

ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Member Budget Monitoring Group

At a reconvened Meeting held on 22 December 1999. Present:
Councillors D E Barnes (Chairman), C R Morgan, R E Vingoe and P F A Webster.

Apologies: Councillor Councillor V H Leach.

Substitutes: Councillor Mrs J Helson

71. BUDGET STRATEGY – FURTHER REVIEW

NOTE: Councillor C R Morgan declared an interest in discussion relating to the Assistant Community Services Officer post and abstained from any debate thereon.

The Group received additional detail which needed to be taken into account when considering the estimates, together with documentation on time expired posts and charges for Council services. The Head of Financial Services had provided draft budget book information for Members of the Working Group.

Prior to commencement of debate the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) emphasised that the Council would need to achieve consensus in the key areas of Council Tax level, income generation and the use of reserves. It was important to proceed as quickly as possible with Leisure Contract proposals to identify early potential savings.

Responding to questions, Officers confirmed that:-

- Revised estimates for salaries allowed for increments and pay award estimates.
- It would be possible to provide specific detail on the percentage increase in the salary costs from the previous year.
- Whilst income estimates appeared to be holding up it was not possible at this stage to be precise about the final savings figure for the current year.
- Further information could be supplied on the potential income generation which could be associated with economic regeneration work.
- By their very nature, forthcoming best value reviews would provide review of the Council's staffing resource.
- Following a review of salary indications against previous performance, it was anticipated that approximately £72,000 would need to be drawn from the budget reserve.

- In the majority of cases, revised estimates in the budget book provided for an inflation element of 3%.
- Whilst the Group had already considered parcels of land which are readily available for disposal, Officers were reviewing the possibilities for other areas.
- The Council's external auditors were to report on income and charges.

The Working Group proceeded to give detailed consideration to each time limited post followed by a page by page review of the draft budget book information. The following specific comments were raised:-

Item	Comment
Bus Shelters	A figure for maintenance should be included. in the estimates.
Verge Maintenance	The costs associated with cutting in respect of the Essex County Council element of the work should be identified and compared to the amount paid by the County.
Ice-cream Site Charge Fees	There would be merit in seeing whether charges could be introduced at other sites.
Pest Control	The possibility of charging for the service should be considered within the fees and charges debate.
Day Centres	Useful to know if figures include the CAB building
Contribution – Women's Refuge	Question as to whether it should be included within grant applications to Corporate Resources Sub-Committee
Shape	Question as to whether it should be included within grant applications to Corporate Resources Sub-Committee
Chamber of Trade	Useful to have further information on the detail of this payment
Office Telephones	At this stage it would be appropriate to recommend that the 2000/2001 estimated be reduced to the 1999/2000 estimate increased by inflation, subject to a detailed report from Officers to the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee
Rayleigh Office Accommodation	Useful to have more information on the variances for equipment, tools and materials provision

Rayleigh Sports and Social Club

It was noted that the figure against the Club may be vired to finance the additional cost of creche provision, subject to the building being demolished as soon as possible.

Chairman's Hospitality

It would be of value to receive detailed information on the classification and costing of the Civic car and car provision.

In considering the time limited posts, the Group made a number of recommendations as set out in the confidential appendix (attached to the signed copy of these Minutes). The costs of these decisions would equate to approximately £48,300, although the net additional cost given potential savings identified in the budget book would be in the region of £13,500.

In discussing charges it was noted that, from current indications, the Government would be defining a level for concessionary fares. A number of Members wished to comment on the importance of car parking charges to the structuring of charges for all Council services. It was also recognised that, notwithstanding the decision on car parking made at the last Meeting of Full Council, each political party had its own views on charging policy and the nature/timing of potential future charge increases.

In view of the time available, the Group agreed that it would be of value to adjourn to enable further detailed consideration of charging at a reconvened meeting. The observations of Officers on current charges would also be of value in this context.

RECOMMENDED

(1) That the Working Group's comments on the draft budget book, as set out above, be agreed. (CD(F&ES))

(2) That the recommendations relating to time expired posts, as set out in the confidential appendix to these Minutes, be approved. (CE)

The Meeting adjourned at 6.15pm.

Chairman

Date