8. The Board is currently responsible for the emission of 21 tonnes of carbon dioxide. With the installation of solar PV cells this should fall in future but overall emissions are likely to remain approx. 15- 20 tonnes. The carbon offset scheme could be developed to cope with level. It was agreed to aim for carbon neutrality by 2011

Review of the AONB Management Plan

9. Following the NE decision not to offer additional grant aid to support the review of the AONB Management Plan it was decided to re-allocate some of the core budget to create a total fund of up to £20,000 over 2007-08 and 2008-09 to produce a reviewed plan. This sum would be used, in part, to engage the services of Alan Wheeler, a planning consultant, who was closely involved with the production of the 1994 and 2002 management plans.

LEADER Programme

10. It was decided to support the submission of a bid to the LEADER (EU funded) programme for the Chilterns for the period 2008-2013. The LEADER programme aims to provide grant aid, of approx. £2 million, for rural development which also contributes to environmental quality. Due to cash flow considerations it was not thought realistic for the Board to be the lead bidder, but instead proposed to request Bucks CC to take on that role (which they have subsequently agreed to do).
11. The timetable would be:

Expressions of Interest	July 2007
Full Bid	Jan 2008
Approval	April 2008
Start of Programme	July 2008
12. It is likely the Chief Officer will have to be heavily involved in preparing the bid and the Board will have influence in helping to create the Local Action Group which will be responsible for managing the project.
13. It is thought that there will be 6-8 successful bids in the south east. The Chilterns cross region bid is likely to be considered favourably.

Access Officer

14. The Committee was advised that Annette Venters will be going on maternity leave from July 2007 to April 2008. It was not proposed to require maternity cover but to reduce the work programme and use a consultant to help deliver a small number of projects. The committee also agreed to Annette's request to return to work on a part time basis (3 days per week).

Recommendation

1. **To note the discussion and decisions of the Executive Committee.**
2. **To adopt the target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2011.**