

Extraordinary Council – 28 January 2014

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **28 January 2014** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley

Cllr Mrs P Aves	Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr C I Black	Cllr M Maddocks
Cllr Mrs L A Butcher	Cllr Mrs C M Mason
Cllr J P Cottis	Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr Mrs J E McPherson
Cllr R R Dray	Cllr D Merrick
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn	Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr K J Gordon	Cllr T E Mountain
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr J D Griffin	Cllr Mrs C E Roe
Cllr Mrs A V Hale	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr B T Hazlewood	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr Mrs D Hoy	Cllr D J Sperring
Cllr M Hoy	Cllr M J Steptoe
Cllr Mrs G A Lucas-Gill	Cllr I H Ward

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs M R Carter, P A Capon, Mrs T J Capon, K H Hudson and Mrs C A Weston.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Dave	-	Chief Executive
A Bugeja	-	Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services
Y Woodward	-	Head of Finance
S Fowler	-	Head of Information and Customer Services
S Scrutton	-	Head of Planning and Transportation
J Bostock	-	Member Services Manager

1 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2014/15 – 2018/19

Council considered the report of the Head of Finance on approving the integrated three year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) starting in 2014/15.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor C I Black, observed that, as in previous years, the Council did not seem to attract the Government financial support available to some other Authorities and that Local Government finance formulas became more complicated year on year. The Council had already achieved significant savings. The proposals for changes to the car parking tariff/charges appeared harsh in terms of the potential impact on shop

keepers and those negotiating business leases. There appeared to be two conflicting views associated with the town centres – they are either seen as in difficulty and requiring assistance to recover or seen as ‘cash cows’ that need nurturing. Paragraph 15.2 of the MTFS report highlighted the need for the Council to be proactive in developing opportunities for growth in local businesses in order to achieve growth in this income stream. The introduction of charging for Saturday afternoon parking could be seen as particularly inappropriate.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr T G Cutmore, observed that report proposals were the culmination of many months of work. The economic climate was very challenging, with external funding sources difficult to access. The Council received only a fraction of the business rates. Future years would see a host of challenges and the Council needed to ensure it remained on a sound financial footing. Unlike many other authorities, the District did not need to borrow to balance its finances and such a position needed to be maintained. The Council did consistently well in terms of external measures of its services. The MTFS report indicated that 49% of respondents to a public consultation would be happy to see an increase in Council Tax if it avoided further reductions in services. Part of the proposals involved the Council looking to assist residents affected by surface water flooding through the facilitation of monies and resources from appropriate sources. It was notable that the Council received more compliments than complaints from residents whilst having one of the lowest spends per head in Essex. In terms of Council Tax, proposals represented an increase of 7.5 pence per week on the average band D property. It would be almost three years before the proposed parking charges came on stream and the charges would be relatively small in the context of the overall costs of running a vehicle.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, Cllr S P Smith, observed that the MTFS proposals were realistic, pragmatic and honest and were based on matters of fact. A number of savings had already been achieved through contract arrangements. Whilst the proposed increase in Council Tax could attract an additional £110,000 per annum, one third of this amount would be written off due to inflation. It should be remembered that the MTFS covered a number of years and needed to address particular issues associated with 2015/16. In terms of income, the significant sums required could not be achieved overnight and needed forward planning. It could be appreciated that there was always likely to be differences of opinion over subjects such as car parking charges. However, even with the introduction of the proposed car parking tariff/charges, the Council would not be that far out of line compared to many other Authorities. When the Council had introduced free afternoon parking the economic climate had been better. Proposals involved the introduction of standard charges and would keep the Council in a reasonable position within a difficult financial climate. Other Councils recognised the value of Rochford’s robust financial position.

The Leader of the Rochford District Residents Group, Cllr J R F Mason, observed that a 1.89% increase in Council Tax, combined with an increase in

parking charges representing an additional 3%, would mean an increase of 4.89% for many residents. In the context of the Council having already achieved savings of £800,000 through other means, an increase in the parking tariff/charges seemed inappropriate. In practice, car parking income would do little to address the remaining financial gap of £500,000 and could damage trade, bring pressure to side roads and move shoppers to out of town facilities where parking is free. Given recent Government observations on Councils raising monies through parking charges, it may well be that the Secretary of State could look to penalise the Rochford District for its approach. It could be appropriate for there to be an independent review of the proposals associated with car parking. A review would not prevent the Council from setting the proposed Council Tax. With regard to flooding, financial liability associated with works to assist residents should sit with appropriate land owners and Authorities. It would be inappropriate for the District to set a budget for such works.

The Leader of the Green Group, Cllr M Hoy, observed that the current free Saturday afternoon parking arrangement was very important for traders. In that current car parking charges resourced overall car parking arrangements, residents were not necessarily getting Saturday afternoon parking for free. An increase of 80p to £1 for a one hour charging period would be a 25% increase. With regard to Council Tax it may well be that Government requirements will mean that the Council will need to restrict its rate to 1.5%. It could be appropriate to consider applying monies aimed at the proposed Innovation Fund for the purpose of budget reduction.

During discussion of proposals for a forum to consider surface water flooding issues it was observed that the terms of reference would be key. The Council would need to be sure that such a forum would be able to achieve objectives. Member experience with the Local Highways Panel highlighted the difficulties District Councils can face when endeavouring to lever assistance from other Authorities. It was confirmed that the approach of the Council would not be about subsidising land owners and responsible Authorities, but looking to ensure that residents are served as well as possible by those responsible. It was observed that legislative provision was in place requiring housing developments to have sustainable drainage systems whereby surface water does not flow into other areas.

Responding to a question on toilet facility provision the Head of Finance confirmed that a report was due to be submitted to the meeting of The Executive scheduled for 5 March 2014. A Member observed that public consultation had not been undertaken with regard to the Hullbridge and Great Wakering toilet facilities, something that would be appropriate to inform any review.

Recommendation (1) of the MTFs report was moved by Cllr T G Cutmore and seconded by Cllr S P Smith.

On a requisition pursuant to Council procedure Rule 17.4, a recorded vote was taken on the motion as follows:-

- For (15) Cllrs Mrs L A Butcher; J P Cottis; T G Cutmore; R R Dray; Mrs H L A Glynn; K J Gordon; J E Grey; Mrs G A Lucas-Gill; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; Mrs J A Mockford; C G Seagers; S P Smith; M J Steptoe and Mrs B J Wilkins.
- Against (7) Cllrs C I Black; Mrs D Hoy; M Hoy; C J Lumley; Mrs C M Mason; J R F Mason and R A Oatham.
- Abstain (10) Cllrs Mrs P Aves; J D Griffin; Mrs A V Hale; B T Hazelwood; Mrs J R Lumley; M Maddocks; T E Mountain; Mrs C E Roe; D J Sperring and I H Ward.

The motion was declared carried and it was:-

Resolved

That the Council's parking tariff be increased as set out in the MTFS report and that parking charges be introduced for the period 1.00pm to 7.00pm on Saturdays. (HPT)

Recommendation (2) of the MTFS report was moved by Cllr T G Cutmore and seconded by Cllr K J Gordon.

On a requisition pursuant to Council procedure rule 17.4, a recorded vote was taken on a motion as follows:-

- For (32) Cllrs Mrs P Aves; C I Black; L A Butcher; J P Cottis; T G Cutmore; R R Dray; Mrs H L A Glynn; K J Gordon; J E Grey; J D Griffin; Mrs A V Hale; B T Hazelwood; Mrs D Hoy; M Hoy; Mrs G A Lucas-Gill; C J Lumley; Mrs J R Lumley; M Maddocks; Mrs C M Mason; J R F Mason; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; Mrs J A Mockford; T E Mountain; R A Oatham; Mrs C E Roe; C G Seagers; S P Smith; D J Sperring; M J Steptoe; I H Ward and Mrs B J Wilkins.

Against (0)

Abstain (0)

The motion was declared carried and it was:-

Resolved

That the principle of a forum for considering surface water flooding issues in the District be agreed with details of the arrangements and terms of reference reported to Council on 25 February 2014 (HPT/HLEMS)

It was further:-

Resolved

- (1) That the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2014/18 to 2018/19 be agreed, including the proposals contained therein and the following key budgetary changes:-
 - (a) Planning Enforcement Officer post (PT 07) to be added to the permanent establishment.
 - (b) Emergency Planning Salaries to be increased by £6,000 for additional on-call officers
 - (c) Member Training budget to be increased by £3,000
 - (d) Local Development Framework budget to be set at £31,000.
 - (e) Materials Recycling Facility budget to be set at £25,000 for 2014/15 only.
 - (f) An Innovation Fund to be set up funded by vacant posts removed from the Establishment.
- (2) That the core estimates for 2014/15, as shown in the Draft Budget Book attached to the MTFS report, be agreed.
- (3) That, for the fifth consecutive year, Member Allowances and expenses be frozen at current levels for the Municipal Year 2014/15.
- (4) That the schedule of fees and charges for 2014/15, as detailed in the MTFS report, be agreed.
- (5) That the Capital Programme, as detailed in the MTFS report, be agreed.
- (6) That the use of Earmarked Reserves, as detailed in the MTFS report, be agreed.
- (7) That the provision of toilet facilities be reviewed as part of the Council's ongoing Asset Management Review.

- (8) That the Non Domestic Rates Return be submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government by 31 January 2014, with authority delegated to the Head of Finance to make changes to the final return.
- (9) That authority be delegated to the Head of Finance to set the amount of Local Council Tax Support Scheme grant to be allocated to individual Parish/Town Councils on the basis of the principles agreed by Council.
- (10) That the Pay Policy Statement for 2014/15, as detailed in the MTFS report, be adopted subject to any amendments arising from national pay settlements. (HF)

Note: Cllr M Hoy wished to be recorded as voting against resolutions (1) to (10) above.

2 ELECTORAL REVIEW WORKING GROUP

Council considered constituting and appointing to an Electoral Review Working Group. It was noted that the Boundary Commission would be making a presentation at the Full Council meeting scheduled for 25 February 2014.

On a motion, moved by Cllr T G Cutmore and seconded by Cllr J R Mason, it was:-

Resolved

That an Electoral Review Working Group be constituted and appointed to for the purpose of formulating recommendations to Full Council in relation to the Electoral Review of the District Council, appointees to comprise six Members of the Conservative Group, one Member of the Liberal Democrat Group, one Member of the Green Group and one Member of Rochford District Residents Group. (HICS/HLEMS)

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Chairman

Date

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