

ONCHAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

Hawthorn Villa,
Main Road, Onchan.

IN PUBLIC

11th February 2009

Sir/Madam,

You are hereby summoned to attend an **ORDINARY meeting of the Authority (focus: Finance and General Purposes)** to be held in the Boardroom, at Hawthorn Villa, 79 Main Road, Onchan, to transact the undernoted business at:

7.00 p.m. on Monday, 16th February 2009

which will be followed by a meeting of the Board sitting *In Committee*.

Yours faithfully,

P.M. HULME
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

AGENDA

The order of business at every meeting of the authority shall be in accordance with that laid down in Standing Order No 13 unless varied by the Chairman at his discretion (with the exception of items 1, 2, 4 or 4 which cannot be varied) or by a resolution duly moved and seconded and passed on a motion which shall be moved and put without discussion.

1. **To choose a person to preside if the Chairman and vice-chairman be absent**
2. **To deal with any business required by statute to be done before any other business**
3. **To approve as a correct record and sign the Minutes of the:-**
 - 3.1 Ordinary meeting held on 9th February 2009 **(Minutes– Appendix 3.1)**
 - 3.2 Extraordinary meeting held on 5th February 2009 **(Minutes - Appendix 3.2)**
4. **To dispose of any relevant business arising from such minutes if not referred to in the minutes of any Special Committee.**

None.
5. **To dispose of any relevant business adjourned from a previous meeting.**
 - 5.1 Report of the Skateboard Working Party

6. To deal with any business expressly required by statute to be done.

None.

7. To consider any planning decisions/communications from the Department of Local Government and the Environment Planning Committee.

7.1 Plans for consideration *(Appendix 7.1)*

7.2 Planning Communications (None)

8. Consideration of any report from the Clerk or other officer

8.1 Setting of Park Charges for 2009 *(Appendix 8.1)*

9. Consideration of any relevant correspondence

9.1 D.T.I. - Regeneration Scheme 2009 *(Appendix 9.1)*

9.2 R.T.L.C. – Delay of Applications *(Appendix 9.2)*

10. To consider Motions in the order in which notice has been received.

None.

11. Other Business, as authorised by the Chairman for consideration.

None.

Minutes of the ordinary meeting of the **ONCHAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS (focus group Properties and Amenities)** held in the Boardroom, Hawthorn Villa, Main Road, Onchan, on Monday 9th February 2009 at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Mr D. Crellin (Chairman)
Mrs J. Kelly (Lead Member for Properties and Amenities)
Mr B. Stowell
Mr S.T. Black
Mr E.J. Thorn (from 7.20 p.m.)
Mr J.K. Watterson

Apologies: Mr S.R.J. Babb

In Attendance: Mr P.M. Hulme (Chief Executive)
Mr T.R. Craig (Deputy Clerk)
Ms A.S. Dentith (Personal Assistant)

C09/02/03/01

TO CHOOSE A PERSON TO PRESIDE IF THE CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN BE ABSENT

Not necessary.

C09/02/03/02

BUSINESS REQUIRED TO BE DEALT WITH BY STATUTE

None.

C09/02/03/03

MINUTES

1. Ordinary meeting held on 2nd February 2009

The minutes of the public section of the ordinary meeting held on 2nd February 2009, copies of which having been previously circulated, were considered, agreed as a correct record of proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

C09/02/03/04

BUSINESS ARISING NOT REFERRED TO IN THE MINUTES OF ANY SPECIAL COMMITTEES

1. C09/02/02/07(1) – Plans to the Board

The Vice-Chairman advised Members that a motion had been passed some time ago to place consideration of the plans in the public domain. However, the minutes do not record the proposer or seconder or how individual Members have voted in most cases. It was his view that he was happy to stand by the way he voted and willing to stand by his decisions. If an individual wished to speak to a Commissioner regarding a planning issue, that individual would have no idea how the Commissioner had voted and what, if any, objections were raised. He advised that he would need to refer to the minutes as an aid memoir to the way he had voted on the subject and felt that as no votes were recorded this would make it difficult.

The Vice-Chairman felt Members should be prepared to stand by the way they had voted with anything which had occurred in the public domain.

Lead Member for Environment and Technical Services agreed with the sentiments of the Vice-Chairman and remarked on the wide difference as to how minutes were presented within Government Departments. He felt there were many items which were considered *In Committee* which could be brought over to the public domain.

The Chairman advised Members that this was a discussion for another evening and moved the meeting on to the next agenda item.

C09/02/03/05

BUSINESS ADJOURNED FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

1. **C09/02/02/07(1)(a) – PA09/000076 – 2 Glen View Road – Proposed first floor alterations to existing dormer bungalow resulting in the raising of the roof height by approximately 1.5m**

The Chief Executive advised that this planning application had been deferred from the previous meeting of the Board to allow Members to view the site.

Chairman advised that he had visited the area and felt it was quite a substantial increase in height of the roof and felt it was over intensive and would be opposing the application at this stage.

The Vice-Chairman had viewed the property and was conscious that it was not directly overlooked by many other properties. However, he felt it was contentious to raise the roofline by 1.5 metres which seemed quite a significant increase, there were not many 2 storey properties in the vicinity and was inclined to recommend refusal.

An opportunity was offered to Mrs Kelly to view the plans as she was not present at the previous meeting, which she duly accepted.

Mr Stowell proposed, seconded by Mr Crellin that PA09/000076 – 2 Glen View Road – Proposed first floor alterations to existing dormer bungalow resulting in the raising of the roof height by approximately 1.5m be refused on the grounds of the significant increase in roof height.

Mr Watterson counter proposed, seconded by Mr Black that PA09/000076 – 2 Glen View Road – Proposed first floor alterations to existing dormer bungalow resulting in the raising of the roof height by approximately 1.5m be approved.

A vote was taken on the counter proposal:-

For: Messrs Watterson, Black and Mrs Kelly

Against: Messrs Crellin and Stowell

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that **PA09/000076 – 2 Glen View Road – Proposed first floor alterations to existing dormer bungalow resulting in the raising of the roof height by approximately 1.5m be approved.**

C09/02/03/06

ANY BUSINESS EXPRESSLY REQUIRED BY STATUTE TO BE DONE

None.

C09/02/03/07

PLANNING DECISIONS/COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT PLANNING COMMITTEE

1. Plans to the Board

None.

2. Planning Communications

None.

C09/02/03/08

REPORT FROM THE CLERK OR OTHER OFFICER

1. C09/02/01/03 - Minutes of Meetings

The report of the Chief Executive dated 28th January 2009 was considered. The report advised:-

“that minutes do not require confirmation in the ordinary sense of that word – the decisions taken at a meeting are of immediate effect. The minutes are merely a record of what has already actually taken place but their confirmation has important legal consequences.

The only question that can properly arise on the confirmation of minutes is that of accuracy. (Onchan District Commissioners Standing Order 10)

The occasion is not one for a resumption of debate on items recorded in the minutes, nor, strictly, should the minutes be used as a basis for reporting subsequent action.

The inclusion of an item to the effect: ‘To dispose of any business arising from such minutes’ is bad practice and of doubtful legality.

The chairman who signs the minutes does so in pursuance of the requirement that he must do so. He need not have been present at the meeting of which the minutes are a record.

If, when a meeting is being asked to confirm the minutes of a preceding meeting, it is agreed that there is an inaccuracy that needs to be corrected, it is advisable for the fact to be duly noted in the minute recording the signing of the minutes, e.g.:

‘Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of [date] were approved and signed by the Chairman subject to correction of...’

The particular minute challenged and agreed to be inaccurate should never be altered although a pencilled note could properly be made against the disputed minute by the proper officer indicating its subsequent correction.”

In answer to question, the Chief Executive advised Members and the Chairman that it was bad practice to discuss items under the heading “To dispose of any business arising from such minutes” and that items should be listed on the agenda should any Member wish to raise any matters. However, many Local Authorities did use this heading.

Mr Watterson felt that if Commissioners are unable to carry out discussions under the Present Agenda Item 4 - “*To dispose of any relevant business arising from such minutes if not referred to in the minutes of any Special Committee*” there should be a separate category to allow for such discussions. There are many occasions where:-

- not all business is concluded at a meeting
- there are matters which are carried over for various reasons
- he didn't think matters should be left to be considered under agenda item *Any Other Business*, this was authorised by the Chairman and this would give the Chairman an option to refuse consideration if he so wished.

Mr Thorn arrived at 7.20 p.m.

Vice-Chairman pointed out that Members would need to appraise the Clerk by Wednesday morning for inclusion of items for the agenda. Agenda papers were circulated on Wednesday afternoon.

Mrs Kelly felt that it was not unreasonable to give 10 working days for consideration of matters which had been deferred rather than 5 days. She felt that a better result would be obtained. If a matter was urgent, it would be either listed on the agenda paper or raised under Any Other Business. For a matter which required further clarity she felt it was not unreasonable to allow 10 working days to come back to the Board.

Vice-Chairman advised he would like written questions to be reinstated.

Mr Watterson felt that a mechanism should be in place to ask questions or to seek further clarity, he did not agree that everything should be written on the agenda.

The Chairman advised Members that the general opinion of the Board was to continue with Agenda Item 4. However, if a Member wished to include a matter on the agenda for consideration, they may do so through the Clerk.

2. Chairman's Dinner Dance and Civic Sunday Dates

1. Dinner Dance

General discussion took place with regard to holding a dinner dance or social evening. Members agreed that the evening would take the form of a social evening with buffet to keep the cost to a minimum.

Mr Watterson proposed, and all Members agreed, that a Social Evening be held on Saturday 21st March 2009.

2. Civic Service

After a brief discussion, Members agreed that subject to confirmation with Canon Convery at St Peters Church, that the Annual Civic Service be held on Sunday 24th May 2009 at 3.00 p.m. and a reception be held at the Youth and Community Centre after the Service.

3. Naming of New School

The Chief Executive advised Members that he had been contacted by Mr G. Waft MLC, regarding the naming of the New Secondary School which was being erected on land at Bemahague. Mr Waft felt that it should reflect an Onchan name rather than presuming to be St Ninians Lower School.

After a brief discussion, Members agreed that the naming of the new school should be relevant to its location, i.e. Bemahague.

4. Librarian's Report

Report of the Librarian dated January 2009 was considered. The Librarian's report referred to:-

- the National Year of Reading renews interest
 - 2008 National Year of Reading had been very successful with highlights including:-
 - Introduction of free library membership for Onchan residents
 - Royal Skandia Top Reads for children
 - Lunch with local author Trevor Norton
 - These initiatives helped to generate a 17% increase on loans from the library than the previous year.
- Increased Library Membership of 13.5%, which reflects the positive impact of the introduction of free membership for Onchan residents.
- Credit Crunch
 - Free computer tuition
 - Customers have reported that they are looking for an alternative to buying their own books
 - Customers are going to use the library computers and resources to help with finding employment
 - Customers without a broadband connection at home have access via the Library to websites offering price comparison information and can save costs on travel bookings
- Library Refurbishment- work expected to commence on improving the library entrance towards the end of March and furniture has been ordered to create a multi-purpose space within the library environment.
- Community Events, Arts and Crafts –
 - Mardi Gras mask making workshop has been arranged for 24th Feb
 - Easter holiday activities will be held on 7th April
 - School Visits have been arranged
 - Mr H.M. Briggs will present his Cup for Writing
 - National Storytelling Week is 31st Jan to 7th Feb
 - colourful displays to mark:-
 - the Chinese New Year
 - 250th Anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns
 - IOM Arts Council Contemporary Art Loan -Will Shakespeare by Ralph Steadman

Lead Member for Finance and General purposes thanked the Librarian for her concise and informative report and was pleased that it showed the good success which had been achieved at the Library.

3. Tenants Satisfaction Survey

Members gave thanks to Ms Dentith for the survey and report.

Mr Watterson gave thanks to Mrs Dentith for the report and for getting involved in the housing. He felt the Survey suggested that more tenants are satisfied, but it may well be that they just cannot be bothered to complete the questionnaires. He felt sure that the Survey will become more interesting in time when comparing statistics with other Local Authorities. He was pleased to note that the new DPN System was having a positive affect. He wished to commend the staff and encourage the working together as a team. He felt the tenants were our customers and this was a good way of judging how the Authority was performing. He further advised Members that this Survey was purely with regard to Housing.

In answer to question, the Deputy Clerk advised that one of the benefits of the survey was to show up any discrepancies. He advised that a large decline was indicated in tenants being aware of the policies regarding rent arrears. This was being rectified by issuing a flyer regarding the rent arrear procedures with rent letters that would be issued in March.

The Deputy Clerk advised that the analysis in total showed a drop from 92% to 75% in relation to housing applicants who were happy with the service provided. However, if you look at the specific questions which are answered the percentages are very high, it is possible that people have misunderstood or got confused as they progressed through the form. He further advised that:-

- Found staff helpful –increase of 3% to 96%
- Felt they had received the right information/guidance – increase of 2% to 93%
- impressive 99% found the housing application form straight forward

The Deputy Clerk advised that the bench mark had been set in 2007 with a return of 56% of the Questionnaires issued, compared with 49% this year.

The Deputy Clerk stated that the demographic on page 6 relates to how many people living in their household are aged 60 or over. The charts show figures displaying residents in the General Housing Stock and also figures including the Elderly Persons Complexes. However, this demonstrated that a significant number of returns were received from households with no children, possibly from mature families.

In answer to question, the Deputy Clerk advised that the questionnaires were issued to all tenants including those resident in Heywood Court and Springfield Court.

Lead Member for Properties and Amenities advised that the Survey proved that the Authority do offer a good service to the majority of their tenants. She requested statistics for the length of time people have been on the waiting list, and how long those who had been allocated over the last 5 years had also been on the waiting list.

The Deputy Clerk advised that looking at the number of tenants who had been housed, there were a number of people who fell within the singles category. He advised that it took single people longer to acquire the pointing, so it was only natural that they would be housed after a longer period of time on the housing waiting list.

C09/02/03/09

LETTERS, PETITIONS, MEMORIALS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

1. Lezayre Parish Commissioners Civic Service

Invitation received from The Chairman, Mrs F.J. Robinson and Members of Lezayre Parish Commissioners, cordially inviting Members to the Annual Civic Service to be held at Kirk Christ Church, Lezayre on Sunday 22nd February 2009 at 11.00 a.m. Commissioners Mr Watterson and Mrs Kelly indicated their attendance.

2. IOM Municipal Association – Minutes

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee of the IOM Municipal Association held on 29th January 2009, having been circulated, were noted.

C09/02/03/10 **MOTIONS**

None.

C09/02/03/11 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None.

C09/02/03/12 **OTHER BUSINESS**

1. Hartford Homes Site, Main Road, Onchan

District Surveyor to enquire with the Department of Transport the expiry time of the current licence issued for the impingement of scaffolding on the pavement at Royal Avenue and Main Road.

2. C08/03/01/20(2) - CCTV – Manx Arms Onchan Village

Brief discussion ensued with regard to the CCTV cameras located at the entrance to the Public Toilets on Main Road and the Car Park to the rear of the Manx Arms.

The Deputy Clerk advised that a resolution had been previously passed by the Board giving permission for the erection of the surveillance equipment on the street furniture and signage. He further advised that the cameras were owned by IOM Breweries.

The Chief Executive to communicate with IOM Breweries to ensure that they are complying with all relevant legislation

It was reported that there had been no vandalism on the Main Road Toilets since installation of the CCTV equipment.

3. Parks Vehicle – Citroen Berlingo

The Chief Executive advised that the purchase of the new vehicle had been included in the estimates for the current financial year ending 31st March 2009.

Vice-Chairman advised Members that this purchase would normally go out to tender, and perhaps policies had been altered to allow for the purchase through the Department of Transport. He felt that political Members seemed to be losing control of the situation and were not being kept apprised and these purchases need to be justified.

In answer to question, the Chief Executive advised that it was the Board's policy to run the vehicles until they were not financially viable. The Deputy Clerk advised it was a replacement for the old pick-up.

Chairman requested that the District Surveyor submit a memorandum advising which vehicle is being replaced, the serviceable history, mileage, etc.

4. Solar Panel

Vice-Chairman advised Members of a planning application which was placed before the Authority recently for a solar panel which received approval. He showed Members copies of the plan indicating the location of the solar panel. He advised that, regrettably, the item was a solar heating system and closely resembled the gantry around the Ben-my-Chree. He felt it was not attractive to those neighbours whose view it was obstructing. The Authority had approved the application and Members had presumed it was a solar panel of a certain type and nature. when the application was actually for a solar heating system.

The Vice-Chairman advised that the application had been applied for and approved. He felt that neither the District Surveyor nor any Member had picked up that it was going to be something other than a solar panel. He felt it would be prudent to photograph the solar heating system and send correspondence to the Department of Local Government and the Environment suggesting that the Planning Authorities needed to be more vigilant when approving such items in the future.

In answer to question, the Vice-Chairman advised that the application was exactly as the applicant had applied for - a total solar heating system. The header tank and expansion chamber was all exposed and the pipework was unclipped. He felt that he had carried out a disservice to the people in that area in the fact that he was not aware that the application was more than just a solar panel, if he had realised, he would have asked for some sort of screening.

The Chairman felt that the District Surveyor had missed the full solar heating system on the application and had got it wrong.

Mr Watterson recollected that it was to be a solar panel mounted on a frame on the garage roof. He felt the only thing overlooked was the header tank which spoiled the image. Normally all the pipework, etc, would be installed indoors.

The Vice-Chairman advised that the subtle change in the application was for an unvented solar heating system which would have its own supply of water contained within it. The position of the dormer windows prevented the panels from being placed on the roof.

Mr Thorn advised that this was a situation where the Authority do not have the powers to do anything with the application, but would it be possible to contact the applicant and explain that the installation was out of context with the plan and ask for screening.

Vice-Chairman advised that the Planning Enforcement Officer may look at the plans, view the installation, and he would be the first person to judge as to whether there was any recourse and he suggested this be the course of action to follow.

Mr Stowell proposed that the Authority contact the Department of Local Government and the Environment to ask the Planning Enforcement Officer if there was any infringement of the planning application as the impact was not envisaged. The representation on the drawing was not as intrusive on the plan as to what the final product has turned out to be. The solar panel faces the rear of the property, it is the view from the front of the property which was most offensive and affected the neighbours as it was located on the roof of the garage it impinged the seaview of the properties behind.

Mr Watterson advised Members that under planning terms you cannot object to a planning application due to a lack of view. Its more on the aesthetics of the installation, whilst on paper the application looks acceptable, in reality, the engineering works are a bit of an eye sore and appeared to be an amateur installation rather than a professional installation.

The Vice-Chairman and Chairman felt that the District Surveyor must be more rigorous in perusing any solar panel applications in the future.

District Surveyor to see if there was any infringement of existing byelaws and to contact the Department of Local Government and the Environment to ask the Planning Enforcement Officer if there was any infringement of the planning application as the impact was not as envisaged on the plan.

5. Street Lighting – King Edward Road

Vice-Chairman reported a fault on the street lighting outside of Number 1 and 2 King Edward Road.

6. C08/12/03/19(2) – Questions submitted by Mr B. Stowell

The Vice-Chairman asked if answers had been formulated to his questions which had been submitted in December 2008.

The Chairman advised that Standing Order No 7 no longer exists for submitting questions. He had accepted the questions and had received the completed answers from the Chief Executive on 5th January. He apologised for the delay, as he had been off the Island.

The Chairman asked the Chief Executive to circulate the answers to all Members of the Board.

The Chairman further advised that under Standing Order 7 Members could only view the answers and not ask questions. However, as there was no such order now in place, Members will be able to ask questions as they so wish.

7. C09/01/02/09(4.3) – Allotments

In answer to question, the Chief Executive advised that the matter was for consideration in the *In Committee* section of the agenda.

8. C09/01/02/12(4) – Dog Faeces

Chairman referred correspondence issued a resident in Fairfield Avenue, having been circulated to Members. He quoted:-

“ . . . that the Government’s Dog Warden regularly patrols our area and during the past 12 months has impounded 60 strays belonging to 45 addresses in Onchan. The small pavement sweeping vehicle is still in operation.

In addition, we employ a Community Warden to enforce our Dog Byelaws and have recently posted notices reminding dog owners of their responsibilities”.

He was disappointed that the matter of dog faeces was continuously being raised. He asked what prosecutions were taking place under the Dogs Act and also what action were the Police taking.

Vice-Chairman advised of a complainant who’s dog had picked up another dog’s excrement and brought it in to the house and he felt that officers were not taking the matter seriously.

Deputy Clerk asked for withdrawal of the comment, as the matter was taken seriously by officers and regular patrols were undertaken. He felt that the complainant may not have had her dog under control to be allowed to roam through the faeces.

Vice-Chairman advised that if the dog was out at night and had stepped in dog faeces, that it was a reasonable explanation and the complainant was very upset. He felt that he had not seen any reduction in the problem, and also there was an issue in two very notable areas - Onchan Park and Port Jack Glen. The Commissioners own operatives were getting covered in dog faeces when carrying out their normal duties.

The Chairman asked for a report from the Community Warden advising on the issue of dog faeces, prosecutions, etc. and requested that a letter be issued to Mr A.J.Earnshaw MHK, to enquire what the Police responsibility was in relation to stray dogs and what systems were in place between the Commissioners and Police of any notification of a stray dog which was to be impounded. Copy letter to be sent to Mr J. Shimmin at the Department of Local Government and the Environment.

In answer to question, the Chairman advised that the Government Dog Warden falls under the Department of Local Government and the Environment and there were kennels located in Kirk Michael. The Dog Warden notified the owner and waited from them to collect the animal and would charge them for their services. The fact was that when these dogs are claimed does the Dog Warden report them to the Police or to the Commissioners.

9. C09/01/02/12 - Skateboard Working Party

Members were advised that a meeting of the Skateboard Working Party would take place on Thursday 12th February 2009 at 7.00 p.m. The recommendations would be submitted to the Board for approval for Monday 16th February.

In answer to question, the Chief Executive advised that the recommendations could be discussed in the public domain.

Vice-Chairman cautioned that the Commissioners were still awaiting the recommendations of the Skateboard Working Party, so Members were still in the dark.

10. Rate Setting

In answer to question, the Chief Executive advised that the minutes of the extraordinary meeting would be circulated *In Public* with the agenda papers for the next meeting of the Board to be held on 16th February 2009.

The meeting terminated at 8.27 p.m. and the Board moved into Committee.

Minutes of the extra-ordinary meeting of the **ONCHAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS** held in the Boardroom, Hawthorn Villa, Main Road, Onchan, on Thursday 5th February 2009 at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Mr D. Crellin (Chairman)
Mr B. Stowell
Mr E.J. Thorn (Lead Member for Finance and General Purposes)
Mr S.R.J. Babb
Mr S.T. Black
Mr J.K. Watterson

Apologies: Mrs J. Kelly

In Attendance: Mr P.M. Hulme (Chief Executive)

C09/02/03/01

ESTIMATES of INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2009

The Chairman invited Mr Thorn, Lead member for Finance and General Purposes, to present his budget report.

Mr Thorn:-

“Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Lead Member for Finance and General Purposes, it is my duty to report on the probable financial result of the Authority’s activities for the year to 31st March 2009 and on the estimates for the forthcoming year to 31st March 2010 which have been agreed by Members and are set out in detail in the document circulated to Members

In the past, this duty has fallen to the Vice-Chairman, as Chairman of the Policy and Finance Committee, but for the election in 2008 the structure of the Board was changed, reducing the number of Commissioners from 10 to 7 and disposing of the Committee system. I am assured by our longer serving members that this has greatly streamlined our decision-making process.

I would like to express our grateful appreciation to all of the Authority’s staff for their endeavours during this past difficult year. The sudden and untimely death of our Chief Financial Officer, Mr Colin Clague, was particularly unsettling for all of his colleagues, and I must thank our Chief Executive, Mr Malcolm Hulme, Mr Tom Reed of PKF, and all of our finance staff for their hard work in maintaining the Authority’s accounts during this challenging period.

The news of the past few months has, of course, been dominated by the ‘credit crunch’, the downturn in the global economic climate which has lately resulted in a confirmed recession in the UK.

The Minister for the Department of Local Government and the Environment, John Shimmin MHK, in a letter to all Local Authorities, requested that proposed rate increases should be kept to a minimum so as to afford our people some respite from ever increasing bills during a difficult period in the economic cycle.

Treasury Minister Allan Bell MHK has also recently commented that capital schemes are needed at a time of economic downturn to generate work.

You will recall that last year the Board had to grasp a very prickly nettle and approve a rate increase higher than inflation in order to stabilise the effect of ‘rollercoaster’ increases and decreases from previous years. I am pleased to report that the strategy was entirely successful and, although criticised at the time, it has proved to be highly accurate and very effective, placing Onchan on a firm footing to continue prudent budgeting into the future.

The Board has therefore been determined to avoid further erratic changes in rates whilst wishing to comply with the Minister’s request and strive to keep the level of rate increase well below the rate of inflation.

Isle of Man Retail Price inflation was reported to be 2.8% in December 2008 and whilst we have used a conservative figure of 2.5% inflation in our own forward calculations we expect this, too, to reduce over the coming months.

In light of this, we have firstly proposed that the Authority’s miscellaneous charges – for trade refuse collection, bin hire, garage rents and search fees – should remain at 2008 levels and, further, that the Authority should now use

some of its reserves to provide funds for capital improvements in the District, thus limiting any increase for our ratepayers.

Major projects undertaken during the past financial year include:

- Housing improvements, electrical rewiring and insulation.
- Street lighting,
- and a replacement for one of our large refuse vehicles

Our collection of income – rates and rents – has been remarkably good and has exceeded 99% of the total due. There has been a large increase in the number of direct debits for this purpose and the Authority encourages this method of payment.

For the year ahead we have identified a number of affordable projects that will benefit our residents and visitors to the District.

These include:

- Additional street lighting
- Insulation at our sheltered housing complexes
- New safety surfaces at our play parks
- A replacement for our small refuse vehicle
- Improvements in the furniture and carpeting at the Library
- Additional computer hardware to ensure business continuity
- And, the relocation of our boardroom, which will provide disabled access and a potential additional source of income by hiring out as a meeting or seminar room.

Mr Chairman, the total agreed rate borne expenditure estimated for the year to 31st March 2010, is two million, four thousand, seven hundred and thirty three pounds (£2,004,733).

As previously indicated, it has been proposed that we utilise some of our reserves and estimate for a balance in revenue reserves at the end of the 2009/10 financial year in the sum of five hundred and seventy two thousand, two hundred and ninety seven pounds (£572,297).

In line with members' determination to keep this year's increase below the level of inflation our recommendation is to levy a rate of 266p in the pound, an increase of just 4p, or 1.5%, over the current year's rate.

Placing this in context, the rise for most properties will be little more than 1p per day.

I therefore propose Mr Chairman, that a rate of 266p in the pound be levied by this Authority for the 2009/10 financial year."

Mr Stowell seconded the motion and responded by saying that he would like to re-iterate Mr Thorn's thanks to all those who assisted in formulating the budget. In hindsight the rate set for 2008/09 was exactly right for the prevailing circumstances and we can say that the former Board of Commissioners have been absolutely vindicated for their courageous decision. There has been much speculation about our reserves, but contrary to rumour no additional money has been found. The Board have merely resolved to bring together many of the Authority's funds under one heading and this may appear to be an unusual increase.

The level of reserves, however, has to be offset against major borrowing. This Authority is borrowing very heavily and carries significant debt from projects that were completed, perhaps, up to 50 years ago.

There are new projects within the estimates, some of which he agreed with and some of which he opposed, but this is a democratic Board and Members should show solidarity for approved resolutions.

He was very happy to support Mr Thorn's proposal. The Board have, quite sensibly, decided to put the Authority on a firm footing and he thanked all members for their hard work.

Mr Black spoke generally against the increase.

Mr Babb agreed with Mr Thorn and Mr Stowell and supported their statements. The economy is going through difficult times. He felt that he could not morally stand by and allow rates to vary erratically and he welcomed the medium term strategy of small increases that will allow the Authority to move forward and improve services to the residents of the area. He said that Members must collectively do what is best for the District. He gave thanks to all staff and made particular reference to Mr Colin Clague. He said that the work, attitude and perseverance of the staff was a credit not just to the Authority but to the whole island.

Mr Watterson endorsed Mr Thorn's speech and included his own thanks to the staff of the Authority including Mr Colin Clague. He agreed with Mr Stowell and echoed all the comments Mr Stowell had made. Some commissioners who stood for the last election had lost their seats because of the decisions that the Board had taken, this was unfortunate and probably due to their position rather than their person, but they had been proved right in the end. He said that the Authority can not stand still. We must be a progressive Authority and move forward whilst giving our residents value for money.

Mr Crellin said that he was not present for the 'in committee' stages of the rate setting, but he found 1.5% to be acceptable. He reiterated the Board's appreciation to Mr Thorn and the staff for their hard work. *Mr Crellin reiterated his opinion that the rate increase last year could have been at a lower level, as the Authority had over 900k in reserves. (blue print amended by minutes dated 16th February 2009)*

In answer to question from Mr Stowell the Chief Executive said that the Authority's current borrowings, including housing, amounted to more than 15 million pounds.

Mr Black counter-proposed a rate of 262p but received no seconder.

A vote was taken on the original proposal and it was **RESOLVED that a rate of 266p in the pound be levied by this Authority for the 2009/10 financial year.**

For: Messrs Crellin, Stowell, Babb, Thorn and Watterson
Against: Mr Black

Meeting ended at 7.24pm