

## Council – 15 December 2020

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Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **15 December 2020** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr R R Dray  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs C A Weston

Cllr Mrs D L Belton	Cllr D Merrick
Cllr Mrs L A Butcher	Cllr R Milne
Cllr C C Cannell	Cllr J E Newport
Cllr M R Carter	Cllr Mrs C A Pavelin
Cllr Mrs T L Carter	Cllr Mrs C E Roe
Cllr D S Efde	Cllr Mrs L Shaw
Cllr A H Eves	Cllr P J Shaw
Cllr Mrs J R Gooding	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr B T Hazlewood	Cllr D J Sperring
Cllr N J Hookway	Cllr C M Stanley
Cllr Mrs D Hoy	Cllr M J Steptoe
Cllr M Hoy	Cllr I H Ward
Cllr K H Hudson	Cllr M J Webb
Cllr G J Ioannou	Cllr M G Wilkinson
Cllr M J Lucas-Gill	Cllr A L Williams
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley	Cllr S A Wilson
Cllr Mrs C M Mason	Cllr S E Wootton
Cllr Mrs J E McPherson	

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J C Burton

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

A Hutchings	- Acting Managing Director
M Harwood-White	- Assistant Director, Assets & Commercial
M Hotten	- Assistant Director, Place & Environment
A Law	- Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic
N Lucas	- Assistant Director, Resources
L Moss	- Assistant Director, People & Communities
N Amor	- HR/Transformation Project Lead
S Worthington	- Principal Democratic & Corporate Services Officer
L Morris	- Democratic Services Officer

### **218 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman in due course.

### 219 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr A L Williams declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 12, Future Role of the Investment Board, by virtue of being Vice-Chairman of the Investment Board.

Cllr M J Steptoe declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 12, Future Role of the Investment Board, by virtue of being Chairman of the Investment Board.

### 220 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN, LEADER OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE

The Chairman congratulated Cllr Mrs T L Carter who had been shortlisted for the LGIU (Local Government Information Unit) Councillor Awards and was highly commended under the category of 'COVID-19 Hero'. The Chairman advised Members that Cllr Mrs T L Carter was nominated by Cllr Mrs C M Mason after volunteering to retrain as a nursing assistant in order to help during the pandemic.

The Chairman also thanked all Councillors who had helped those in need throughout the pandemic.

The Leader made the following announcement:-

"Tomorrow, or possibly later tonight, the new Portfolio Holder chart will be circulated, but I thought it would be helpful just to go through the key headlines for Members this evening.

I am delighted to welcome Cllr Danielle Belton, who joins the Executive team with responsibility for the newly named portfolio, Commercial, Business, Local Economy and Leisure, which replaces the old Enterprise portfolio. Leisure switches to this portfolio given the significant financial support provided to Fusion. It is important, particularly over the next couple of years, that there is close focus on their performance as a business.

Finance is renamed Financial Services, and continues under Cllr Simon Smith, but responsibilities remain unchanged.

Planning is renamed Strategic Planning under Cllr Ian Ward. As the name implies, emphasis will be on the strategic infrastructure aspects of development, highways, transport and regeneration as well as the creation of the new local plan.

Environment is renamed Environment and Place under Cllr Arthur Williams, and it now includes the impacts of climate change and air quality within the district. Meetings to do with the River Crouch and coastal matters will now fall within this portfolio.

Whilst Community remains an unchanged name under Cllr Mike Webb, increased opportunities will be explored towards community engagement, especially with younger people.

Cllr Daniel Efde will head up the newly named IT, Tourism, Housing and Parking portfolio. For the time being, and for continuity, the implementation of actions from the car parking working group will be seen through by Cllr Efde. Housing and homelessness will also be managed under his portfolio.

In addition to the standard strategic responsibilities as Leader, I will be overseeing the Asset Development Programme until completion. I will also be reviewing how residents and businesses engage to ensure that the customer experience with the Council continues to be positive.

As well as supporting me in all of my responsibilities as Deputy Leader, Cllr Cheryl Roe's responsibilities will include emphasis upon Council communications, including Social Media, transformation and the Connect Programme.

As I said earlier, a new portfolio organisation chart will be circulated to Members tomorrow."

### **221 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND MEMBER QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Proper Officer reported that, pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 12.2, the following Member questions had been received:-

- (1) From Cllr J E Newport to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Cllr I H Ward:-

"As of 30 November 2020, how many planning enforcement cases were outstanding?"

The Portfolio Holder responded as follows:-

"The current caseload of the planning enforcement team is split into two groups; cases still being investigated and cases where formal action has been taken and where compliance is being monitored.

As of the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020 there were a total of 286 being investigated at this moment in time."

- (2) From Cllr J E Newport to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Cllr I H Ward:-

"As of 30 November 2020, how many full-time planning officers were directly employed by the Council, and not on sick leave, parental leave or on holiday?"

The Portfolio Holder responded as follows:-

"The Council employs 12 FTE Planning Officers. Of these currently 0.4 of FTE (2 days) is on maternity leave (returning 23 February 2021). 1 FTE (Planning Enforcement Officer) is currently vacant.

The 12 FTEs include the Planning Manager, 4 Team Leaders, 4 Senior Planners and 3 Planners.”

### **222 MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD BETWEEN THE PERIOD 7 OCTOBER 2020 TO 30 NOVEMBER 2020**

Council received the Minutes of Executive and Committee meetings held between the period 7 October 2020 to 30 November 2020 and these Minutes were noted.

### **223 REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEES TO COUNCIL**

#### **Report of the Review Committee – 2020/21 Mid Year Treasury Management Review**

Council considered the report of the Review Committee providing an update of the Council’s treasury management activity for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020 in accordance with the Council’s treasury management policy and good practice in treasury management.

#### **Resolved**

That the contents of the Treasury Management Mid Year Report be noted. (ADR)

#### **Report of the Review Committee – Waste and Recycling Strategy**

Council considered the report of the Review Committee recommending to Council that the attached waste and recycling strategy (Appendix A) be adopted.

In response to a Member question requesting clarification that the council tax for new build houses would be cost neutral, officers advised that the costs of the contract does not necessarily follow the cost of the houses exactly, but advised that the council tax contribution would go towards running the refuse contract.

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

For (35) Cllrs Mrs D L Belton; Mrs L A Butcher; C C Cannell; M R Carter; Mrs T L Carter; R R Dray; D S Efde; A H Eves; Mrs J R Gooding; B T Hazlewood; M Hoy; K H Hudson; G J Ioannou; M J Lucas-Gill; Mrs J R Lumley; Mrs C M Mason; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; R Milne; J E Newport; Mrs C A Pavelin; Mrs C E Roe; Mrs L Shaw; P J Shaw; S P Smith; D J Sperring; C M Stanley; M J Steptoe; I H Ward; M J Webb; Mrs C A Weston; M G Wilkinson; A L Williams; S A Wilson; S E Wootton

Against (0)

Abstain (0)

**Resolved**

That the waste and recycling strategy be adopted. (ADPE)

**Report of the Licensing & Appeals Committee – Consultation on the Draft Statement of Licensing Policy – Licensing Act 2003**

Council considered the report of the Licensing & Appeals Committee detailing proposed amendments to the draft Statement of Licensing Policy that was approved for consultation by the Licensing & Appeals Committee on 1 July 2020.

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

For (34) Cllrs Mrs D L Belton; Mrs L A Butcher; C C Cannell; M R Carter; Mrs T L Carter; R R Dray; D S Efde; A H Eves; Mrs J R Gooding; B T Hazlewood; M Hoy; K H Hudson; M J Lucas-Gill; Mrs J R Lumley; Mrs C M Mason; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; R Milne; J E Newport; Mrs C A Pavelin; Mrs C E Roe; Mrs L Shaw; P J Shaw; S P Smith; D J Sperring; C M Stanley; M J Steptoe; I H Ward; M J Webb; Mrs C A Weston; M G Wilkinson; A L Williams; S A Wilson; S E Wootton

Against (0)

Abstain (0)

**Resolved**

That the amended Statement of Licensing Policy (Licensing Act 2003) be approved. (ADPC)

**224 REPORT ON URGENT DECISIONS**

Council received and noted the report on Urgent Decisions.

**225 REPORT OF THE LEADER ON THE WORK OF THE EXECUTIVE**

Council received the following report from the Leader on the work of the Executive:-

“Members, the meeting has already received the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 4 November 2020 when the Quarter 2 2020/21 Financial Management Report was noted. I am happy to provide an update for information purposes of business dealt with by the Executive since then.

At its meeting on 2 December 2020, the Executive noted the plans for the recreation of the Council-led Beagle Event project and agreed that the Portfolio Holder with the responsibility for Tourism works with the Acting Managing Director to achieve a suitable commemoration in 2021.

It also approved the extension of the current leisure contract with Fusion for a period of three years, taking it to the 21 March 2025, with the following changes:

- The Freight House, The Mill Arts & Events Centre, and Castle Hall to remain closed following the national enforced closure between 5 November and 2 December 2020.

Portfolio Holder Decisions have been taken that have agreed the suspension of parking charges in all Council car parks on Saturdays during December prior to Christmas, responded to the Planning for the Future government consultation, agreed the Authority Monitoring Report 2019/2020 publication as part of the Council's evidence base for planning, and published the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan 2020.

I would just like to add that the provision of free parking in all Council car parks during December to support residents and businesses nearly did not happen this year. A decision call-in notice was submitted at the last moment. After drawing attention to the fact that this would stop the decision being implemented, I am absolutely delighted to say that the call-in was hastily withdrawn and residents have the benefit of free car parking on Saturdays through December, and that will give benefit to our businesses as well."

### 226 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

(Note: Cllr A L Williams declared a non-pecuniary interest in Motion 1 regarding free car parking by virtue of his wife and daughter working for the NHS and receiving free car parking).

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13, the following motions had been received:-

- (1) From Cllrs M Hoy and S A Wilson and supported by Cllrs Mrs T L Carter, A H Eves, Mrs C M Mason and J E Newport:-

"During the pandemic Council officers took a decision to not charge NHS staff and social care workers for parking in the Council run car parks.

Whilst we wholly support this decision, we believe that it is fundamentally a policy decision and as such should be ratified by Members.

#### **We Propose that:**

1. The action taken by officer in not charging NHS staff and social care workers for parking in the Council run car parks is formally ratified by

Council as a Member decision rather than remaining in the remit of officers.

2. All NHS Staff and social care workers may park for free in all Rochford District run car parks upon displaying supporting official evidence on the vehicle.

This will be effective until it is reviewed by the first Council meeting of the Municipal Year of 2021/22.”

The Motion was moved by Cllr M Hoy and seconded by Cllr S A Wilson.

The Portfolio Holder for IT, Tourism, Housing and Parking stated the following:-

“The Council is following guidance that the government implemented at the start of the pandemic that it is to not enforce parking charges in Council car parks for NHS staff members or for social care workers. This concession for Covid-19 can only be used when on official duty as an NHS staff member, health and social care worker, or NHS volunteer responder. This will be kept under review by officers and myself as the Portfolio Holder.

The Motion put forward by some of the Members of the minority parties seems premature as this guidance from government is still in force, and to attempt to make political capital on actions taken during a pandemic is inappropriate.

For that reason, I will be voting against this Motion and in favour of Council officers following government guidance with no political impediment.”

A Member raised a point that the call-in notice for the provision of free car parking in all Council car parks on Saturdays in December had been made to give greater savings to the residents, and stated that this was usually made as a late, emergency decision, which she felt was incorrect.

A Member stated that she felt the Council should be proactive in supporting the workers of the NHS, therefore would be supporting the motion.

A Member questioned if the decision should have been made by officers or by Members and was advised by officers that this was an operational decision that was taken in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

The Leader of the Council advised that at the time of the decision, he was Portfolio Holder responsible for car parking, and at the time it was important to put decisions into effect as quickly as possible. The Leader advised that at the time discussions were had with the Assistant Director to provide free car parking to volunteers to ensure that people associated with the community hub were given free car parking. The Leader advised that he had difficulty with this Motion as it was prescriptive, and there was no indication as to how

long the current situation would continue. The Leader argued that it was important to act flexibly to situations as they present themselves, and therefore supported the Portfolio Holder in voting against the Motion. The Leader emphasised that he was in support of the principle of providing the benefit for NHS workers and volunteers, but could not slow down the mechanism and being tied to dates.

The Leader of the Green Group stated that the Motion gave certainty to NHS workers that they would continue to be able to park for free for the foreseeable future. He also disputed the Leader of the Council's argument that the Motion was prescriptive, as there was a suggested review at the first Council of the Municipal Year 2021/22 to ensure that this was still necessary.

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

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| For (10)     | Cllrs C C Cannell; Mrs T L Carter; A H Eves; N J Hookway; M Hoy; G J Ioannou; Mrs C M Mason; C M Stanley; S A Wilson   |
| Against (24) | Cllrs Mrs D L Belton; Mrs L A Butcher; M R Carter; R R Dray; D S Efde; Mrs J R Gooding; K H Hudson; M J Lucas-Gill; Mrs J R Lumley; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; R Milne; Mrs C A Pavelin; Mrs C E Roe; Mrs L Shaw; P J Shaw; S P Smith; D J Sperring; M J Steptoe; I H Ward; M J Webb; Mrs C A Weston; A L Williams; S E Wootton |
| Abstain (2)  | Cllrs B T Hazlewood; M G Wilkinson   |

The Motion was lost.

- (2) From Cllrs J E Newport and A H Eves and supported by Cllrs Mrs T L Carter, M Hoy, Mrs C M Mason and S A Wilson:-

“The Council is currently in the process of mothballing the Mill Arts Centre and the Civic Suite, both in Rayleigh.

This Council is requesting that officers explore the possibility of using these buildings to provide either of the following with an interim formal report at the next Full Council:

1. Accommodation for new, small and emerging business on affordable short term rents, including shared office workspace with flexible rental arrangements. This will allow businesses to see if the business is viable and also allow for start up businesses easy affordable access to the High Street.
2. Temporary accommodation for homeless people.”



The Motion was moved by Cllr J E Newport and seconded by Cllr S A Wilson.

The Leader of the Council stated the following:-

“This item under the Motions section suggests that the Mill Arts and Events Centre and the Civic Suite could be used for two purposes: accommodation for new, small and emerging businesses on affordable short term rents, including shared office workspace with flexible rental arrangements and/or temporary accommodation for homeless people.

However well intentioned, both of these ideas are impractical, and I will explain why. A few weeks ago, and as a result of the pandemic, the Council faced a very difficult decision to focus on keeping our most popular leisure centres open, and that meant that regrettably we had to close the events venues which included the Mill Arts & Events Centre. The significant costs, which ultimately have to be borne by our residents, the Council Tax payers, could not be justified.

This site and the Civic Suite are part of the Council's Asset Delivery Programme which schedules them for redevelopment. In the case of the Civic Suite, this is due to start in Autumn 2021, less than a year away. For the Mill Arts and Events Centre, the redevelopment of the site is currently scheduled to commence in 2022, less than 2 years away. I can assure Members that the Council is very aware that although a brand new, purpose-built, multi-functional community centre is planned for Rayleigh, which incidentally will be much more attractive to many community groups where the hire of such large halls is at present not practical, the closure of the current Mill Arts and Events Centre will in the meantime, and for reasons due to the pandemic, leave a significant gap for our residents, and for that, I am truly sorry.

Recognising this, at the Executive meeting on 2 December 2020, Members gave a commitment to bring forward the timeline for the development of the new standalone community building. Discussions are ongoing, and I hope to be able to make an announcement soon, but I am optimistic that the upside of having to close the Mill Arts and Events Centre sooner than we would have liked may enable us to bring forward the opening of the new centre by possibly as much as a year. That means Summer 2022, just over 18 months away.

Also, I am pleased to tell you that we are currently in conversation with the NHS about how we can assist in the roll out of Covid-19 vaccination centres, and whether any of our Civic sites, including the Mill Arts and Events Centre, can on an interim measure be useful in the national approach to combat this terrible virus.

If we were to seriously contemplate to carry out what this Motion is proposing within the very limited time available before the sites are redeveloped as per the Asset Delivery Programme, a major conversion programme will have to be undertaken with all the time and work this would take in order to reach the required standards to lease the space on the commercial market.

Furthermore, having done some financial estimates of such a scheme, the irrecoverable costs of such a project for such a limited period of time could amount to up to £1m.

The creation of accommodation for the homeless would further add to the cost given the need for additional building regulation and housing licensing requirements, change of use would also be required. Quite separately, the authority is already entered into long-term lease agreements to provide two local temporary accommodation sites, and our focus is now on the delivery of affordable accommodation.

So, in summary, in the limited period of time available, to formulate a business case, deal with planning and meet other regulatory requirements, and do the commercial works, the idea is just not feasible. Whilst it may be politically opportunist rather than having a strategic approach to supporting businesses and the homeless in our district, of which this administration has a good and proud record, this idea is a classic example of knee-jerk reality of what, heaven forbid, would ever happen if our opposition Members were in charge of this authority.”

The Portfolio Holder for Community echoed the comments of the Leader and emphasised that there were already facilities to support homeless people with temporary accommodation. He confirmed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Housing Options team had picked up 10 rough sleepers, and all had been placed in accommodation. The Portfolio Holder for Community confirmed that the Council was able to accommodate all rough sleepers with the buildings that were currently in the district.

In response to a Member question regarding the cost to transform these buildings, officers advised that detailed work would be required to calculate these costs and this would require a full scope and specification for the works and this was not available at this time..

In favour of the Motion, Members stated that given the pandemic, people who were made redundant would be seeking to create new businesses and by providing low-cost working spaces, this would encourage new opportunities within the district. Members also stated that the Motion called for officers to explore the possibility of redevelopment, rather than commit to action.

In opposition to the Motion, Members stated that the costs of converting the sites would be too high and given the upcoming Asset Delivery Programme, the cost would be unjustifiable for the amount of use. Members commended the sentiment of the Motion but argued that it had not been well thought

through due to lack of demand with small businesses looking to work from home and cut overhead costs.

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

For (11) Cllrs C C Cannell; Mrs T L Carter; A H Eves; N J Hookway; M Hoy; G J Ioannou; Mrs C M Mason; C M Stanley; M G Wilkinson; S A Wilson

Against (24) Cllrs Mrs D L Belton; Mrs L A Butcher; M R Carter; R R Dray; D S Efde; Mrs J R Gooding; B T Hazlewood; K H Hudson; M J Lucas-Gill; Mrs J R Lumley; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; R Milne; Mrs C E Roe; Mrs L Shaw; P J Shaw; S P Smith; D J Sperring; M J Steptoe; I H Ward; M J Webb; Mrs C A Weston; A L Williams; S E Wootton

Abstain (0)

The Motion was lost.

(3) From Cllrs Mrs C M Mason and M Hoy and supported by Cllrs Mrs T L Carter, A H Eves, N J Hookway, J E Newport and S A Wilson:-

“When a question was raised in Full Council with officers about the number of declared votes not corresponding to the number of Members present the Monitoring Officer ruled that there were four categories of votes: For, Against, Abstain, and ‘No wish to vote’. It was explained to Members that we were not obliged to vote, thus the apparent anomaly.

In the chamber the public could see if Members voted or not. When we moved to Zoom meetings the Managing Director set up a protocol that again made Members’ votes transparent. Full Council then decided that the number of Members voting in each category would be recorded.

Since then, the Acting Managing Director has altered the method of voting to the raising of a ‘blue hand’ to save time in meetings. However, in the recent Review Committee meeting on the first vote no numbers were given; we were just advised the item had been agreed.

On the second item we were advised 11 Members voted for and three Members did not vote. On enquiry it appeared that some Members were unable to raise their blue hand and the vote was retaken.

It was then stated that 13 Members voted for and that there were no votes for and no abstentions. Then the officer stated that there were 13 votes for and one abstention.

This new system raises concerns. Neither the public nor Members can see who is voting and therefore we lose the transparency that prevailed before. It is also problematic if a Member who decides not to vote is then counted as an abstention and contrary to what Council had previously been advised.

With important decisions being taken it is important that there is clarity. Therefore:

This Council asks that the Portfolio Holder for Governance, in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer and the Acting Managing Director, ensures that the method of voting is re-examined as a matter of urgency and a verification process is implemented to prevent such a recurrence.”

The Motion was moved by Cllr Mrs C M Mason and seconded by Cllr M Hoy.

The Deputy Leader of the Council responded as below:-

“The Motion asks that the system of voting by raising the blue hand in the software is re-examined by officers; there is no need to do this. When we first began to use the software for digital meetings, it was new to all of us. We ended up using the roll call of names system of voting because at the time it was the easiest way to ensure that we were conducting the meetings properly. We used that system from 29 April to 12 November 2020, and Members will recall that this has led to meetings taking longer than usual, and in some cases, exceptionally long meetings, particularly for Full Council.

To date, Council meetings have continued until 10.47, 11.05, 11.07, 10.55 and 10.34 pm. At each of these meetings, Motions without notice had to be taken to extend the meeting in order for the business to be completed beyond the current constitutional time of two and a half hours.

When standing orders for remote meetings were first introduced on 29 April 2020, it was agreed that these would be kept under review and this has been done. The standing orders were reviewed on 1 June 2020 and again on 13 November 2020. The changes brought forward on 13 November reflect the fact that as Members, we are much more proficient in operating in a digital way. The changes improved our system of voting and improved the quality of the meetings. It is unreasonable to ask for a review of voting arrangements when this has only just been done. An inadequate opportunity has been allowed for the system to bed in.

It also makes no sense to take a step backwards and operate a voting system which was time consuming. Cllrs Hoy, Newport and Mrs Mason had already asked the Acting Managing Director to review these arrangements and their request was denied on that basis before this Motion was raised.

It has been suggested that members of the public cannot see the blue hands. This does not make the system undemocratic. Unless a formal recorded vote is agreed by a minimum of one-fifth of the voting Members

present at the meeting, there is no constitutional or legal obligation for Members to vote or for the numbers of Members voting to be declared during formal meetings.

I would also remind Members that there is a constitutional requirement for numbers to be recorded in the Minutes, which has been met since it was introduced by Council on 14 July 2020. Members can also ask for their names to be noted in the minutes; transparency is assured.

I do not accept that just because we are not in the physical chamber that we have to invent new steps to prove that we are being democratic. We are operating within our Constitution, and that is sufficient. I suspect that some Members may resort to asking for a formal recorded vote for everything, but I would suggest that this action would entirely subvert the intentions behind the standing orders and instead of speeding things up, such actions would slow us back down again and frustrate democracy rather than improve it.

The Motion also asks for a verification process to be implemented – this is also unnecessary. No verification process is required as all Members are able to see the electronic hands raised. However, the Chairman will continue to ask Members to confirm during meetings that they are all able to use the electronic hand raise as we have seen this evening. If any Members have difficulties with this during a meeting, their votes will be taken by means of a manual hand raise.

A Review Committee meeting on 1 December 2020 is being cited as the reason why these arrangements should be reviewed. Members should note that this was the first meeting of that Committee at which these new voting systems were used. Yes, it was not without problems – that was not unexpected, but after these teething troubles were sorted out, the Committee went on to conduct its business as required by the Constitution. At a subsequent meeting of the Executive on 2 December, the Chairman kept asking Members if they were able to use their electronic hands, and the electronic voting worked very well.

The arrangements will be kept under constant review, and a further report and recommendation will be made at an appropriate time, if required. The national regulations enabling digital meetings expire on 7 May 2021 in any event, so I expect government to be providing new guidance as the Covid-19 pandemic evolves, and hopefully the vaccine programme means that in the new municipal year, we may well be back in the chamber.”

Members in favour of the Motion pointed out that Members were not looking to return to a recorded vote for every Motion, but instead wanted to review the process to identify if there were better ways for voting to be carried out. Members suggested looking at the polling function included within Zoom and cited the importance of transparency for the public watching the meeting.

Members opposed to the Motion stated that all Members can view the participants box to view which Councillors had voted, therefore were monitoring themselves. Members also pointed out that there had been circumstances in the chamber where Councillors had voted multiple times on one item, therefore problems were not limited to remote meetings.

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

- For (8)                    Cllrs Mrs T L Carter; A H Eves; N J Hookway; Mrs C M Mason; J E Newport; C M Stanley; M G Wilkinson; S A Wilson
- Against (27)            Cllrs Mrs D L Belton; Mrs L A Butcher; C C Cannell; M R Carter; R R Dray; D S Efde; Mrs J R Gooding; B T Hazlewood; K H Hudson; G J Ioannou; M J Lucas-Gill; Mrs J R Lumley; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; R Milne; Mrs C A Pavelin; Mrs C E Roe; Mrs L Shaw; P J Shaw; S P Smith; D J Sperring; M J Steptoe; I H Ward; M J Webb; Mrs C A Weston; A L Williams; S E Wootton

Abstain (0)

The Motion was lost.

- (4)     From Cllrs J E Newport and C C Cannell and supported by Cllrs M Hoy, Mrs C M Mason and C M Stanley:-

“This Council notes:

- 1) The Council has a working group to understand the implications and recommend a policy to this Council on how it can reduce its carbon footprint and become carbon neutral by 2030 at the latest;
- 2) That the biggest single contributor to climate change is the emission of carbon from fossil fuels;
- 3) That trees have the ability to soak up carbon emissions and therefore tree planting can offset some of the carbon dioxide which is contributing to climate change;
- 4) Forest Research, Britain’s principal organisation for forestry and tree related research, says that the average tree canopy cover figure in England is 16%, measured from 283 towns and cities. The Rochford District has less than 10% tree cover and Friends of the Earth recommends that this should be, at least, doubled.

This Council therefore calls on the Chief Executive to prepare a tree planting strategy which:

- 1) Aims to increase considerably the tree cover within the District by identifying council owned land that could be used for tree planning;
- 2) Works with the voluntary sector to deliver tree planting plans;
- 3) Involves schools, colleges and their pupils and students in carrying out tree planting and woodland maintenance, specifically to promote and facilitate residents to enable the use of Council land to take part in the BBC's 'Plant Britain' campaign as supported by HRH The Prince of Wales over the course of the next two years;
- 4) Sets out to create community orchards to help improve the supply of fresh, local produce and boost the health of residents;
- 5) Identifies sources of funding available to the Council and voluntary organisations to pay for tree planting.”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment responded with the below statement:-

“I do note the points made in the first four items of this recommendation. As for the remaining points, most of these actions are presently in hand. In fact, our Carbon Neutral Working Group are looking at ways to reduce our carbon footprint along with tree planting and other suitable locations for these. Open space suitability is also being investigated by this group and it would be premature to pre-empt their findings at this time.

We are already working with the voluntary sector to improve our tree population, along with our existing community orchard at Cherry Orchard Country Park. The Council already takes its responsibility for managing its trees very seriously, with the forestry commission recently approving a ten year woodland management plan for 100 hectares of Council managed woodland. That's the equivalent of 140 football pitches. We are already committed to managing some of the best and ancient woodland within this district.

With this in mind, I am therefore reluctant at this time to devise yet another strategy action plan. However, having said that, along with officers we are looking to put together a 'parks for nature' scheme which will propose a suitable suite of steps to improve parks for nature, including tree planting. This, we hope, will move forward in the very near future.

This is not to say that we cannot do more, but any tree planting scheme will need to have careful consideration as the preparation and aftercare of tree planting represents a far greater cost and commitment than just planting a tree.

I'm at a loss as to why this Motion has be brought in the knowledge that we are already implementing or investigating the points made, and in actual fact, the proposer is part of that working group. We are awaiting

recommendations from that Carbon Neutral Working Group. I therefore propose that this Motion be declined at this time.”

Members in favour of the Motion indicated that the intention of the Motion was to supplement the Carbon Working Group and involve other members of the community in order to take some of the burden away from the Council. Members advised that as the district was below the average tree canopy cover figure throughout the country, it was particularly important that this Motion was put into place.

Members against the Motion stated that as there was already a Carbon Neutral Working Group, the ideas within the Motion should be fed through the existing group. One Member also pointed out that it would take an acre of fully grown trees six months to offset one car, therefore it was unlikely that the Council had the acres available to completely offset the district’s carbon emissions.

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

For (10) Cllrs C C Cannell; Mrs T L Carter; A H Eves; N J Hookway; G J Ioannou; Mrs C M Mason; J E Newport; C M Stanley; M G Wilkinson; S A Wilson

Against (25) Cllrs Mrs D L Belton; Mrs L A Butcher; M R Carter; R R Dray; D S Efde; Mrs J R Gooding; B T Hazlewood; K H Hudson; M J Lucas-Gill; Mrs J R Lumley; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; R Milne; Mrs C A Pavelin; Mrs C E Roe; Mrs L Shaw; P J Shaw; S P Smith; D J Sperring; M J Steptoe; I H Ward; M J Webb; Mrs C A Weston; A L Williams; S E Wootton

Abstain (0)

The Motion was lost.

The Chairman of the Carbon Neutral Working Group advised Members that the items within the defeated Motion would be reviewed by the Carbon Neutral Working Group.

### **227 FUTURE ROLE OF INVESTMENT BOARD**

Council considered the report on the Future Role of Investment Board recommending that the Investment Board is disbanded with immediate effect.

Members in favour of the Motion stated that this Committee could be replaced by working groups due to completion of the projects that the Investment Board had been created to manage. Members advised that the



Investment Board had run its course and meetings had recently had to be cancelled due to no business on the agenda.

Members in opposition to the Motion argued that the Investment Board had originally been created to find ways to fill a funding gap created by a drop in funding from central government and pointed out that this gap had not been filled. It was also highlighted that the Asset Development Strategy had not yet been concluded, therefore the Investment Board should not yet be disbanded. Members also argued that there may be opportunities for investment in the future and felt that the Investment Board provided a cross party forum for discussion of projects that might benefit residents that might require further funding. Officers emphasised that any budget strategies had to be referred to Full Council for approval.

A Member raised an issue relating to paragraph 6.2 of the report and stated that there may be a need in future for further investment into the asset delivery programme and Connect programmes and argued that the Investment Board would be the best forum for that. In respect of paragraph 7.1 of the report the point was made that the risks had been downplayed in that any decisions of the Executive could be called in by the Review Committee; this could only be done retrospectively once decisions have already been taken.

A Member expressed concern that the pro-rata for the Partnership Panel, referred to in paragraph 5.3 of the report, had been incorrectly calculated and was advised by officers that this would be dealt with outside the meeting.

In response to a Member stating that the Partnership Panel has different terms of reference to that of the Investment Board and doesn't report into Council and that the Investment Board assessed projects, eg, the ICT Project, before referral to Council as part of the budget process, officers advised that the Partnership Panel as an outside body was required to report back to Members and advised that the panel was under contract with the development partner, therefore had different governance arrangements for that.

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

For (25) Cllrs Mrs D L Belton; Mrs L A Butcher; M R Carter; R R Dray; D S Efde; Mrs J R Gooding; B T Hazlewood; K H Hudson; M J Lucas-Gill; Mrs J R Lumley; Mrs J E McPherson; D Merrick; R Milne; Mrs C A Pavelin; Mrs C E Roe; Mrs L Shaw; P J Shaw; S P Smith; D J Sperring; M J Steptoe; I H Ward; M J Webb; Mrs C A Weston; A L Williams; S E Wootton

Against (9) Cllrs C C Cannell; Mrs T L Carter; A H Eves; N J Hookway;  
G J Ioannou; J E Newport; C M Stanley; M G Wilkinson; S A  
Wilson

Abstain (0)

**Resolved**

- (1) That the Investment Board be disbanded with immediate effect.
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer shall make the necessary amendments to the Council's Constitution and delete all references to the Investment Board. (ADLD)

**EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved**

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

(21 Members voted for the Motion, 2 voted against and 2 abstained)

**228 FUTURE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

Details on the discussion is set out in the exempt appendix to the Minutes.

The meeting closed at 11.48 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

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