

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 25 March 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **25 March 2003** when there were present:

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)
Cllr T Livings (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr D F Flack
Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr G A Mockford

Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr M G B Starke

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs J R Lumley.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren
R J Honey

Chief Executive
Corporate Director (Law, Planning &
Administration)
Head of Administrative and Member Services
Corporate Policy Manager
Audit & Process Review Officer
Principal Committee Administrator

150 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

151 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was recognised that all Members who are appointees to outside bodies would have a personal interest in the item on review of outside bodies.

152 ESSEX COMMUNITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION - SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ESSEX

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which sought comments on the Essex County Community Strategy.

It was confirmed that, at this stage, the nine key areas of life for the future of Essex as identified in the strategy documentation were very generalised.

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Responding to Member questions, officers advised that the consultation undertaken by the County Council had been at Rayleigh Library for a two-day period.

During debate a Member observed that this type of documentation did not enable the identification of specific proposals, such as those relating to highways, that are often significant for District Councils. It was also observed that, if compared with many other counties near to London, house prices in Essex were not as high.

Resolved

That, subject to the above observations, the officer comments set out in the report be forwarded as this Council's submission to Essex County Council on the Consultation Document. (CE)

153 REVIEW OF OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services which detailed the work of the Outside Body Review Sub-Committee and set out the Sub-Committee's recommendations.

With regard to the Rochford Health Partnership Board, the Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to retain membership but reduce representation down to three appointees. This would accord with the recent decision of Castle Point Borough Council to appoint three members and the observations of the Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust that he would prefer not to see District Council representation reduced too greatly in view of the board's objective of maintaining strong involvement from partners.

During debate, the Committee concurred with the view of a Member that it would be particularly useful if information could be provided on the timing, frequency and location of meetings of outside bodies to assist Members when considering whether, from a practical perspective, they would have the time to contribute. Officers confirmed that future reports could include this information.

It was recognised that there can be occasions when appointees to a body receive minimal communication from that body. The Chairman observed that any Members who had concerns with this aspect should report the matter to officers.

RECOMMENDED to Council-

- (1) That, subject to having three appointees on the Joint Health Partnership Board with Castle Point, membership of outside

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bodies be changed on the basis set out at Appendix 1 of the report.

- (2) That, to enable allying to appropriate Service Areas, appointments to Outside Bodies should, wherever possible, be from the membership of an appropriate Policy Committee or Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the basis set out at Appendix 2 of the report.
- (3) That all appointees to Outside Bodies have a substitute, with the exception of the London Southend Airport Consultative Committee, for which there should be at least two substitutes.
- (4) That appointees to Outside Bodies receive initial briefings on the work of the Body by an appropriate Officer or a Body representative.
- (5) That Member and Officer appointees be asked to report back on the work of Bodies to which they are appointed via the Members' Bulletin twice per year. The possibility of an appointee reporting into the appointing Committee should not be discounted as an alternative in appropriate circumstances.
- (6) That when Members consider appointments, information should be available on the timing, frequency and location of meetings.(HAMS)

154 IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT (IEG 2) – UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services, which provided an update on the implementation of the Council's IS/ICT and e - government strategies.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that: -

- Confirmation had now been received from the Department of Work and Pensions that the Council's bid for funding to improve the delivery of the Housing Benefit service by the installation of a PC in each of the Council's Sheltered Housing Schemes had been approved.
- Priorities were set out within the IEG 2 Statement. The Council had been able to implement all the 2002/03 proposals from available funding, the principal expenditure being on the implementation of on-line payment systems. In 2003/04, in addition to IEG 2 monies, funding would be utilised from the planning delivery and homelessness grants to achieve the proposed programme of projects. In terms of 2003/4 proposals, a report was being submitted to the next meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee

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on development and implementation of a virtual private network, links to the national planning portal and implementation of the CAPS public access module.

During debate it was recognised that information on detailed costings was useful for the purposes of prioritisation and that it would be of value for forthcoming reports on specific developments to include information on the financial implications as they relate to all e - government developments for the financial year.

Resolved

That progress made towards implementing the IEG 2 and IS/ICT strategies be endorsed, further reports on specific proposals to include information on the financial implications as they relate to all the e - government developments for the financial. (HAMS)

155 AUDIT AND INSPECTION

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the recommendations of the external auditors, including Best Value and Value for Money reports, and suggested Best Practice from Audit Commission publications.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that: -

- A risk assessment review was underway, the outcome of which would be reported into the Committee process prior to the summer recess. The identification of current risks would assist the development of continuity planning.
- The Authority already had a basis for business continuity planning which came into play, for example, over the Millennium period. However, the nature of risk changed over time
- The external auditors had highlighted the need for further work on risk assessment.
- The Authority worked on the basis that the medium term related to a period of three years for financial planning purposes.

Resolved

- (1) That the updated monitoring sheet for the Audit Commission publications be agreed.

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- (2) That the monitoring sheet for the external audit recommendations, including the value for money reports, be agreed.
- (3) That the monitoring sheet for the Best Value Performance Plan recommendations be agreed. (CE)

156 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the 2002/03 Audit Plan and the proposed Audit Plan for 2003/04. 92% of the audit plan had now been completed.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposed changes to the 2002/03 Audit Plan be agreed and that achievement of 92% of the plan be noted.
- (2) That it be noted that there has been no reported frauds under the Fraud and Corruption Policy, excluding Housing Benefit frauds.
- (3) That the proposed Audit Plan for 2003/04 be agreed. (CE)

157 PLANNING WEEKLY LIST ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services on changes that had been made to the notification arrangements for applications referred by Members from the Weekly List in the week of a Planning Services Committee.

It was agreed that, overall, the revised arrangements seemed acceptable. The Chairman observed that it would be appropriate for individual Members to contact Officers should there be any specific occasions when arrangements would not suit.

Resolved

That the arrangements put in place by the Head of Planning Services for notifying Members about referred weekly list items in the week of the Planning Services Committee be endorsed. (HPS)

158 SIGNAGE IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the introduction of formal signage within the Council Chamber.

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During debate Members felt that the high cost associated with the proposed signage could not be justified.

It was observed that, given the location of the public gallery, there could be value in providing some form of wall plan from which Councillors in the main body of the Chamber could be identified. Reference was made to the quality of the furniture in the Chamber and that any proposals should be sympathetic and avoid changes to the woodwork. Reference was also made to the value of ensuring the signage used was capable of relaying a professional image. It would be appropriate to retain signage for the dais area.

The Committee agreed that, subject to minimal cost, there should be further investigation of possibilities.

Resolved

That Officers review and report back on the possibilities for introducing signage for the dais area which is both sympathetic to the Chamber and capable of relaying a professional image. The cost of any proposals to be kept at a minimum, with a maximum expenditure of £500. (HAMS)

The meeting closed at 8.21pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____