

APPENDIX B

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **12 December 2002** when there were present:

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)

Cllr Mrs J R Lumley

Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr C G Seagers

Cllr C G Seagers

Cllr M G B Starke

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs D F Flack, T Livings and G A Mockford.

Apologies were also received from Mr J Sheaf of the South East Essex Chamber of Commerce, Mr K Wickham of the Federation of Small Businesses and the Rayleigh District Chamber of Trade.

REPRESENTING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

W H R Squier - Rochford and District Chamber of Trade and Commerce

OFFICERS ATTENDING

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
R J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
D Deeks	-	Head of Financial Services
T Metcalf	-	Audit & Process Review Manager
J Kevany	-	Audit Officer
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

618 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES – CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on consultation with the business community about the plans for the 2003/04 Budget Strategy.

By way of introduction, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) provided details of the recent Central Government announcement on Council Tax as reported to the meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee on 5 December (Minute 592/02 refers). The Corporate Director also advised that Holmes Place had now indicated that the profit share element of the leisure contract available to the Council may be in the region of £50,000-£75,000 this year. The precise figure would only be available following the audit of their accounts. The figure was likely

to be variable on a year by year basis. For example, income would be reduced for the period when Clements Hall was closed for refurbishment.

It was noted that the Corporate Director would be recommending that any monies available from the profit share arrangement should be targeted at the Park Sports Centre fund, rather than the core budget. This was on the basis that an increase in the contribution to capital would reduce ongoing costs. Officers were still reviewing possibilities, but proposals would be by way of amendment to the draft Three Year Budget Strategy.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Squier, the representative from the business community.

Mr Squier made a number of observations. These, together with the Officer response, are set out below:-

- It would be interesting to note what the Holmes Place monies represented in terms of the percentage of total capital spend.

The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advised that, within its leisure contract, the Council made contributions to Park School and the Mill Hall, but not Clements Hall.

- It was good to see that work on Rochford Town Square was concluding. Whilst it was understood there is a debate about the respective advantages of close circuit television or lighting and addressing crime problems, it would be useful to now be able to further the proposal for CCTV for which the Parish had been granted of £5,300 by the District.

Officers advised that the CCTV grant was still available for use. The Council could be consulted should proposals move away from CCTV.

- It was pleasing to note that the Authority was a Member of the South Essex Thames Gateway Partnership with the associated likelihood of inward investment. Membership of the East of England Local Government Conference would seem of value in the context of maximising sources of funding.

The Chief Executive advised that the Council was a Member of The East of England Local Government Conference and very much involved with the regional agenda. The South Essex Thames Gateway Board was a useful vehicle for communicating with the Conference. The East of England Development Agency allocated money to the Thames Gateway Project. A County Councillor from within the District's area had recently been appointed to serve on the Agency Board.

- It would be of interest to know the precise costs associated with the three planning appeals lost over the previous year.

Officers confirmed that they could provide this information.

- The Thames Gateway Project had provided a useful financial contribution towards the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Park. It would be of interest to know if the £20,000 shown in the budget strategy was ongoing.

The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advised that the £20,000 in the budget strategy would be used for revenue purposes, including aspects of Health and Safety.

- It would be of interest to know the contribution made by the District to flood defence.

The Chief Executive advised that flood defence contributions were contained within the County Council's precept. The District had a direct financial responsibility for any issues around areas of land in its own ownership. In recent times problems associated with water running off land had been more significant than sea defence problems.

At the conclusion of discussions, Mr Squier observed that it may be of value for consideration to be given to introducing cleaning at Rochford Town Square on Saturday mornings given the litter which can collect over Friday evenings. The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) referred to the recent Town Centre chewing gum/stain removal trial which had been abandoned due to an element of poor pre-planning by the Company undertaking the trial. From liaison with the Company it was clear that their system may not provide some of the remedies originally envisaged. For example, Cleaning over night in a residential area could take a number of hours and produce significant noise.

Resolved

That the observations from the business community be received and made available to the meeting of Full Council on 28 January 2003, when all issues relating to the budget will be determined. (HFS)