

MINUTES of the meeting of Council held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford. on Friday, 7th November, 2003 at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Councillor P.E. Harling (Chairman)
Councillor J.W. Edwards (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: Mrs. P.A. Andrews, B.F. Ashton, Mrs. L.O. Barnett, Mrs. E.M. Bew, W.L.S. Bowen, H. Bramer, R.B.A. Burke, A.C.R. Chappell, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, P.J. Dauncey, N.J.J. Davies, Mrs. C.J. Davis, G.W. Davis, P.J. Edwards, D.J. Fleet, Mrs. J.P. French, J.H.R. Goodwin, Mrs. A.E. Gray, K.G. Grumbley, J.G.S. Guthrie, J.W. Hope, B. Hunt, T.W. Hunt, G.V. Hyde, Mrs. J.A. Hyde, T.M. James, Brig. P. Jones CBE, Mrs. R.F. Lincoln, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, G. Lucas, R.M. Manning, R.I. Matthews, J.C. Mayson, R. Mills, J.W. Newman, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, R.J. Phillips, Ms. G.A. Powell, R. Preece, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.W. Rule MBE, R.V. Stockton, J. Stone, D.C. Taylor, J.P. Thomas, W.J.S. Thomas, Ms. A.M. Toon, P. G. Turpin, W.J. Walling, D.B. Wilcox, A.L. Williams, J.B. Williams and R.M. Wilson

31. PRAYERS

The Very Reverend Michael Tavinor, the Dean of Hereford, led the Council in prayer.

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs. W.U. Attfield, M.R. Cunningham, and D.C. Short.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J.P. Thomas declared an interest in Agenda item 9, Cabinet Report item 13.1(ii) - Extra Care Housing.

34. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th July, 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed a teacher and group of pupils from Haywood High School who had come to see how the Council conducted its business.

He announced that the Council had received a Certificate from nPower, marking the Council's commitment to the use of renewable energy.

He gave notice of two events to take place in early 2004. The first was an invitation from the Chaplain to attend Evensong in the Cathedral on 29th January at which light refreshments and a tour of the Cathedral would be included. The other was the Council's Civic Service which would take place on 14th March at St Mary's Ross on Wye by kind permission of the Rector and Church Wardens. Invitations to both events would be sent out nearer the time.

The Chairman also thanked the Chaplain for his assistance in staging the Anne Frank Exhibition which had been extremely well attended and proved to be a great success.

Petitions

The Chairman had received a petition containing 943 signatures from Councillor Manning relating to traffic control at Newtown Crossroads, which he passed it to the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) for action.

36. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Under the Constitution a member of the public can ask a Cabinet Member or Chairman of a Committee any question relevant to a matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties, or which affects the County, as long as a copy of the question is deposited with the County Secretary and Solicitor more than six clear working days before the meeting. No such questions had been received.

37. QUESTIONS TO THE CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRMEN UNDER STANDING ORDERS

Councillor R.I. Mathews asked:

A sale of Library books held at the Shirehall on Saturday, 4th October, 2003, raised the sum of £2,231 and the staff costs for preparing and managing the sale was £900. Do you agree with me that this is not a very efficient way of disposing of these books and in particular could you look at ways of reducing staff costs which I think were excessive?

Councillor Stockton replied that the income on the day was £2,321.20. The total staff time required to prepare, manage and clear away the sale was 85 hours, with an equivalent cost of approximately £900. 40 hours were normal weekday working; 33 hours as time in lieu and 12 hours additional payment. The library service did not incur any additional costs for the use of the Shirehall.

He advised that the Library Operations Manager had been looking at the viability of book sales of this kind. There had not been any previous analysis to compare income generated with costs but it was estimated that 35% of staff time would have been required to sell this volume of stock by other means. This suggested a net profit of at least £1,700.

Councillor P.J. Dauncey asked the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development):

Can you tell us how Council is monitoring the performance of outside contractors, particularly HALO?

Councillor Stockton replied that the question had implications across the authority and he could only reply specifically in relation to HALO. He agreed to liaise with the other Cabinet Members and arrange for written responses to be given where appropriate. He advised that there were a number of arrangements with HALO. The Council was represented by two Members on the Board. There was an annual funding agreement which was monitored regularly by senior officers within Policy and Community Directorate and the County Treasurer's Department. This process was currently considering the position for 2004/2005. Discussions were also taking place on the five year Business Strategy which would be presented to Cabinet later

this year. Day to day monitoring takes place between client officers within Parks and Countryside and HALO. In addition, and to aid communication, there are monthly meetings between the Director of Policy and Community and Chief Executive of HALO. HALO is also required to report annually to the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee. This was due at the next meeting on 27th November, 2003.

In response to a further question from Councillor Dauncey, Councillor Stockton gave his assurance that he would look into HALO's operations in Bromyard and in particular whether they were acting outside their terms of reference.

Councillor R.M. Manning asked, with reference to the Newtown Crossroads (Junction A4103 and A417), Yarkhill, Frome Ward:

In view of the increasing number of accidents at the Newtown Crossroads, will the Council now give due consideration to the priorities of road safety and install traffic lights at this notorious black spot?

Councillor R.M. Wilson, Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) responded by saying that Herefordshire Council worked hard to ensure its roads were safe. Newtown Crossroads had been identified as an area of concern and a number of low cost measures had been introduced which had led to a drop in the number of accidents and up to the end of 2002 had a record good enough to not warrant further action. Unfortunately, this figure had risen over the last two years and the junction has been investigated again with a view to taking further measures. As part of this process a public meeting was held at which various options, including traffic signals, were discussed. At the meeting it was apparent that whilst signals had significant local support, there was also a section of the local community opposed to them. Technical investigations have continued, looking both at how to improve the acceptability of a traffic signal scheme and at alternative options. This work is expected to be completed by early December, when the results will be discussed with Councillor Manning as the local Member and the police before being presented to the local community. Subject to the outcome of these discussions and the availability of funding, works could be carried out early in the new financial year. Councillor Wilson advised motorists to approach the crossroads with care and observe the restrictions in force.

Councillor Manning asked if, as the ducting was already in place, traffic lights would be the cheapest option. Councillor Wilson agreed that the ducting was in place but that he could only advise on the cheapest option once all other options had been investigated.

Councillor Mrs. M.D. Lloyd Hayes asked the following questions on the River Wye Litigation.

What is the figure to date of fees paid to Learned Counsel for representing Herefordshire Council with regard to the River Wye Litigation?

The exempt report at the Cabinet Meeting on 23rd October, 2003 was not circulated to Herefordshire Councillors representing the City. Will the precise terms of the advice given by Learned Counsel be made available to those Councillors on an exempt information basis?

As the custodian of the Ancient Royal Charters, does Herefordshire Council accept that it has a legal and moral duty to protect the fishing and other rights in favour of the inhabitants of the City?

Will the Council act by whatever means necessary to protect such rights for the benefit of the community?

The Chairman reminded Council that it had inherited a number of High Court actions relating to the navigation, mooring and fishing rights associated with the River Wye. Consideration of these matters involved the disclosure of advice on the strengths (or otherwise) of the position of the respective parties and had quite properly been taken in confidential session. Subject to observation of confidentiality, Members had had the opportunity to attend those meetings.

He advised that the matters raised in the four questions asked by Councillor Mrs. Lloyd-Hayes required the disclosure of exempt confidential information to be answered properly. This meant that the Council would have to agree to move into confidential session. Having given consideration to the merits of such a step and the information which is already available to members of the Council he ruled, under Standing Order 4.25.4, that the subsequent circulation of the answer to Councillor Mrs. Lloyd-Hayes would constitute a sufficient reply to her questions. He reminded Councillor Mrs. Lloyd-Hayes that that answer would itself be subject to the normal rules on confidential items and reports.

Councillor Mrs. Lloyd-Hayes asked for, and received, an assurance that the inhabitants of the City would be well represented.

Councillor A.C.R. Chappell asked the following question about the siting of the new market.

It is some months now since the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Markets and Property announced that the Hospital Farm site near Burghill was no longer an option for the siting of any new market development. At the time he announced that he would examine all possible alternatives. Can the Cabinet Member now tell me:

- 1. With whom did he consult before he made the decision to abandon the Hospital Farm site as a possible option for the market?*
- 2. How many other sites have been examined as possible alternatives since he made that decision?*
- 3. What are the conclusions that he has made regarding the sites that have already been examined as possible alternatives?*
- 4. When does he intend to announce the alternative to the Hospital Farm site?*
- 5. Before he makes an announcement about the proposed new site for the market, with whom will he consult and will the result of those consultations be made public?*

Councillor Hyde replied

1. Local inhabitants within a ½ mile radius, and Local Councillor Mrs. Robertson.
2. No other sites have been examined.
3. As no other sites have been examined this question is not applicable.
4. I will announce an alternative when a site has been identified and appropriate consultation taken place.
5. Yes, the result of any consultations will be made public.

38. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDERS

The following Notice of Motion had been submitted by: Councillors T.M. James, A.C.R. Chappell, Mrs. P.A. Andrews, W.J. Walling, W.L.S. Bowen, B. Ashton, and J.W. Newman:

That this Council, bearing in mind that it represents one of the counties with the lowest household income in England, wishes it to be made clear to the Cabinet that its proposal to increase car parking charges by a figure many times the rate of inflation and in some cases as much as 100% and do so without any meaningful consultation with the communities affected, is unacceptable.

It therefore instructs that the Cabinet and the relevant Cabinet Member withdraw this proposed scheme until full meaningful consultation has taken place with the relevant parish, town and city councils, trade organisations and general public.

It further wishes to make it clear that any increase above the current annual rate of inflation is totally unacceptable to this Council. It further instructs that a working party be established representing all affected groups to discuss any changes to the current scheme and make recommendations.

The Chairman ruled that the motion be not accepted and that, under Standing Order 4.26.9, the matter be dealt with during debate on Agenda item 9 - Cabinet Report at item 10.1(ii).

39. CABINET

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R.J. Phillips, presented the report of the meetings of Cabinet held on 21st August, 4th and 25th September and 9th and 23rd October, 2003.

In relation to Item 2.1 - Notice of Motion by Councillors B. Hunt and P.J. Dauncey - In response to a request for an update Councillor Hunt was advised that the matter would be dealt with as part of the report on swimming pool provision in North Herefordshire which would be considered by Cabinet on 27th November, 2003.

In relation to Item 3.1 - Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO): A4103 Roman Road, Hereford, in response to a question on progress towards a start date of February 2004 Councillor Wilson, Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) advised that archaeological works were due to be completed in December 2003 and that the CPOs were currently with the Secretary of State.

In relation to Item 4.1(ii) - Council Tax Consultation, in response to a series of questions about discounts for pensioners the Leader advised that this was a scheme that had been raised by other local authorities and a great deal of investigation and debate would be required before coming to any conclusion. He warned that if discounts for pensioners were agreed a heavier tax-paying burden would fall on non-pension households, some of whom also have low incomes. He advised that the Council would be considering reducing the discounts currently applied to second homes which would be more practical to implement and could raise up to £350,000 a year.

In relation to Item 4.1(ix) - Local Area Forums, the Leader advised that review of the constitution would be submitted to Council in January but that he hoped the Local Area Forums would start again as soon as practicable.

In relation to Item 4.2(i) - Procurement of Contract Services - in response to a query on the adverse publicity Jarvis had received nationally, the Leader assured Council that the contract with Jarvis would be subject to scrutiny both by the Scrutiny Committees and by the Executive. He advised Council that Jarvis was a many-faceted company and acknowledged that there had been considerable adverse publicity in relation to their rail operations. However, Jarvis were addressing these issues. He said he was confident that with proper monitoring the Jarvis contract would secure a good quality of service and represent value for money.

In relation to Item 4.2(vii) - LPSA Monitoring Report - in response to a query about potential difficulties in meeting agreed targets the Leader advised that some targets, e.g. in Education, were set extremely high. The Government had relaxed its own targets in this area but had not yet passed those on to the LPSA targets. He said milestones were now being included in the monitoring reports which were being considered both by Scrutiny Committees and the Executive.

In relation to Item 6.1(iii) - Public Library Position Statement - in answer to a question about lottery funding recently granted for Ledbury library, Councillor Stockton, Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) gave an assurance that this scheme would move ahead as quickly as possible.

In relation to Item 7.1(ii) - Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI) - Councillor G.V. Hyde, Cabinet Member (Economic Development, Markets and Property) confirmed he would continue to apply pressure with regards to the flood alleviation scheme at Rotherwas, which was vital for the continued growth of the industrial estate.

In relation to Item 7.1(i) - Leominster Industrial Estate Access Road - Councillor R.M. Wilson, Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) confirmed that road works had commenced and that the business park should be open during the summer of 2004.

In relation to Item 8.1(i) - Children's Centres, in response to a question about the continuing closure of the Ledbury Youth Centre, Councillor Stockton advised that the youth centre had experience great difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. He said that investigations were underway into possible dual-use of the facility. Councillor D.W. Rule, Cabinet Member (Education) advised that "Mucky Pups" was providing a service for the early years category.

In relation to Item 8.1(ii) - Building Schools for the Future - Councillor Rule advised that all Councillors would be kept fully informed of proposals to improve or extend schools in their local area. He confirmed that the bid to be included at an early phase of the national programme had been submitted and that a decision should be announced in December 2003. For the benefit of the pupils from Haywood High School attending the meeting, the Leader advised that it was proposed that 90% of their school would be demolished and rebuilt if such proposals were to be approved.

In relation to Item 9.1(i) - Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Part 1 (Strategy) - Councillor P.J. Edwards, Cabinet Member (Environment) was congratulated on the consultations with local members at which a broad consensus view was agreed to be taken forward to the next stage in the process. However, some Councillors who represented wards within the City expressed disappointment that none of the Hereford Councillors representing the City were included in the UDP Group.

In relation to Item 10.1(ii) - Car Parking Strategy and Charges - Councillor T.M.

James moved the following motion:

"That this Council, bearing in mind that it represents one of the counties with the lowest household income in England, wishes it to be made clear to the Cabinet that its proposal to increase car parking charges by a figure many times the rate of inflation and in some cases as much as 100% and do so without any meaningful consultation with the communities affected, is unacceptable.

It therefore instructs that the Cabinet and the relevant Cabinet Member withdraw this proposed scheme until full meaningful consultation has taken place with the relevant parish, town and city councils, trade organisations and general public.

It further wishes to make it clear that any increase above the current annual rate of inflation is totally unacceptable to this Council. It further instructs that a working party be established representing all affected groups to discuss any changes to the current scheme and make recommendations."

He expressed the view that this should not be a matter for the Executive. It was a policy matter which should be decided by the whole Council. He said he was concerned at the way in which the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) had dealt with the consultation meeting at which the schedule of charges had been circulated to Members. He said there had been limited consultation with parishes and communities, and that the charges would be, in effect, a stealth tax. He was concerned that there was a lack of information from officers who could not say whether the charges would cover the costs of collection. He said there was a need for an all-party body to consult with communities and make recommendations which would be fair to the whole County. He said that people were tired of increases to charges that were way above the rate of inflation.

Councillor Chappell seconded the motion.

Several Members spoke in favour of the motion, making the following points:

Leominster - it would be wise to defer changes in Leominster for 12 months to assess the impact of various retail factors including

- the construction of a new DIY superstore which would have around 100 free car parking spaces;
- restrictions to access to town centre caused by work on the Industrial Estate Access Road;
- transfer of Council staff from Leominster to Hereford;
- current planning application for 40% increase in out-of-town supermarket space;
- general deprivation factors.
- Leominster Town Council had commissioned a report which would be ready before Christmas.
- Equity of charges did not mean equality - different towns had different needs.

Hereford City

- Money raised from parking in the City should be used in the city, e.g to remove graffiti.
- Hospital car parks are inadequate and increasing charges would put members of staff at risk.
- Parts of Merton Meadow car park are often completely empty - spaces here should be free to key workers.

- Additional income expected from a 12% increase in charges.
- A Multi-storey car park is required in the vicinity of the bus station.
- Belmont has more unemployment than any other part of the City.
- A cross-party group should be set up and extra funding made available for rural transport.

Environment Scrutiny Committee

- The point was made that the all-party Scrutiny Committee had unanimously rejected the increased charges and referred the decision back to Cabinet. Further consideration should be given to the proposals before they were implemented because, once imposed, they would not be reversed. Review of charges should take place at the end of the administration's term of office.
- More consultation was needed.

Those opposed to the motion argued:

- The Council had made a pledge to be equitable in provision of services across the County in particular on issues such as parking and cemeteries;
- the position on free parking was obviously unfair;
- neighbouring authorities charge much more for their parking;
- the car parking strategy was approved and supported by the previous administration.

The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) reminded Council that it had approved the car parking strategy as part of the Local Transport Plan and that a review of charges had not been undertaken for two and a half years. He also said that Cabinet had attempted to achieve equity and had agreed to review the strategy. The Leader said that the decision to raise charges was always a difficult one, as neither the County nor the Council was wealthy. He reminded Council of the overall package of proposed changes which included concessions for Christmas. He said that increases had to be practical in terms of coinage and that fees collected from car parking charges helped offset costs for other services. He said that the Forward Plan had contained details of the proposed changes but that had been largely ignored.

Councillor James took issue with the Leader's comments. He said that the strategy did not imply authority to raise charges nor to extend parking charges in Leominster, Ledbury and Kington. He said that if the Council went ahead with imposing such charges it would be sending a clear signal to market towns, businesses and the people of Herefordshire that it did not care about their views.

A named vote was held with the following result

For (18) - Councillors Mrs. Andrews, Ashton, Mrs. Bew, Bowen, Chappell, Mrs. Daniels, Dauncey, Mrs. Davis, Fleet, James, Mrs. Lloyd-Hayes, Newman, Preece, J.P. Thomas, W.J.S. Thomas, Ms Toon, Walling and A.L. Williams.

Against (36) - Councillors Mrs. Barnett, Bramer, Davies, G.W. Davis, J.W. Edwards, P.J. Edwards, Mrs. French, Goodwin, Mrs. Gray, Grumbley, Guthrie, Harling, Hope, B. Hunt, T.W. Hunt, G.V. Hyde, Mrs. Hyde, Brig. Jones, Mrs. Lincoln, Lucas, Manning, Matthews, Mayson, Mills, Mrs. Pemberton, Phillips, Ms Powell, Mrs. Robertson, Rule, Stockton, Stone, Taylor, Turpin, Wilcox, J.B. Williams, Wilson.

Councillor R.B.A. Burke abstained.

The motion was therefore declared lost.

In relation to Item 11.1(i) - Access to Services in Kington and Surrounding Areas: Wesleyan Chapel - Councillor James congratulated Councillor Mrs. French, Cabinet Member (Human Resources and Corporate Support Services) on holding a successful open public meeting.

In relation to Item 11.1(ii) - Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Statement - in response to a query about the amount of funding likely to be awarded next year, Councillor Mrs. French advised that the statement had been submitted to central government in October and the award of funding was in their hands. She stated that the Budget Panel would be looking at how much would be needed to bring the Council's IT to a comparable standard with other authorities. Councillor Mrs. Barnett, Cabinet Member (Social Care and Strategic Housing) confirmed that officers were investigating the introduction of a system of single assessment. Councillor Mrs. French noted a request to encourage parish councils to access e-government.

In relation to Item 13.1(v) - TUPE Considerations in Relation to the Proposed Transfer of Homes for Older People to Shaw - Councillor Chappell urged the Leader to reconsider the Cabinet decision not to require Shaw Homes to employ new joiners, post-transfer on the same terms and conditions as existing staff. Councillor Mrs. Barnett said that negotiations were continuing with Shaw but that the Council could not dictate how they should treat new staff. It could, however, protect existing staff, and that was what it had done. She advised Council that, if negotiations with Shaw were to fail, the Council would be failing the most vulnerable people in the County and she would not wish to be involved in that. Councillor Chappell stated that a divided workforce would not be a happy workforce. He quoted the recent transfer of staff at the Hospital as an example. He also praised Jarvis for adopting TUPE Gold and again urged the Cabinet Member to require Shaw to comply.

The Council adjourned at 12.20 p.m. and reconvened at 12.25 p.m. to allow the staff and school pupils in attendance to withdraw.

In relation to Item 13.2(i) - Regional Housing Strategy for the West Midlands and Regional Housing Board Allocations Strategy - In response to a question, Councillor Mrs. Barnett advised that there were 5,000 homeless families in Herefordshire and that there was an average of 19 applications for each house.

In relation to Item 13.2(ii) - Annual Review of Performance in 2002-03 Herefordshire Council Social Services - In response to a query Councillor Mrs. Barnett advised that a date had not yet been set to consider the business case for Older People's Homes. The Leader advised that there would be a full Member briefing.

RESOLVED: That the report of the meetings of Cabinet held on 21st August, 4th and 25th September and 9th and 23rd October, 2003 be received.

40. REGULATORY COMMITTEE

Councillor R.I. Matthews presented the report of the meetings of the Regulatory Committee held on 29th July and 14th October, 2003. He advised that the recommendation to Council, at Item 9 of the report, was no longer required as the delegation to officers was already provided for under existing delegated powers.

In response to a query on licensing hours, he assured Council that all Members would be invited to appropriate training sessions/seminars.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the deletion of the recommendation to Council at item 9, the report of the meetings of the Regulatory Committee held on 29th July and 14th October, 2003, be received.

41. STATUTORY ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Councillor D.B. Wilcox presented the report of the meeting of the Statutory Accounts Committee held on 19th September, 2003.

RESOLVED: That the report of the meeting of the Statutory Accounts Committee held on 19th September, 2003 be received.

42. PLANNING COMMITTEE

Councillor T.W. Hunt presented the report of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 3rd October, 2003.

RESOLVED: That the report of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 3rd October, 2003 be received.

43. STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Mr. Robert Rogers presented the report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 10th October, 2003.

RESOLVED: That the report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 10th October, 2003 be received.

44. STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Councillor T.M. James presented the report of the meeting of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held on 13th October, 2003.

RESOLVED: That the report of the meeting of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held on 13th October, 2003 be received.

45. COUNCILLOR REV. D.C. SHORT, MBE - ST NICHOLAS WARD: LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 85

RESOLVED: That leave of absence be granted to Councillor Rev. D.C. Short, MBE until the matter can next be reviewed at the Council meeting to be held on 16th January, 2004.

46. ELECTORAL MATTERS

Council noted the outcome of the Electoral Pilot Scheme undertaken at the elections held on 1st May, 2003 and received a report from the Chief Executive on two consultation papers from the Electoral Commission.

The Chief Executive advised that consultation on electoral reform was a sensitive issue because if such consultation was undertaken solely through the Executive there might be a perception that the response could be partisan. For this reason the consultation had been conducted through the political group leaders who were unanimous in their recommendations.

The Council thanked the Chief Executive, as Returning Officer, and all those who had organised and assisted during the election process.

The Chief Executive answered a number of questions.

- He was unable to give an assurance, at this stage, that marked up registers would be available at future elections, but agreed to look at the practicalities at the time.
- He was surprised that Parish Councils had not received bills for electoral expenses and would expedite the matter.
- He reported that if there was a move to all-out postal ballots a change would be required to the electoral registration system which could require all electors to sign the form as a means of confirming identity. He advised that three regions would be involved in an all postal pilot for the next European elections. He did not know at this stage if the West Midlands would be one of the pilots.
- He said that he had advised the Electoral Commission that, because of the success of the all-postal pilot, it would be difficult to return to the traditional ballot-box method.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) **the Electoral Commission's evaluation report on the Electoral Pilot Scheme for the 1st May, 2003 elections be received and noted; and**
- (b) **the proposed response of group leaders to the Electoral Commission's consultation papers entitled "Voting Age and Candidacy" and "The Cycle of Local Government Elections in England" supporting a minimum voting age and age for candidacy of 18 and re-expressing its support for the continuation of quadrennial elections be endorsed.**

47. WEST MERCIA POLICE AUTHORITY

Councillor B. Hunt presented the report of the meeting of the West Mercia Police Authority held on 23rd September, 2003. He advised Council that the authority was carrying out extensive upgrades and extensions to its properties including an experimental booth at Peterchurch which would operate when the station was unmanned. He also asked Councillors for their feedback on the newsletter he had circulated.

He stated that 34 additional police staff had been allocated to Herefordshire but advised that they could not all be on duty all the time. He agreed to pass on a number of concerns including: inadequacy of police numbers on the ground; difficulties in making contact with the police; slow response times, inadequate communication between CCTV control rooms and police at the scene; and low level anti-social behaviour and the need for more community policing.

RESOLVED: That the report of the meeting of the West Mercia Police Authority held on 23rd September, 2003 be noted.

48. HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

Councillor G.W. Davis presented the report of the meetings of the Hereford and Worcester Combined Fire Authority held on 16th June, and 2nd and 24th September, 2003. He confirmed that local fire fighters had indicated that they would not be joining the unofficial strike action proposed elsewhere in the country.

The Council gave Councillor Davis a vote of thanks for the work he had undertaken in keeping people informed during the strike earlier in the year.

RESOLVED: That the report of the meetings of the Hereford and Worcester Combined Fire Authority held on 16th June, and 2nd and 24th September, 2003 be noted.

The meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN