

Minutes of the Member Budget Monitoring Working Group

At a Meeting held on 3 February 2000. Present: Councillors DE Barnes (Chairman), C R Morgan, R E Vingoe and P F A Webster.

Apologies: Councillor V H Leach.

Substitute: Councillor Mrs J Helson.

73. MINUTES

The Minutes of the adjourned Meetings held on 18 November, 25 November, 2 December, 9 December and 22 December 1999, and of the Meeting held on 4 January 2000 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Resolved

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

74. ASSET REVIEW

The Chairman informed the Working Group that Finance and General Purposes Committee, at its Meeting on 1 February 2000, had agreed the recommended action in respect of the various non-leisure sites previously reviewed by the Group, subject to the proposed disposals being submitted to Full Council for determination.

Members considered possible future action that could be taken concerning two further sites, as follows:

a) Land at Purdeys Industrial Estate

Copies of Minutes from the Land Sub-Committee of 27 March 1980 and 25 September 1980; Council of 16 March 1982; Policy and Resources Committee of 21 July 1983; and Planning Services Committee of 10 November 1983 which related to this site were circulated for Members' information, together with a plan and a copy of a letter from the Council's Solicitor, dated 2nd February 2000, to the Managing Director of Rochehall Limited from which the land had originally been purchased. The Group was advised of the original purchase price in 1981 and details of the covenant restricting the uses to which the land could be put, and noted the attempts that were currently being made to seek the lifting of this covenant.

b) 9 Highfield Crescent, Rayleigh

The Group was advised that the current tenant of this property would be eligible to purchase the property under right to buy, which would include that part of the surrounding land included within the tenancy. Members agreed that an asset review of this site should be undertaken.

c) Playspaces in Great Wakering

A plan showing the location of playspaces in Great Wakering was circulated for Members' information.

RECOMMENDED

That Officers undertake an asset review in respect of 9 Highfield Crescent, Rayleigh. (HLS)

75. CAPITAL PROGRAMME

NOTE: A non-pecuniary interest in this item was declared by Councillor P F A Webster, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) and the Head of Financial Services by virtue of their membership of the National Trust.

An overview, which outlined the current year's capital programme, estimates for future years, the resources available to the Council, and likely capital requirements, had previously been circulated to the Group. Members also had before them a report that was to be considered by Council on 8 February 2000, which gave details of notices of motion which had been submitted by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups, concerning the 2000/2001 Capital Programme.

The Head of Financial Services then gave a presentation to the Group which explained the components of the overview in more detail, during which the following main points arose:

Capital Requirements

- Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It was explained that the cost of carrying out fire prevention works to ensure that the Council's sheltered housing accommodation met the requirements of current safety legislation was an issue for consideration. A report examining the main issues and identifying priorities for expenditure would be presented to a future Meeting of the Housing Management Sub-Committee. Members agreed that other factors in relation to sheltered housing which should receive urgent consideration were: the difficulty of letting some units; the likely cost of adaptations for disabled tenants; and the practicability/cost of upgrading bathroom facilities.

General Fund

Equipment – car park machines. The Group was informed of the quotation that had been received recently for the purchase and installation of 18 new Accent machines. The figure obtained did not include a facility for offering a

- refund to non-traders. Members requested that further details be made available, prior to the Meeting of Council on 8 February 2000, regarding the criteria that had been used in obtaining the quotation. Regarding the installation of the new machines, the Group concurred with the suggestion of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) that their introduction should be phased, and that the proposed increase in tariff charges should take place subsequently, possibly from 1 June 2000.
- Playspaces. There would be an inspection of the equipment in the District's playspaces in April, by the National Playing Fields Association, to determine compliance with current safety standards.
- Building Condition Survey. The sum identified for this element would be influenced by the asset review; the renewal of the leisure contract; and the budgetary allocation already earmarked for refurbishment of Mill Hall. It was confirmed that a letter of invitation had been sent inviting submissions from contractors for proposals for reviewing the leisure contract.
- Rayleigh Windmill. A reply was still awaited from the Trustee concerning maintenance/refurbishment proposals.
- Blatches Farm. The outcome of a Meeting held on 31 January 2000 with Southend Borough Council concerning the proposed establishment of a country park on this site was reported to the Group.
- Best Value. It was noted that the requirements of Best Value would necessitate public consultation both regarding proposed capital projects and plans for the disposal of the Council's assets, with consequent implications for the timing of schemes within the Capital Programme in future years. The Corporate Director indicated that, as part of the asset review, consultations would be held on the asset management plan where facilities were being upgraded.

In conclusion, Members recognised that the current year's Capital Programme would be influenced to a significant extent by the outcome of the consideration given by Council on 8 February 2000 to the Notices of Motion submitted by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups. The Head of Financial Services gave a brief summary of the likely financial implications of the proposals contained within the Notices.

The schedules contained within the overview supplied to the Group, outlining the Capital Programmes for 1999/2000 – 2002/2003 were noted.

The Meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Chairman

Date