

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE – 7 OCTOBER 2008

SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL MEETING – 21 OCTOBER 2008

(To be read in conjunction with the Agenda for the Meeting)

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|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| * Cllr Richard Gates (Chairman) | * Cllr Ms Denise Le Gal |
| * Cllr Mike Band (Vice-Chairman) | * Cllr Bryn Morgan |
| * Cllr Mrs Carole Cockburn | * Cllr John Sandy |
| * Cllr Mrs Carole King | * Cllr Roger Steel |
| * Cllr Robert Knowles | Cllr Adam Taylor-Smith |

* Present

Cllrs Peter Isherwood, Mrs Celia Savage and Ms Jane Thomson were also in attendance

Cllr Mrs Celia Savage spoke on Agenda Items 8, 11, 12, 18 and 25 (Minute Nos 88, 94, 95, 100 and 107 refer)

85. MINUTES (Agenda Item 2)

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive held on 2 September 2008 were confirmed and signed.

86. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 3)

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Adam Taylor-Smith.

87. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Mrs Carole King declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 27 and 30 as a Haslemere Town Councillor.

Cllr Mrs Celia Savage declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 30 relating to Undershaw as a contractor referred to in the Annexe to the report was a family friend.

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL

88. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09 FORECAST – UNDERSPEND AND RELEASING NEW SCHEMES (Agenda Item 8; Appendix B)

- 88.1 This item describes how forecast savings on this year's capital programme could be released to fund additional capital schemes, which contribute to the Council's corporate priorities. Savings of £127,000 have been identified in the 2008/09 Capital Programme and a further £35,000 will not be required until 2009/10, making £162,000 available for further schemes.

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07.10.08

88.2 Officers have identified new capital schemes, which contribute to the Council's corporate priorities that can be delivered by 31 March 2009. Releasing funding for new schemes now will advance capital spending and reduce funding for the 2009-10 Capital Programme to be agreed in February 2009 by the Council.

88.3 Officers working with the Finance Portfolio Holder continue to monitor the Capital Programme on a monthly basis. In 2008/09 savings are forecast on the following schemes:

	£
Council Office Meeting Room	50,000
House Condition Survey	14,000
Weyhill Car Park	38,000
Disabled Facilities Grants	25,000
	127,000

88.4 In addition, other than preliminary work, the following scheme will not be started until 2009/10.

Cemeteries – headstone risk assessment	<u>£35,000</u>
Total available for new schemes	<u>£162,000</u>

88.5 The early identification of savings allows the Executive to consider whether schemes that contribute to the corporate priorities should be advanced. Annexe 1 summarises the schemes identified for release with the individual scheme detail shown at Annexe 2.

88.6 The schemes considered for release were required to meet the following criteria:

1. They must be of a capital nature
2. They must contribute to a corporate priority
3. They can be delivered by 31 March 2009, and
4. Wherever possible they should be of an Invest to Save nature.

88.7 Officers were reminded that they need to ensure that identified savings are delivered to finance the release of the new schemes and thereby avoid a potential overspend on the Capital Programme.

88.8 The Executive accordingly

RECOMMENDS that

18. the Council agrees to release £119,000 for the schemes listed in Annexe 1, to be funded from Capital Programme savings in 2008/09.

Background Papers (DCEx)

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

89. SURREY AND HAMPSHIRE IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP (SHIP) – TACKLING FUEL POVERTY AND EMPTY HOMES IN WAVERLEY (Agenda Item 10; Appendix D)

89.1 Eight local authorities in the West Surrey/ North East Hants area collaborated to formulate a single bid to the Regional Housing Board (RHB). The RHB successfully secured funding for private sector initiatives to extend the range of support that the Council could offer private householders. The bid was for a project totalling almost one million pounds and focused on three schemes that are described in more detail below. The eight local authorities participating in the bid application are:

Elmbridge Borough Council
Guildford Borough Council
Hart District Council (Hampshire)
Runnymede Borough Council
Rushmoor District Council (Hampshire)
Spelthorne Borough Council
Waverley Borough Council
Woking Borough Council

89.2 The lead authority is Woking BC and they have been informed that the bid has been given approval by Ministers, but the amount awarded is likely to be £822,000. Authorities have been advised to proceed to produce a detailed project plan to Government Office South East having regard to the reduced level of funding. Details of the bid have been set out below with the necessary scaling-back to take account of the lower level of funding.

89.3 The main objectives that the RHB set out in their guidance to applicants were that bids should aim to: -

- Reduce the number of vulnerable people living in non-decent homes
- Reduce the number of households living in fuel poverty
- Support regeneration to create sustainable communities
- Foster partnership working by groups of local authorities.

89.4 The bid covered the three-year period from 2008/09 to 2010/11 and the partnership of the eight local authorities has called itself the 'Surrey and Hants Improvement Partnership' (SHIP). A copy of the bid application is attached at Annexe 3.

89.5 The bid is made up of three schemes in which different partner authorities have expressed an interest; The Equity Loan Fund, Fuel Poverty Scheme and Empty Homes Scheme:

- I. The establishment of a recyclable Equity Loan Fund to support home improvements in the privately owned housing market. Five Authorities are taking part. – not including Waverley. An Equity Release Loan Scheme is already available to Waverley Residents through Houseproud and the Home Improvement Trust at no cost to the Council. This is available for major works for the benefit of the elderly or disabled residents.

- II. An enhanced grants programme to tackle fuel poverty for vulnerable owners and tenants of hard-to-heat homes in partnership with other bodies and existing grant schemes. The scheme will be known as the Fuel Poverty Scheme. (Seven Authorities are taking part– including Waverley).
- III. The development of an Empty Homes Scheme to bring long term empty properties back into use, increase the supply of higher quality private rented accommodation and provide additional accommodation for homeless households. (Seven Authorities are taking part – including Waverley).

89.6 The bid requested £968,000 of RHB funding over the period 2008-2011 to be apportioned between the partnership members. This has been reduced to £822,000.

89.7 Matched funding from the local authorities over the three years will be required as shown in the following table.

Scheme	Cost	RHB contribution	Other sources of funding	LA contribution
Empty Homes	£23,000	£23,000		Nil
Fuel Poverty	£1.57m	£313,190	£863,721	£400,000
Equity Loan	£577,638	£485,810		£91,828

89.8 This item considers in detail each element of the bid that Waverley are involved with and the potential consequences of the Council's involvement in SHIP.

Fuel Poverty Scheme

89.9 The bid provides funding to extend the assistance available towards improving hard to heat homes, extending what is already available via the 'Warmfront' scheme and utilising funds made available by the energy utilities. Providing the assistance available towards heating systems and insulation measures is a significant means of reducing the number of non-decent homes occupied by vulnerable people. There is an emphasis in the bid to tackle hard to heat homes, which currently are not as popular with funders due to their higher costs. The types of homes that will be eligible for these special measures are:

- Older solid wall properties
- Rural properties with poor access to conventional heating fuels
- Properties with inaccessible or difficult roof spaces
- Complex Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Mobile/park homes

89.10 It fits well with the Council's priorities and targets to tackle carbon emissions and more recently the National Indicator 187 on fuel poverty.

- 89.11 The project aims to improve 1,000 non-decent properties in the SHIP area through appropriate energy efficiency measures. The scheme would enable approximately 140 dwellings within Waverley to be made more energy efficient for a relatively small outlay. The number of properties improved will depend on the cost of the type of work needed.
- 89.12 The proposed activities that are to be supported are set out in the bid application. The total value of the work is £1.57m. SHIP will use the grant from the RHB of £313,190 and seeks to use other funding of £863,721 as described below. The remaining £400,000 will be met by the 7 SHIP partners over the 3-year period of the initiative.
- 89.13 Based on 7 local authority partners each having an equal share of work in line with the projections, Waverley's capital contribution to the scheme would be within £60,000 in total. It is estimated to be divided as £10,000 for 2008/09 and £25,000 for both 2009/2010 and 2010/11.
- 89.14 Officers are requesting that the funding of £10,000 for 2008/09 be met by a virement of a saving identified within this year's Capital Budget for the House Condition Survey that has now been completed. The funding for years 2009/10 and 2010/11 will need to be allocated as an additional commitment in the Capital Programme.
- 89.15 This scheme seeks to attract multiple funding solutions from both private and public sector sources. A proportion of supplemental funding will come from surveyed properties receiving Warm Front eligible funds and Carbon Emission Reduction Target (CERT) money obtained from the most appropriate supplier according to measures required and the financial means of the client involved.
- 89.16 The bid proposes using existing surveyors working for partner local authorities, Home Improvement Agencies and Warm Front to identify qualifying properties and prescribe treatment from a suite of highly effective energy efficiency measures not normally covered by existing grant programmes. The programme will be managed by a suitable agent with the requisite skills to deliver such a project. They will oversee the specification of works, appointment of contractors, grant payment and monitoring and reporting.

Empty Homes Scheme

- 89.17 The bid resulted in modest funding being provided by The Regional Housing Board of £23,000 towards the development of means to deal with long-term empty homes. Waverley's financial contribution would be nil. The proposal is to offer encouragement and incentives to owners of empty homes to bring their properties back into use and to contribute to an increased supply of housing stock. This proposal would be delivered through two initiatives:
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders – to develop the use of Empty Property Management Orders amongst the local authority partners and to work in conjunction with a local Registered Social Landlord to manage the property on behalf of the local authority.

- Empty Homes Website - To develop a website to provide useful information to anyone owning or thinking of buying, selling or letting an empty property and to provide an additional mechanism for the reporting of empty properties across the partnership

89.18 After the 3-year period, SHIP partners will assess the success of these initiatives. The on-going costs will be relatively modest. The scheme will continue to be funded by the SHIP members if the scheme provides good value for money, and the costs are affordable to individual partners.

89.19 Officers feel that it is worthwhile for Waverley to participate in this element of the bid to the RHB. If the RHB impose onerous conditions, it will be possible to withdraw from the bid at that stage. Otherwise, this offers a good opportunity to test initiatives that could lead managing empty homes in the Borough better.

89.20 Following the last Capital Budget Monitoring report, a potential saving was identified in relation to the House Condition Survey and it is proposed to utilise this unspent budget provision to provide funding of £10,000 for 2008/2009. A further provision of £25,000 in both 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 is requested to support the scheme. The deadline for partner authorities signing up to the project and the three-year funding was 10th October 2008 and the Executive agreed to a bid being included in the Capital Programme at this stage. Without this commitment now within the Capital Budget for the next two years Waverley cannot take part in the SHIP schemes identified in this report. Officers have considered whether the home improvement grants budget could be reduced to finance this partnership but it is not expected at this stage that sufficient savings could be made.

89.21 The revenue contribution to support Woking Borough Council acting as the Lead Authority for the project is £1,000 per annum that can be met from the Environmental Health Service budget. The RHB bid prospectus offers access to grant funding to improve private sector housing renewal in partnership with local authorities. Waverley is part of the SHIP group of local authorities.

89.22 The Fuel Poverty Scheme and the Empty Homes Scheme could be introduced to Waverley as additional tool to assist improvements in private sector conditions. The schemes effectively support National, Regional and local priorities and maximise the Borough's contribution.

89.23 The Executive has agreed to enter into the Surrey and Hampshire Improvement Partnership to participate in the fuel poverty and empty homes elements of the project and to authorise the Strategic Director of Community Services to sign the Memorandum of Understanding and associated contractual/framework agreements in consultation with the Legal Services Manager. Officers are also requested to report back every six months on the success of the partnership. The Executive accordingly

RECOMMENDS that

- 19. the Sharing Homes Improvement Project be supported at a total cost of £60,000 over 3 years, financed as follows:-**

- (a) **£10,000 to be met from the forecast underspend on the capital programme; and**
- (b) **£25,000 per year be included in the draft capital programme for 2009/10 and 2010/11.**

Background Papers (SDCS)

Bid to the Regional Housing Board.

90. VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEW OF THE PAYMENT RECEIPTING SERVICE
(Agenda Item 13; Appendix G)

90.1 In January 2008, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a review of Waverley's payment receipting service. At its meeting held on 23 June 2008 the Committee considered alternative ways of operating this service and requested officers to investigate further, the options of bar-coded bills using a third party payment facility available at post offices and a range of retail outlets, and Transcash enabling payments at just post offices. Both options would cover 'in-person' payments for council tax, housing rents, business rates and sundry debts. The review looked at the service provided at the main office in Godalming and at each of the Locality offices for the receipt of payments from customers. At the June meeting, Members of the Committee asked that officers give particular consideration to:

- opportunities to address the impact on Waverley's more vulnerable citizens;
- the potential to encourage customers to make payments to the Council in ways other than by cash;
- the practicalities of handling residual miscellaneous cash payments;
- the cost involved in setting up pay points; and
- contact with other local authorities to identify alternative methods of receipting payments.

90.2 Members asked that, in parallel to the review of the payment receipting service, consideration also be given to Waverley's vision for customer service and the future role for its locality offices, in particular with respect to the Council's role in addressing social inclusiveness and providing support to its more vulnerable citizens.

90.3 Members are reminded that the drivers for undertaking a review of the payment receipting service are as follows:

- Reducing numbers of customers choosing to make payments over the counter at Waverley's four cash counters due to the Council's investment in web and phone payment facilities and its drive to increase direct debit;
- Cost savings – with significant pressure on the General Fund and HRA Budgets, handling cash is high risk and costly (for example the HRA was recharged and estimated £160,000 in 2007/08 for the payments receipting service);
- Efficiency gains – free-up staff time to support improvements in other customer-facing services;
- Customer choice – Are there better ways of offering more convenient local outlets for customers wishing to pay the Council by cash?;
- Investment in electronic payment methods and changes to car park cash handling arrangements; and
- Better use of assets – Cash desks require secure physical environments and take up large amounts of prime space in Waverley's offices. Could these assets be better utilised to improve customer access to services?

90.4 The financial and staffing implications for the Council are identified below along with the service delivery implications for its customers of replacing the cash counters with a payment collection service provided at the post office and other retail outlets and sets out a possible implementation timetable.

90.5 The alternative methods of providing a payment receipting service that members asked to be investigated in greater detail are summarised as follows. Both of these options would result in the closure of Waverley's four existing cash counters.

A) Enable customers, at no cost to themselves, to make payments to the Council at post offices counters using Transcash. (Annexe 4); and

B) Provide payment cards to Waverley customers or include a bar-code on all bills and payment documents to enable payments to be made at a wide range of local outlets (e.g. post offices and nominated retail outlets). (Annexe 5).

90.6 As part of their further investigation, officers met with all three suppliers to Local Government of these services and supplemented their earlier survey of other local authorities by visiting two more councils, one of which initially used payment cards and the other used Transcash but both of which have subsequently changed over to using bar-coded bills, rent cards and invoices.

Transcash

- 90.7 Waverley's customers have always been able to pay the Council using Transcash at Post Office counters but have had to fill in the necessary documentation themselves and pay a handling charge of £2.35 per transaction.
- 90.8 The Council, if it wished, could enter into a contract with Transcash (which is operated by Alliance+Leicester) service, to pay the handling charge itself (an average of approximately £1.00 per transaction) and provide its customers with pre-printed completed payment slips.
- 90.9 The advantages and disadvantages of Transcash are set out at Annexe 4. In brief, Transcash would enable the Council's customers to make payments at the approximately 30 post offices in the Borough (see Annexe 7) at an initial capital cost of £7,500 but relatively high annual maintenance and transaction costs of £139,000. (A comparison of the costs of each option under consideration is set out at Annexe 6).

Payment Cards / Bar-coding

- 90.10 Issuing payment cards to our customers or including bar-codes on our bills and invoices would enable payments to be made to the Council not only at post offices but also at a range of retail outlets via a third-party payment collection service (PCS). The advantages and disadvantages of using a third-party PCS are set out at Annexe 2.
- 90.11 There are currently three main suppliers of this service to Local Government, each of which has arrangements with different retail outlets. The suppliers are:
- Alliance+Leicester (Post Offices, Payzone retail outlets)
 - AllPay (Post Offices, Paypoint retail outlets, Woolworths)
 - The Co-operative Bank (Post Offices, Paypoint retail outlets)
- 90.12 A map showing the locations of the post offices and retail outlets is attached at Annexe 7. It should be noted that payments to the Council would not be restricted to locations within the borough. Customers would be able to pay their rent, council tax etc. at any post office or appropriate retail outlet anywhere in the country.
- 90.13 Each supplier offers three technical solutions enabling customers to make payments at these locations:
- Bar codes printed on the Council's existing stationery for bills, invoices and other appropriate correspondence (e.g. reminder letters);
 - Plastic Payment Cards (each customer is provided with a plastic card similar in appearance to a credit card); and
 - "Pop out" Payment Cards (bills and invoices are printed on special stationery which includes a "pop-out" laminated, die-cut payment card).

90.14 The advantages and disadvantages of each of these technical solutions are set out at Annexe 5 and the comparative costs itemised at Annexe 6.

90.15 There are a number of benefits to customers of enabling them to make payments at Post Offices and retail outlets in the Borough including:

- More convenient locations reducing the need to travel;
- The ability to pay at locations outside of the Borough, for example where the customer works rather than where they live; and
- Longer opening hours and week-end opening at certain retail outlets.

90.16 However, there are some limitations to the service that Post Offices and retail outlets can provide compared with the service currently delivered at the Council's cash counters. These impacts on customer service are set out in the table below along with proposals on how they might be addressed:

<i>Impact on customer service</i>	<i>How the impact might be addressed</i>
Some retail outlets only accept payments made by cash and only to a value £200	Post Offices will accept payments up to a value of £999 made by either cheque, debit card or cash. Waverley will continue to encourage and promote more convenient electronic methods of payment
Customers would not be able to obtain details of account balances or have their payment history on a single document at the point of payment.	This service would continue to be provided by the locality offices and at the reception desk at Godalming or by phone to officers. Customers could be sent statements of their account on request.
Customers would not be able to make payments if they have lost their bar-coded bill or payment card. (Currently staff at the council's cash desks can find the customer's account number for them.)	Customers could be sent bar-coded bills or payment cards on request. Housing tenants are regularly sent revised rent cards throughout the year, each of which would include a bar-code. The staff at the locality offices and the reception desk at Godalming could continue to find customers' account numbers on request and provide a bar-coded document.
Customers will not have the privacy or the assurance of making their payment direct to the Council.	The Post Office is a trusted agency. Many customers will already pay their utility bills at Post Offices and retail outlets and thereby developed a level of trust.
Customers will not be able to make miscellaneous payments or pay their parking fines by cash.	These payments represent only 5% of over-the-counter transactions receipted by the Council each year and arrangements could be made to continue to accept them at the locality offices and

	the reception desk at Godalming. The option to pay car park fines with notes and coins would be reviewed.
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Table 1: Impacts in customer service and how they might be addressed

90.17 As part of the initial review of the Council's payment receipting service, questionnaires were sent to 2,000 customers who have made one or more payments for housing rent or council tax over the counter at one of the Council's offices in the past year. Completed questionnaires were received from 697 customers (37% response rate).

90.18 This survey identified that, of Waverley's customers who currently pay over the counter at the Council's offices:

- 48% visit the Council's offices only for the purpose of making a payment;
- 56% responded that it would be acceptable to pay at post offices or retail outlets; and
- 16.4% said it would be inconvenient.

90.19 The majority of the current users of Waverley's cash counters would therefore find it convenient to make their payments at post offices or retail outlets. As there is at least one payment location in nearly every centre of population in the Borough (the map at Annexe 7 shows the proximity of post offices and retail outlets to Waverley's housing stock) then such a move would be of particular benefit to those customers with transport or mobility issues.

90.20 The timetable proposed at Annexe 8 includes an extended transition period which will allow the service departments and cash and Locality Office staff the opportunity to provide customers with all the information, assistance and support they might require in order to minimise the impact on customer service.

90.21 Over 150 local authorities have introduced bar-coded bills or payment cards and closed their cash counters in recent years. 13 of these were contacted as part of this review and site visits were made to two of them. Their experience with respect to impact upon customer service can be summarised as follows:

- The majority of sites contacted reported that their customers had responded well to the transition for the Council's cash desks to the Post Office and retail outlets. The exception to this was an authority that gave its customers only three months notice of the change. The outline timetable envisages giving customers 9 months notice of the change; and
- None reported any problems with respect to the £200 maximum cash payment restriction at some retail outlets.

90.22 All authorities emphasised the importance of:

- a well-planned publicity campaign focussed on those customers who wished to pay over the counter, keeping them well-informed throughout the process via targeted mail shots and publicity material at their cash offices; and
- thorough testing of their bar-coded documents and the retail outlets and Post Offices in their district.

90.23 Most local authorities that have implemented a third-party payment collection service report an increase in the take up of direct debit payments on its introduction. It is proposed that, as part of the campaign to publicise the new service, the benefits of direct debits be promoted strongly.

90.24 In some service areas payment by cash is decreasing (e.g. in 2007/08 only 13% of parking fines and 2% of parking permits were paid in cash). As part of the campaign to publicise the new service the facility to pay online or via the automated telephone service would be promoted strongly

90.25 As stated in the previous report to Corporate O&S, close attention needs to be given to "miscellaneous income". This term covers a wide range of services for which payment is received at "point of sale" (e.g. refuse sacks, planning fees, parking permits, licences, photocopying, pest control etc.). As these "miscellaneous" services are only provided on receipt of payment it would be problematic for payments to be made via a third party (e.g. post office, retail outlet) and thus there will be a continued requirement to provide some facility in-house to receive miscellaneous income.

90.26 In 2007/08 16,400 payments were receipted with respect to miscellaneous income. The vast majority (88%) of these were receipted at the Godalming cash office. As the introduction of a third-party payment collection service would still require the Council to retain a "back-of-office" receipting and income management service at Godalming, the majority of miscellaneous income payments would continue to be processed as at present.

90.27 Of the remaining 1,883 (12%) miscellaneous income transactions receipted at the locality offices over half are made in cash to a total value of £16,000, i.e. an average of £22 per office per day. It is felt that these sums could be handled as "petty cash. However, alternative ways of paying for "miscellaneous" services, including ordering online, are currently being investigated.

90.28 It is proposed that, for those customers wishing to pay in person by cheque, secure post boxes be placed in each reception area to allow customers to deposit their payments in pre-printed envelopes provided by the Council.

90.29 With regard to timescales, it would not be possible to close the cash counters until the alternative payment collection service was in place and fully tested and the customers had been provided with the necessary documentation (payment cards or bar-coded bills or invoices). The best time, therefore, is at the end of the financial year when all council tax payers, tenants and business ratepayers have been provided with new bills and rents cards. This has been the practice at the majority of other local authorities contacted.

90.30 The key tasks required to be undertaken would be:

- Tendering and selection of preferred supplier in accordance with EU procurement rules (14 weeks);
- Adding Waverley to the payment network (12 weeks);
- Amending software to print barcodes in the required format on bills, invoices or payment cards (the experience of other authorities suggests this takes between 3 and 6 months);
- Testing each and every post office and retail outlet (strongly recommended by the local authorities contacted - 3 weeks); and
- Publicity campaign (throughout the transition).

90.31 Although some of the above tasks could be undertaken in parallel, it would not be possible to implement a new payment collection service in time for the production of council tax bills and rent cards in February 2009 for financial year 2009/10.

90.32 Consultation with other local authorities indicates that implementation takes between 12 and 15 months. It is therefore proposed that the new payment collection service be phased in during financial year 2009/10. This could coincide with a gradual phasing out of the cash counters and their closure on or around March 2010.

90.33 An outline timetable is attached at Annexe 8.

90.34 The costs of implementing each of the alternative payment collection services considered in this report are given at Annexe 6.

90.35 In accordance with the proposed timetable the phasing of the additional capital investment and revenue costs would be as follows (ranging from bar-coding – lowest price – to plastic payment cards – highest). However, the ongoing costs savings exceed these costs resulting in a net reduction that will benefit the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
E. <u>Capital Cost</u>	£2,500	£21-24,000	-
Revenue cost	-	£8-10,000	£62-79,000

Table 2: Estimated capital and revenue costs of implementing new payment collection service

90.36 The total estimated cost of the current cashing function in 2008-09 is £408,000 including fixed and support costs that will not vary as a result of closing the cash counters. It is estimated that a total of 7.9 full time equivalent staff are engaged in delivering the cashing service (see Table 3 below) ¹.

Office	Staff (cash collection) f.t.e.	Staff (enquiry service) f.t.e.	Total Staff f.t.e.
Godalming	3.50	-	3.50
Cranleigh	1.07	0.68	1.75

¹ At the locality offices staff deliver both a cashing and front-line customer enquiry service. For the purpose of costing alternative options cashier transactions and customer enquiries have been given equal weighting when apportioning costs and staff time to each of these two services.

Farnham	1.81	2.69	4.50
Haslemere	1.55	0.70	2.25
Total	7.93	4.07	12.00

Table 3: Current cash collection costs and staff numbers

90.37 For each of the payment collection options under consideration the volume of over-the-counter transactions would reduce by an estimated 95% of the current levels. Thus the introduction of a new payment collection service and the closure of the cash counters would reduce the level of staff involved in cash collection by an estimated 5.70 (7.93 – 2.23) f.t.e. (see Table 3). (Members are reminded that the Godalming cash office provides a back office receipting and income management service in addition to the over-the-counter service. The back office service - approximately two f.t.e. staff - would continue to be required even if the over-the-counter service was withdrawn.)

90.38 As stated in the report to the June meeting of Corporate O&S, if the 95% reduction in staff time spent in delivering the over-the-counter cashiering service at the locality offices was taken as a saving it would reduce staffing levels at each of the locality offices at Cranleigh and Haslemere to approximately 0.80 f.t.e. which would mean that the front-line customer enquiry service at these offices was no longer viable.

90.39 It is estimated that a minimum total staffing level of 6.00 f.t.e. would be required to maintain a operate the customer enquiry service at all of the locality offices. As only 0.23 f.t.e. would be involved in delivering the payment receipting service at the locality offices following the introduction of a new payment (see Table 3 below) the remaining 5.77 f.t.e. would be dedicated to delivering the customer enquiry service. This represents an increase of 1.70 (5.77 – 4.07) f.t.e. above the current staffing levels for the customer enquiry service.

Office	Estimated Staffing Levels (assuming the minimum staffing level required to operate the customer enquiry service at the locality offices)			
	Cash processing f.t.e.	Staffing for viable Locality Offices f.t.e.	Customer enquiry service f.t.e.	Total Staff f.t.e.
Godalming	2.00	-	-	2.00
Locality Offices	0.23	6	5.77	6.00
Total	2.23	6.00	5.77	8.00

Table 4: Estimated staffing for residual cash processing service and operating the customer enquiry service

90.40 The net reduction in staffing would therefore be 4.00 (12.0 – 8.0) fte. This reduction of 4.00 posts would need to be realised firstly by not replacing posts permanently as they become vacant and then by redeploying staff to other suitable posts within the Council.

- 90.41 At present, it is proposed that, to coincide with the phasing in of the new payment collection service the Council's in-house payment receipting service should be wound-down. Annexe 9 analyses the volumes of payment transactions receipted at Waverley's four cash counters. As can be seen, over 80% of all payment transactions are receipted before 2.00pm.
- 90.42 A redeployment of one of the cashiers at Godalming provides the opportunity to close the cash counter at the main office at 2.00pm each day from the beginning of April 2009. This would result in a one-off revenue saving of £8,000 in 2009/10 ahead of the achievement of the savings in future years.
- 90.43 The 19% of transactions receipted at Godalming after 2.00pm represents 9,100 over-the-counter payments, an average of 36 payments an afternoon. The majority of these payments (7,800) are for housing rent and council tax and represent payments from approximately 900 tenants and 1,800 taxpayers.
- 90.44 After the introduction of a new payment collection service it is estimated that there will be fewer than 300 residual miscellaneous cash transactions per annum over all of the counters on a Saturday (less than 2 transactions per office per Saturday)
- 90.45 It is concluded that implementing a new payment collection service by providing current cash paying customers with bar-coded documents for council tax, housing rent and invoices to enable them to make payments to the Council at post offices and other retail outlets is a viable alternative to the current Waverley-provided over-the-counter service. Whilst there may be some negative impact for the customers, this would significantly increase the choice of payment locations, deliver a cash saving to the Council and enable potential improvements in customer service at the Council's offices.
- 90.46 Bar-coded documents are recommended over the alternative options for the following reasons:
- The majority of other authorities contacted have found the bar-coding of existing documents sufficient to provide an efficient and flexible service;
 - The few benefits of introducing plastic payment cards do not justify the ongoing administrative overheads and additional costs of doing so; and
 - Although inexpensive to set up, Transcash can only deliver half the number of payment locations in the Borough and the transaction costs are significantly higher than the alternatives.
- 90.47 Although the administrative overheads and costs of introducing pop-out cards are significantly less prohibitive than those for plastic cards it is proposed that the case for their introduction should be considered as part of a post-implementation review to be undertaken a year after the introduction of bar-coded documents and a report submitted to the members.
- 90.48 This report presents and opportunity for Waverley to close its four cash counters with effect from 1 April 2010 and provide an alternative method of payment for those customers who choose to continue to pay the Council using cash in the future. The report also identifies and opportunity to close the Godalming cash counter every afternoon after 2.00pm from the beginning of

April 2009 which will achieve an additional cost saving. These proposals have been discussed with Staffside and the Tenants' Panel.

90.49 The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not entirely comfortable with the loss of the personal service at the cash counters, especially for vulnerable customers. There were also concerns about what removing this important service might mean for the future of the Locality Offices. Noting these reservations, the Committee agreed to commend to the Executive the proposals for changing the Council's payment receipting system on the basis that it offered a cost-effective alternative to the current arrangements. However, the Executive noted the Committee's observations, as follows:

- (i) the Tenants' Panel should be consulted on the proposals;
- (ii) as well as the proposed publicity during the transition period, there should be a telephone help line service available during the implementation period, as not everyone would be able to access the website for information on the new arrangements; and
- (iii) it was important that other locality services were retained at current levels.

90.50 The Committee considered the opportunity to close the Godalming cash counter at 2.00pm each day from 1 April 2009 that has arisen following the redeployment of a cashier. Members noted that this would achieve a one-off saving of £8,000 in 2009/10 but again had some concerns about the inconvenience to those customers who currently used the cash counter in the afternoon. However, it was important to have certainty with regard to opening hours, to avoid the confusion arising from the variable opening hours at the Locality Offices. Appropriate publicity for the change to opening hours would be required. The Committee agreed to support the recommendation to close the Godalming cash counter at 2.00pm each day from 1 April 2009.

90.51 The Executive congratulated the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work carried out in the review and

RECOMMENDS that

- 20. a payment receipting system be implemented for customers that choose to pay the Council in person for council tax, housing rents, business rates or sundry debts, using bar-coded bills and a third party operator, noting the potential for up to 55 outlets being available in the Borough including post offices;**
- 21. the procurement and agreement of contract terms be subject to the agreement of the Deputy Chief Executive and the Legal Services Manager;**
- 22. Waverley cease to operate its four cash counters with effect from 31 March 2010 on the basis that the service described in (1) above offers a cost-effective alternative to the current arrangements, noting in particular:**

- The timetable for implementation
 - The potential impact on customers
 - The potential revenue savings
 - The proposals for a major PR and information campaign
 - Improved customer choice of payment outlets
 - Opportunities for enhancing Waverley's customer service at its offices;
23. the Godalming cash counter be closed at 2.00pm each day from 1 April 2009;
24. as well as the proposed publicity during the transition period, there should be a telephone helpline service available during the implementation period; and
25. the Tenants' Panel be kept fully involved and informed during the implementation period and the Executive be fully informed on the implementation, especially for small miscellaneous payments.

Background Papers (DCEx)

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

PARTS II AND III - MATTERS OF REPORT

Background Papers

The background papers relating to the following items in Parts II and III are as specified in the agenda for the meeting of the Executive.

Part II – Matters Reported in Detail for the Information of the Council

There were no matters falling within this category.

Part III – Brief Summaries of Other Matters Dealt With

91. EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 6; Appendix A)

RESOLVED that the forward programme of key decisions for Waverley Borough Council be agreed, subject to the following amendments to the Planning and Major Projects Portfolio:-

- i. amending the date for the update on LDF Evidence gathering to January 2009;
- ii. revised dates of February 2009 to Review the Local Development Scheme and for an update on the Interim Subsidised Affordable Housing Policy; and

- iii. the addition of an item on the South East Plan Partial Review relating to Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in November 2008 and an update on Planning Infrastructure Contributions SPD in April 2009.

92. EAST STREET (Agenda Item 7)

The Executive received an oral update on the latest position with regard to the East Street Scheme which had now been granted planning permission and agreed, if necessary, to hold a Special Council meeting on 4 November and move the scheduled Executive meeting to 3 November 2008.

93. IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN – “DON’T LOSE YOUR HOME” CAMPAIGN (Agenda Item 9; Appendix C)

RESOLVED that

1. an advice service and publicity and information campaign be implemented as detailed in the report, targeted at residents in the Borough to help prevent individuals moving to a position where their home is at risk of repossession;
2. a supplementary estimate of an immediate £20,000 to finance part of the costs associated with (1) above be approved and officers asked to come back to the next meeting with further advice on any additional costs required;
3. a ‘hardship’ scheme be devised, as detailed in the report, which enables community organisations to apply for one-off financial assistance to assist with measures to reduce the impact of rising fuel costs;
4. the balance of the Community Partnerships Fund be used to establish the hardship fund proposed in (3) above;
5. work be undertaken with Business Link Surrey, Waverley Business forum, Enterprise First and other support organisations to promote appropriate advice and support for businesses seeking support during the current downturn in the economy; and
6. the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to prepare the detailed schemes necessary to deliver the proposals in (1) and (3) above, having regard to financial and operational risks, and to implement these as soon as possible.

94. REVENUE FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN 2009/10 – GRANT ELIGIBILITY, CRITERIA AND TIMETABLE (Agenda Item 11; Appendix E)

The Head of Finance and Performance amended the figure in the report for total funding awarded in 2008/09 for the Waverley Voluntary Grants Partnership (WVGP) from £52,400 to £54,000.

RESOLVED that

1. for budget planning purposes, the total amount of the revenue grants pot and the contribution to the Waverley Voluntary Grants Partnership in 2009/10 be frozen at the 2008/09 level;
2. the existing Sponsored Organisations be notified that the revenue grants fund will not be increased by inflation and be requested to provide an impact analysis of the effects of no grant increase in 2009/10 and of potential grant reductions in future years;
3. the 2009/10 bidding round should be open to new organisations;
4. the application process, eligibility, grant criteria and timetable, revised to take account of the changes proposed in this report, be endorsed;
5. Waverley's contribution to the Waverley Voluntary Grants Partnership in 2009/10 will be at the same amount as in 2008/09 with two nominated members on the panel and with the results of the grants being reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Executive;
6. a Member/Link officer grants panel be formed to assess applications;
7. officers provide organisations with increased support to help them identify additional sources of funding; and
8. the Sponsored Organisations Scheme be renamed the "Waverley Community Partnership".

95. GRANT INCOME AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS (Agenda Item 12; Appendix F)

RESOLVED that

1. the proposals to extend the advice and support service to community organisations in the Borough on external funding opportunities be endorsed;
2. the proposals to identify and secure new funding opportunities to support the Council's own service provision be endorsed, noting the need to acquire a system as requested in the capital report at Minute No. 88; and
3. officers be requested to report to the November meeting of the Executive on the proposed framework for utilising developers' contributions to deliver projects in partnership with community organisations.

96. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY (Agenda Item 14; Appendix H)

RESOLVED that

1. the Customer Service Strategy process outlined in the report be agreed;
2. a Customer Service Special Interest Group be established, with a membership of seven and the membership to be authorised by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder; and
3. the terms of reference for the SIG be agreed, as set out in the report.

97. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT, QUARTER 1 (APRIL – JUNE) 2008/09 (Agenda item 15; Appendix I)

RESOLVED that the observations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the Quarter 1 performance management report be noted.

98. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK (Agenda Item 16; Appendix J)

RESOLVED that the direction of travel on the LDF be endorsed, and the Spatial Portrait, the list of Issues, the proposed Vision and the Core Strategy Objectives be confirmed.

99. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE DRAFT SOUTH EAST PLAN (Agenda Item 17; Appendix K)

RESOLVED that the suggested responses to the Secretary of State on her Proposed Changes to the draft South East Plan, set out in the table in Annexe 1 to the agenda report, be agreed.

100. PROPOSED ADDITIONS TO THE LOCAL LIST OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS (Agenda Item 18; Appendix L)

RESOLVED that approval be given in principle to the buildings listed in Haslemere, Cranleigh and Farnham, as set out in Annexe 1 of the agenda report, and that they should be the subject of consultation for their inclusion in the Waverley Local List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest.

101. IN-DEPTH REVIEW – FEAR OF CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (Agenda Item 19; Appendix M)

The Executive complimented the work of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this in-depth review and

RESOLVED that the following recommendations be endorsed, that:-

1. Waverley and the Safer Waverley Partnership should be supported in using enhanced communications to underline the general safety of and low levels of crime in Waverley;
2. greater clarity of communication should be encouraged about how to contact the police, both for emergencies and non-emergencies, including greater publicity for the Mount Browne Call Centre;

3. the approaches of the Safer Waverley Partnership and the Waverley Community Safety team should be supported in reducing the fear of crime and recommending its continuation;
4. the role of the Police Community Support Officers in Waverley should be supported and the use of Council communications media to publicise their role and activities should be encouraged; and
5. an in-depth analysis of the responses to the forthcoming Place Survey should be commissioned, with a view to identifying those sections of the community which are particularly fearful of crime and anti-social behaviour, so that resources can be targeted towards these groups.

102. IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF WAVERLEY'S DAY CENTRES – MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR CHANGING COMMUNITIES (Agenda Item 20; Appendix N)

The Executive congratulated the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the excellent report and

RESOLVED that the following recommendations be endorsed, that:-

1. the day centres in Waverley provided a very valuable service to older people in Waverley, and should continue to be supported by the Council in accordance with the Council's priority of "improving the quality of life for all, particularly the more vulnerable within our society";
2. a more strategic approach needed to be developed with regard to sustaining the funding, support and development of the centres, in the light of the changing requirements of users;
3. the centres should be encouraged and supported to widen the services they offer in ways that met the changing demands and needs of current and potential users. This would require them to adopt an increasingly outward approach to their communities to attract other users and customer groups;
4. Centres should be encouraged to work more closely together across the Borough to develop opportunities together and share best practice, e.g. in attracting alternative sources of funding;
5. the Council's officers should work with the day centres and Surrey County Council to understand the potential impact of "self-directed support" on day centre services;
6. the Council should maintain its support for day centres through the Sponsored Organisation Scheme, or equivalent, and develop a more strategic approach to the funding and development of the day centres, possibly on the basis of a service level agreement with agreed outcomes; and
7. officers should continue the dialogue with Surrey County Council, the PCT and day centres to determine:

- a) how Waverley can assist the County Council and PCT to help individuals to continue living in good health in their own homes; and
- b) how Waverley can help the County Council and PCT optimise new sources of funding to meet Government targets for supporting more vulnerable people in their homes, e.g. through the use of Telecare and other initiatives.

103. MEETING THE DECENT HOMES STANDARD – OCKFORD RIDGE, GODALMING (Agenda Item 21; Appendix O)

RESOLVED that

1. a community consultation exercise be undertaken with local residents on Ockford Ridge about how best the Council can help improve the estates and the homes on it, and what options are available;
2. a Steering Group, chaired by the Housing Portfolio, including the Waverley Ward Councillors, representatives from the Landlord Service Partnership and local community be created to oversee the consultation process; and
3. budget provision of £30,000 (in total) be identified, with £15,000 in 2008/09 and £15,000 in 2009/10 coming from the HA feasibility budget in the capital programme, with further details to be discussed with the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Steering Group.

104. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT (Agenda Item 22; Appendix P)

RESOLVED that

1. the Executive concurs with the views from the Town and Parishes and Community O&S that Waverley should adopt a 'light touch' approach in taking forward the Sustainable Communities Act ; and
2. officers review the guidance published in October to determine (i) the most practical way of generating and shortlisting any emerging ideas for consideration by the LGA and (ii) how this best fits into a wider community engagement approach for Waverley

105. SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES AFTER FOOT AND MOUTH (Agenda Item 23; Appendix Q)

The Executive noted the partnership work that had been taking place to support those businesses affected by the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Surrey and

RESOLVED that

1. the partnership work that has been taking place to support all of those businesses affected by the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Surrey be noted;

2. Waverley's actions set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the report be noted and commended;
3. support available for Waverley businesses be optimised by continuing to work with SEEDA, Business Link Surrey, Tourism South East, the Surrey Economic Partnership, Surrey Food Links, Surrey County Council and other appropriate partners; and
4. concern be expressed that compensation payments are still outstanding one year on from the outbreak and urges Defra, the Government and the Institute for Animal Health and its insurers to resolve speedily the outstanding compensation claims for businesses affected by FMD and the Chief Executive be instructed to write to the appropriate bodies accordingly.

106. FREE SWIMMING – REPORT BACK (Agenda Item 24)

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Leisure informed the Executive that financial information had now been received and Waverley was being awarded £62,168 to facilitate the free swimming scheme for under 16s, supplemented by a further £26,568 for promotional/publicity purposes. It was explained that if Waverley committed to both the Over 60s and the Under 16s schemes, they were eligible to apply for a capital grant and that an application was ready to be submitted for £377,000 to be spent on leisure centres. The Executive

RESOLVED to

1. participate in the free swimming scheme for under 16s and to authorise officers to commit to both parts of the scheme i.e. free swimming for over 60s and under 16s; and
2. ask officers to make appropriate applications for any capital grants available.

107. ROWLAND HOUSE (Agenda Item 25; Appendix R)

RESOLVED that

1. a Rowland House Redevelopment Special Interest Group be established to recommend to the Executive a preferred Housing Association and associated redevelopment proposal for redeveloping the Rowland House site; and
2. the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to determine the membership of the Special Interest Group.

108. REDUNDANCY OF EXTERNALLY FUNDED POSTS (Agenda Item 26; Appendix Q)

RESOLVED that

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07.10.08

1. the Executive agrees all new externally funded posts with clear agreement as to how potential redundancy costs are to be met;
2. the redundancy payments for all new externally funded posts be calculated using statutory rates unless a different calculation basis is agreed by the funding body at the time the appointment is made; and
3. the Executive gives delegated authority to approve redundancies for externally funded posts to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Human Resources and the Service concerned.

109. HASLEMERE CENTRAL AREA – ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (Agenda Item 27)

RESOLVED that a Special Interest Group be established to take forward the Haslemere Central project and that the membership should include Cllrs Mrs Carole Cockburn, Ms Denise Le Gal, Dr Nicky Lee, Robert Knowles and Steven Renshaw, with other co-optees invited to attend as appropriate.

110. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda Item 29)

At 9.02 p.m. it was

RESOLVED that pursuant to Procedure Rule 20 and in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during these items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information (as defined by Section 100I of the Act) of the description specified in the following paragraph of the revised Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act, namely:-

Minute 111

Information which reveals that the authority proposes:

- (a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
- (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment (Paragraph 6)

Minute 112

Information relating to any individual (Paragraph 1).

111. UNDERSHAW (Agenda Item 30; (Exempt) Appendix T)

RESOLVED that the decisions set out in the (Exempt) Annexe to these minutes be agreed.

112. REDUNDANCY OF AN EXTERNALLY FUNDED POST (Agenda Item 31; (Exempt) Appendix U)

RESOLVED that the decisions set out in the (Exempt) Annexe to these minutes be agreed.

The meeting commenced at 6.45 p.m. and concluded at 9.17 p.m.

Chairman