

Extraordinary Council – 10 February 2015

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **10 February 2015** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn

Cllr C I Black	Cllr Mrs G A Lucas-Gill
Cllr J C Burton	Cllr M Maddocks
Cllr Mrs L A Butcher	Cllr Mrs C M Mason
Cllr P A Capon	Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr Mrs T J Capon	Cllr Mrs J E McPherson
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr D Merrick
Cllr R R Dray	Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr J H Gibson	Cllr T E Mountain
Cllr K J Gordon	Cllr Mrs C E Roe
Cllr J D Griffin	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr Mrs A V Hale	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr J Hayter	Cllr D J Sperring
Cllr N J Hookway	Cllr M J Steptoe
Cllr Mrs D Hoy	Cllr I H Ward
Cllr M Hoy	Cllr Mrs C A Weston
Cllr K H Hudson	Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins
Cllr J L Lawmon	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs M R Carter, R A Oatham and Mrs M H Spencer.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Dave	- Chief Executive
A Bugeja	- Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services
Y Woodward	- Head of Finance
N Khan	- Director
S Scrutton	- Director
J Raveendran	- Assistant Director, Resource Services
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs J C Burton, R R Dray, J L Lawmon, Mrs J R Lumley, Mrs C E Roe, D J Sperring and I H Ward each declared a non pecuniary interest in item 4 of the Agenda on new Council ward boundaries by virtue of membership of Rayleigh Town Council. Cllr Mrs C E Roe declared a further non pecuniary interest in the same item by virtue of membership of the Electoral Boundary Review Member Advisory Group. Cllr J H Gibson also declared a non pecuniary interest in the same item by virtue of membership of Rochford Parish Council.

29 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2015/16 – 2019/20

Council considered the report of the Head of Finance on approving the integrated five year medium term financial strategy starting in 2015/16.

It was noted that the part night lighting budget of £30,000 was not required and that recommendation 2(g) of the report was to be deleted.

It was further noted that the NDR budget for leisure premises was to be reduced from £119,000 to £54,400; recommendation 3 of the report should be amended accordingly.

It was also noted that £50,000 of the budgetary provision for Cherry Orchard Country Park should remain in the current year budget, rather than moved to 2016/17 in order to facilitate the potential purchase of land at Grove Wood; recommendation 5 of the report should be amended to reflect this.

Officers also emphasised that it was anticipated that the Council would need to pay for the removal of recyclables and that provision for this expenditure would need to be made in the budget, once figures were available.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr S P Smith, observed that the Council's financial position was a positive one, following a period of prudent financial management and the recent redesign of the Council. He considered that it was appropriate therefore to freeze the level of Council Tax for 2015/16 at the current level.

He also stated that the Review Committee had recently looked in detail at the proposed medium term financial strategy. He confirmed that he fully supported the budget recommendations outlined in the officer's report. He made particular reference to the hard work that had been done at the budget away days and by the Finance Team and thanked Yvonne Woodward for all her hard work on her final budget for the Council.

The Leader of the Green and Rochford District Residents Group, Cllr J R F Mason, observed that the recent Autumn Statement indicated a further period of austerity. The tax savings that had been announced in the Statement would, in part, be funded from a reduction in Local Government grant. He was therefore unable to support recommendations 2c) and 2d) of the report.

He further stated that the budget away days should be open to the public. The Leader of the Council emphasised that the budget process had been conducted successfully in the same manner for a number of years; holding away days in public could stifle open financial debate between the different groups.

The Leader of the UKIP Group, Cllr J Hayter, affirmed that the figure in the second sentence of paragraph 6.2 of the officer's report should be shown as £1.451 trillion, and not £1,451 billion.

One Member, in debating Council reserves, observed that funds might be better used to help those residents made homeless and that the Council should explore the possibility of using redundant Council properties to house the homeless. Another Member, however, queried where such empty Council properties were and, while recognising that homelessness levels were better than they were, nevertheless agreed that they should be lower. It was also emphasised that the Council was currently reviewing its homelessness strategy.

During debate of recommendation 2d) of the officer's report, one Member did not perceive that there was evidence to support the proposal to bring the pest control service in house and further considered that the costs of the proposed service appeared high. In support of the recommendation, another Member stressed that the rat population was increasing and needed to be tackled; it was also observed that this was particularly a problem in rural parts of the District.

In objection to recommendation 2c) of the officer's report one Member perceived that the County Council should be facilitating the use of the Stock Road site by Rochford residents. Furthermore, there was no reciprocal arrangement from Southend on Borough Council in respect of the use of the Castle Road site by Southend Borough residents. In support of the recommendation, the Portfolio Holder for the Environment made reference to residents in the east of the District having to travel up to 13 miles to access the Castle Road site. Recommendation 2c) constituted a good public service to residents.

During debate of minor budget items, one Member made reference to the removal of graffiti, the budget of which had not been spent during the current financial year. The Portfolio Holder for Finance stated that the Council was responsible for removal of graffiti from Council property; it was therefore important to retain this budget. The Council, in removing graffiti from privately owned property, makes every attempt to recover the costs from the relevant landowner.

One Member questioned the need to include provision in the parks and open spaces budget for £150,000 contract contingency over three years in respect of the possibility of any future failure in the grounds maintenance contract. The Portfolio Holder for Finance emphasised that this was a prudent measure to take in respect of a new contract; this amount would be written back each year, if not used.

During debate of funding for the windmill, one Member observed that there could be merit in the Council exploring options for a public/private partnership for the windmill, given depreciation and maintenance costs, as well as the costs of licensing the building for weddings, the latter of which provided a modest income. Another Member emphasised that the windmill is part of the Essex Museums Service and drew attention to the high number of visitors to

the windmill last year, including school visits. Particular reference was made of the windmill being a notable asset for the District, attaining Quality Assured Visitor status and a winner of a Museums and Heritage Award; the Council was a good custodian of this asset.

A Motion that the level of Council Tax for 2015/16 be frozen at the same level as that of 2014/15 was moved by Cllr S P Smith and seconded by Cllr T G Cutmore.

A recorded vote was taken on the motion as follows:-

For (35) Cllrs C I Black, J C Burton, Mrs L A Butcher, P A Capon, Mrs T J Capon, T G Cutmore, R R Dray, J H Gibson, Mrs H L A Glynn, K J Gordon, J D Griffin, Mrs A V Hale, J Hayter, N J Hookway, Mrs D Hoy, M Hoy, K H Hudson, J L Lawmon, Mrs G A Lucas-Gill, 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, Mrs C E Roe, C G Seagers, S P Smith, D J Sperring, M J Steptoe, I H Ward, Mrs C A Weston and Mrs B J Wilkins.

Against (0)

Abstain (0)

The motion was declared carried and it was:-

Resolved

That the level of Council Tax for Rochford District Council for 2015/16 be frozen at the same level as for 2014/15. (HF)

Cllr S P Smith moved a further Motion, seconded by Cllr T G Cutmore, that there be no charge included in the schedule of fees and charges for the interment of children under 12 years and this was carried on a show of hands.

It was further:-

Resolved

(1) That the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2015/16 to 2019/20 be agreed, including the proposals contained within the officer's report, with the following key budgetary changes:-

- a) New budget of £7,500 for the social media strategy and any required subscriptions.

- b) New budget of £15,000 to support the delivery of the economic growth strategy.
 - c) Increase to the recycling contract costs to provide access for Rochford District residents to the Southend Borough Council amenity site in Stock Road.
 - d) New budget of £40,000 for the reintroduction of a pest control service, final details to be determined by the Portfolio Holder for introduction from April 2015.
 - e) New budget of £25,000 for flood prevention works.
 - f) New budget of £6,000 for community safety accreditation.
- (2) That the core estimates for 2015/16, as shown in the attached draft budget book, with the noted revision to the estimate for leisure premises business rates, be agreed.
 - (3) That the schedule of fees and charges for 2015/16 be agreed, subject to the removal of the interment fee for children under the age of 12.
 - (4) That the capital programme with £50,000 of the Cherry Orchard provision retained in 2014/15, as detailed in the MTFS report, be agreed.
 - (5) That the use of earmarked reserves, as detailed in the MTFS report, be agreed.
 - (6) That the Non Domestic Rates Return (NNDR1) be submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government. (HF)

(Note: Cllrs P A Capon, Mrs T J Capon, Mrs D Hoy, M Hoy, Mrs C M Mason and J R F Mason wished it to be recorded that they had voted against resolutions 1c) and 1d))

30 NEW COUNCIL WARD BOUNDARIES

(Note: Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn wished it to be noted that she took no part in the debate of this item of business)

Council considered the report of the Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services on the second stage consultation response to the Boundary Commission on new Council ward boundaries.

During debate, the point was made by some Members that the Ward names proposed for Hockley were not sufficiently descriptive of the actual locations covered by the Wards. It was argued that Hockley West and Hockley East and Ashingdon more accurately reflected the areas covered by the two

Wards. Another view was expressed that a lot of work had gone on to arrive at the proposed Ward names and boundaries and the proposal before Members was the culmination of all this work. The proposal included simple Ward names, which was preferred by the Commission.

One of the Rochford Ward Members observed that it would be preferable to name the proposed Rochford Wards Rochford Central and Rochford Rural, as this would more accurately reflect the locations than the proposed Rochford North and Rochford South.

Some Members considered that the Commission's proposal for a Grange Ward should be rejected in favour of Sweyne Park and Grange, while others considered that the Ward should be called Grange, given that Sweyne Park did not fall within the ward boundary.

In response to Member concern relating to the proposals to transfer Deepdene Avenue, Hedgehope Avenue and Downhall Close areas from the Downhall and Rawreth Wards to Grange Ward and to transfer the Victoria Avenue area into the Downhall and Rawreth Ward, officers stressed that the proposals ensured that boundaries were coterminous with the County Division line in order to avoid the creation of small Town Council wards. Caution should be exercised in revising the boundary for one Ward as this would have a knock on effect to other wards and could significantly skew electorate figures. Detailed plans had been made available to Members of the Advisory Group; it was a very complex process, with no perfect solution.

In response to a Member concern relating to the fact that the proposals only took into account planning permissions already granted, rather than making provision for sites contained within the Council's Core Strategy, officers emphasised that the Commission's criteria were very strict – sites to be included in the Ward boundary determinations were those under construction, in receipt of planning permission or sites that were highly likely to be built within six years.

A Motion moved by Cllr K H Hudson and seconded by Cllr T G Cutmore that the names of the Hockley Wards detailed in the table on page 4.5 of the officer's report be amended to Hockley West and Hockley East and Ashingdon was carried on a show of hands.

A further Motion, moved by Cllr Mrs J A Mockford and seconded by Cllr T E Mountain, that the name of the Grange Ward detailed in the table on page 4.5 of the officer's report be amended to Sweyne Park and Grange was carried on a show of hands.

An additional Motion, moved by Cllr Mrs J A Mockford and seconded by Cllr T E Mountain, that the Sweyne Park and Grange Ward should include the Victoria Avenue area, but not include Deepdene Avenue, Hedgehope Avenue and Downhall Close areas was lost on a show of hands.

Resolved

- (1) That the Working Group's recommendations, as set out in the table in paragraph 3 of the officer's report, form the Council's final consultation response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- (2) That the Working Group's recommendations, as set out in the table at paragraph 4 of the officer's report, form the Council's final consultation response to the LGBCE, subject to Grange Ward being renamed Sweyne Park and Grange Ward, Hockley Ward being renamed Hockley West and Hockley and Ashingdon Ward renamed Hockley East and Ashingdon.
- (3) That the remainder of the LGBCE's proposals be formally supported, as they accord completely with the Council's original proposals, as provided in its stage 1 consultation.
- (4) That authority be delegated to officers, in consultation with the Working Group, to finalise the wording of the final stage (stage 2) consultation response required to be submitted to the LGBCE. (HLEMS)

31 ALLOCATION OF SEATS ON COMMITTEES

Council considered the report of the Head of Legal, Estates and Member Services on the allocation of seats to Committees following a change in political composition.

Resolved

- (1) That Committee seat allocations be as shown in the appendix to the officer's report.
- (2) That the one seat on the Licensing Committee to which the Green and Rochford District Residents Group do not wish to nominate be taken by the Conservative Group. (HLEMS)

The meeting closed at 9.07 pm.

Chairman

Date

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