NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL DECISION

DECISION OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE, HUMAN RESOURCES AND ASSET MANAGEMENT WITH ADVICE FROM THE HEAD OF PROPERTY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

DECISION NO: CSD148

SUBJECT: Ward-based Property Reviews

BACKGROUND:

The Council’s adopted Corporate Asset Management Plan sets out how planned corporate, service and financial outcomes from holding property are to be realised. The aim is for the Council to “have fewer, better and more sustainable property assets”.

How the Council manages its property assets is a key issue in addressing the projected funding shortfall through the Transformation Programme. A number of major property-related initiatives are either ongoing or about to commence and this project will contribute to the achievement of the overall aim as set out above.

Whilst significant progress has been made in rationalising and making better use of property assets, there is still a significant number, mainly green infrastructure and associated land and property held by D&E (Streets and Open Spaces), which have not been reviewed. This being the case, it is proposed to review these assets through a programme based on ward boundaries, undertaken in consultation with local members.

This approach will enable officers and local members to jointly review Council landholdings in each ward in a consultative and structured way. The process will provide information to members on Council property assets in their ward and provide an opportunity for more proactive local engagement.

Due to ongoing budget cuts and the need to raise funding from alternative sources, the reviews will mainly focus on estate rationalisation and obtaining capital receipts, although any property shortfalls and use/utilisation issues relating to operational properties identified can feed into future action plans. The planned output from each review area is a short overview report providing basic information on Council properties held, issues and potential opportunities arising, and specific short, medium or long-term property/asset management actions proposed.

Whilst the reviews will be based on ward boundaries, a broader approach, with a number of wards included in each review area, is proposed in some, mainly urban, areas. This will reduce the overall length of the programme and should result in a more consistent and integrated approach being adopted.
The first phase of reviews, up to May 2015, will be based on existing ward boundaries. It is planned to review wards in Clevedon, Nailsea, Portishead and Worle in this period. A programme for the second phase of reviews, after May 2015, will be decided after completion of the current Electoral review of North Somerset and the local Council elections. Decisions on the wards included in each review area will be taken following consultation with local members.

As the majority of the properties reviewed will be green infrastructure landholdings held by Streets and Open Spaces, it is proposed to provide joint officer (Property and D&E) support for each review.

Schools, libraries, leisure centres, community centres together with small areas of land which, realistically, have no potential alternative use or must be retained, will not be included in the reviews. All other property in each area will be recorded.

Initial discussions will take place with members prior to advice being sought from Planning Officers on those properties on which changes in status (including disposal options) may be considered.

All wards will be reviewed over a 2 year period with the programme being completed in early 2016. The aim is to complete the final report within 3 months of each review commencing, although there will be some flexibility in the programme to take account of the differing number of property assets in each area.

Recommendations included in final reports will be advisory and record if they are supported by local members.

The principle of undertaking a programme of ward/area reviews and proposed implementation arrangements summarised in this report are supported by the Community and Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Panel.

**DECISION:**

Approval is given to implement a ward review programme, primarily focusing on estate rationalisation, to commence in the 2014/15 financial year.

**Reasons:**

The project will contribute to the Transformation Programme by ensuring the Council is only holding property it requires. Property assets not held for a specific defined purpose are to be considered for market or other disposal.

**Other Alternatives Considered:**

Function and service reviews have been undertaken on other parts of the estate. Area/ward reviews will be more effective in considering the future use of this type of property.

**Financial Implications:**
Internal officer resources will be utilised in undertaking the reviews. Capital receipts obtained from the sale of property declared surplus to requirements through the reviews will support future Council investment or savings programmes.

**Implications for Future Years:**

None other than above.

Signed: ........................................................................

Head of Property and Asset Management, North Somerset Council

Dated: ........................................................................

Signed: ........................................................................

Councillor Lake
(Executive Member for Finance, Human Resources and Asset Management)

Dated: ........................................................................