

## Council – 23 February 2006

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Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **23 February 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr P F A Webster  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs M J Webster

Cllr R A Amner	Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr Mrs R Brown	Cllr D Merrick
Cllr Mrs L A Butcher	Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr P A Capon	Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr R G S Choppen	Cllr P R Robinson
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr T E Goodwin	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr K J Gordon	Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr Mrs S A Harper	Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr K H Hudson	Cllr J Thomass
Cllr A J Humphries	Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr C A Hungate	Cllr Mrs C A Weston
Cllr Mrs L Hungate	Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins
Cllr T Livings	

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs C I Black, Mrs T J Capon, K A Gibbs, Mrs H L A Glynn, C J Lumley, Mrs J R Lumley, R A Oatham and P K Savill.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren - Chief Executive  
R J Honey - Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)  
R Crofts - Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)  
D Deeks - Head of Financial Services  
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

### **67 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 December 2005 and the Extraordinary meetings held on 26 January and 31 January 2006 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

### **68 COMMITTEE MINUTES AND REPORTS**

Council received the Minutes of Committees as follows:-

	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Minute No.</b>
(1)	Environmental Services	11 January 2006	1 – 3

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- |            |   |                 |        |
|------------|---|-----------------|--------|
| (2)        | Policy & Finance  | 12 January 2006 | 4 – 8  |
| (3)        | Community Overview & Scrutiny   | 17 January 2006 | 9 - 12 |
| <b>(a)</b> | <b>Commissioning a Patient-led NHS – Formal Consultation (Minute 11/05)</b> |                 |        |

Members concurred with the observation of the Leader of the Council that it would be appropriate for a Policy Committee to consider this consultation in the light of further information.

### **Resolved**

That the formal consultation on the reconfiguration of health service structures be considered by the Community Services Committee at its meeting on 2 March 2006. (HHHCC)

- |      |  |                  |         |
|------|--|------------------|---------|
| (4)  | Environment Overview and Scrutiny        | 18 January 2006  | 13 - 15 |
| (5)  | Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny | 19 January 2006  | 16 - 18 |
| (6)  | Planning Services                        | 26 January 2006  | 21 – 23 |
| (7)  | Community Services                       | 7 February 2006  | 27 – 36 |
| (8)  | Environmental Services                   | 8 February 2006  | 37 - 43 |
| (9)  | Policy & Finance                         | 9 February 2006  | 44 – 52 |
| (10) | Community Overview & Scrutiny            | 14 February 2006 | 53 - 56 |
| (11) | Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny | 16 February 2006 | 57 - 60 |

### **(a) Council Constitution – Proposed Amendments (Minute 60/06)**

Council concurred with the observation of the Chairman of the Committee that the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) should be thanked for his work on revision to the Council's Constitution.

- |      |                   |                  |         |
|------|-------------------|------------------|---------|
| (12) | Appeals           | 20 February 2006 | 61 – 63 |
| (13) | Planning Services | 21 February 2006 | 64 - 66 |

### 69 SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX 2006/07

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on the level of Council Tax for 2006/07.

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:-

“Chairman and through you, members of the public and press, this is the second budget that I am presenting as Leader of this Conservative Administration.

I am proposing an increase in the Rochford District Council element of council tax of 4.98%, equivalent to just over 15 pence per week for a Band D rated householder. Whilst I do believe that any tax increase should be as low as possible, my vision for Rochford, however, is not stagnation. We must continue to improve and develop our services in key areas, but at the same time have a sustainable budget over the medium term. I am pleased to announce that this is precisely what we have achieved.

This time last year I had to inform Members that the five-year rolling budget strategy was unsustainable. That is no longer the case. Assuming no adverse changes in Government grant(s) and sensible increases in council tax, this budget is now sustainable. It also allows some provision for what I consider to be inevitable increases for new contracts in 2008 as a result of the need to recycle, thus reducing landfill.

I will, as always, mention Government grant. This year, due to a new grant formula, it has increased by £728,000. From this we have met:-

- The cost of the enhanced concessionary fares scheme amounting to £270,000.
- Costs that Rochford District incurs in managing the Council tenants right-to-buy scheme which, under new rules, we can no longer set off against the receipt now paid over to Government - £51,000.
- Loss of income as a result of the new National Register on Land Charges amounting to £71,000.

Although increase in grant is welcomed and has helped to balance our budget, we are still the lowest funded authority in Essex and 20<sup>th</sup> lowest in England. In addition, the Government is withholding £273,000 worth of grant that their own assessment indicates we are due, from Rochford District to give to richer Councils that might otherwise have lost out from the new grant formula.

I still prefer to draw the comparison between Brentwood and ourselves whereby we would receive an additional £1.3m. worth of grant if we had their allocation.

It is easy to complain about lack of funding, no matter how unjustified. I would much rather the Council concentrate on its efforts in overcoming these difficulties.

For 2004/5 and 2005/6 we have levered in over £6.2 million of additional funds. I will look at some examples. Firstly, in relation to our partnerships, these include the renovation of the Rayleigh Windmill, Websters Way Car Park, Capacity building funding, Department of Works and Pensions funding and renovating the industrial estates in the District.

We also received funding linked to our performance. This includes Planning Delivery, housing benefits and e-government.

Just consider what we have achieved in this past year alone, despite poor funding:-

- In partnership with Holmes Place the Council leisure facility at Clements Hall has received a £4m. refurbishment, raising the facility to the level of many private clubs, and we will open a brand new £3m. plus sports centre in May in Rayleigh. How many Districts the size of Rochford can boast such achievements!
- Beside the superbly restored windmill in Rayleigh, now a focal point for the town, we will also open a sensory garden in the spring.
- Commemorated the Battle of Trafalgar by planting 200 new oak trees, many of which were sponsored, in the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.
- We have improved our recycling by again working with a private sector supplier to provide an extra green waste collection of which the take-up is ahead of target.
- By the end of March we will have rolled out kerbside recycling to 96% of the District after successfully bidding for additional grant monies to provide a new smaller vehicle to access smaller roads and alleys.
- We have launched our environmental campaign, joined by members of the public and local church groups, which has provided additional cleaning of “hot spots” and encouraged our residents to be our eyes and ears to report issues such as litter, fly tipping, abandoned cars and graffiti. So far they have collected an additional 13 tons of rubbish and have tackled 103 graffiti sites.
- We completed our housing option appraisal and, in accordance with tenants' wishes, are now working with Sanctuary/Hereward Housing Association to conduct a ballot of all tenants in order to seek their approval to create a new Rochford Housing Association to run the District Council's housing. This will bring significant improvements to

tenants' properties that would not be possible if they remained under Council control due to different funding methods allowed by Government.

- We have improved our council tax and benefits service by working with Capita. This now allows contact by the public from 8a.m. to 8p.m. Monday to Friday and from 8a.m. to 12 noon on Saturdays. This innovation has been a major contributor to our raising the performance standards in that service. In human terms the improvement to this service has meant that over £13m in benefits alone has been paid out this year to those who are potentially the weakest and most vulnerable in our community. Also, thanks to an additional initiative, our officers have helped those formerly not claiming benefits, although they were entitled to, to claim an extra £1/2 m. which again has gone to those most vulnerable in our community. These extra monies are also spent in our area, raising the local economy. Although residents will not always see the benefits directly, we are continuing to address issues around corporate capacity identified in our Comprehensive Performance Assessment Improvement Plan.

So, Chairman, we may have small budgets, but we do achieve!

What of 2006/7?

As I said at the start, I do not want Rochford to stagnate. We must work with Thames Gateway to ensure Rochford does provide the facilities that will enable visitors to appreciate the wide variety of rural attractions we have on offer. We need to continue to promote our offer as the "Green" part of the Gateway.

We need to realise our long term ambition for the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park. As yet it is in its early formative years and is not readily available to the public. With the Local Plan adoption imminent, now is the time to drive forward on the land purchases necessary to realise the enormous potential of this major asset. It will take time and energy, but this is a key project for the Council as we continue to develop our "Green" portfolio.

Also, as part of our vision, we really do need to do more on recycling. Next year we will be introducing more targeted education campaigns aimed at schools and the general public. At present only around two thirds of our residents are participating. We must strive to increase usage of the scheme. Central Government is setting increasingly stretching targets in this area and we need to ensure that we continue to endeavour to meet them.

We will also be looking to provide more Saturday morning collection points in the rural areas for residents to take their green waste, free of charge. Again, this will help to meet targets.

Although, as I mentioned, the Government is funding free bus concessionary passes, this is in the Rochford District area only; Rochford District Council is therefore additionally funding an Essex wide scheme so that residents' passes may be used throughout the Essex area, making them much more valuable and usable. This may also replace some use of the private car thus reducing traffic, congestion and pollution.

Our environment is good, but we cannot be complacent. We will be making additional resources available to tackle issues such as improvements to lighting in alleyways and targeting graffiti removal. Our main challenge over the coming 12 months, however, will be to work towards the new contracts for waste collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance. We need extra capacity to deliver on these. On waste in particular, we will continue to work in partnership with other Thames Gateway authorities on a South Essex solution.

To underpin the improvements we have made and to ensure further progress, we are providing new resources to strengthen our overview and scrutiny process, together with a new Committee system which will come into operation from May.

As communications with our residents and customers continues to grow using IT, we are also taking steps to further resource this important area to keep pace with demand and expectations placed upon us as a key local public service.

To assist the more vulnerable members of our community, we will be further expanding the gardening and handyman service. We have supported this initiative for a number of years and its value within our aging community continues to grow.

We are also continuing with the revenue and benefits call centre and will be working to simplify the wording of our public applications for assistance to ensure they are more user friendly.

We will identify where we can contribute towards the Public Service Agreements with our fellow District Councils, Essex County Council and other public partners.

To achieve all of these initiatives we will be adding around £157,000 to our annual budget.

The budget strategy provides for the identification of £150,000 per annum as part of the Gershon efficiency savings demanded by Government. The irony is that, with our levels of funding, we need to find these savings whether or not there was a Gershon requirement.

Turning now to our capital programme, the completion and opening of the Rayleigh Leisure Centre in May will be a landmark project for this year. We

will also be proceeding with the land purchase for the extension of the Rochford Cemetery.

We will also be seizing any opportunity to increase our land holdings at Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, although this may require the use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers over time.

For the youth of the area we will be replacing the skateboarding facility at Clements Hall as well as a new facility at the Rayleigh Leisure Centre. For business, via the monies we're receiving through Thames Gateway, we will be further investing in improving our industrial estates.

With regard to housing, we are continuing to progress the option to transfer our housing. This year will be critical in determining whether such a transfer takes place, with the tenants' ballot scheduled for around October/November. We will, meanwhile, continue to invest in making more homes compliant with the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

There are many other things we would like to do, and, if we had the same level of grant as some of our neighbours, we would do them. We have had to prioritise and some of the things we would like to have done will be held in abeyance, such as:-

- Improved lighting in car parks
- Park and Street Wardens
- Woodlands Environmental Liaison Officer
- Partnership Assistant

We will look to appoint a Marketing and Promotions Officer in 2007/8 as our tourism agenda begins to develop. We are also looking to work in partnership with Essex County Council in order to provide modern electronic car park information signs.

Housing rents will once again increase in accordance with central Government dictat.

Chairman, I am proud of the way Members of this Council construct the budget process. I think others could learn from us. Although it is a large Conservative administration, we do listen to our colleagues of the opposition. They have participated fully on the budget and I was pleased to second their proposal to earmark more resources for graffiti removal. It is in this way that our Members work to benefit the District and its residents.

Our council tax will increase for a Band D property from £162.81 a year to £170.91. I repeat, this is an increase of just over 15 pence per week.

In conclusion, the total council tax for a Band D property will be:-

Essex County Council

£960.39 – an increase of 4.65%

Essex Police Authority	£110.97 – an increase of 5.93%
Essex Fire Authority	£58.23 – an increase of 1.89%
Rochford District Council	£170.91 – an increase of 4.98%
Average Parish/Town Council	£29.10 – an increase of 9.15%.

Total Band D average council tax will be £1,329.60 – an increase of 4.77%.

I commend the council tax for Members' approval."

During discussion reference was made to the high level of the average Parish/Town Council precepts for 2006/07 (9.15%). It was recognised that various factors may be associated with this. For example, for Parishes with small initial budgets, an increase that appears relatively insignificant in monetary terms can result in a noticeable percentage increase. Also, some Parishes may keep their budgets low over a period of years. There can be situations where a Parish is responding to the wishes of its community in relation to specific projects, such as the young persons development in the Parish of Great Wakering.

It was recognised that administrative costs can be significant for Parish/Town Councils. The Leader of the Council referred to the potential associated with the development of partnership working with Parish/Town Councils in terms of keeping their costs as low as possible.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the total for economic development is estimated at £102,300.
- (2) That the total for gross expenditure of the District together with the Parish precepts be £27,732,593.
- (3) That the total of income for the District Council be £17,134,300.
- (4) That the total net expenditure of the District Council together with the Parishes be £10,598,293.
- (5) That the total of the sums payable into the general fund in respect of redistributed non domestic rates, revenue support grant, together with adjustments from the collection fund, be £4,456,556.
- (6) That the budget requirement for the year of £10,598,293 less the net income receivable of £4,456,556 which, divided by the tax base of 30,707.27 is equal to £200.01, which is the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
- (7) That the total of Parish precepts included within the above is £893,657.
- (8) That the Council Tax relating to the District Council without Parish precepts is £170.91.

- (9) That the total tax for both District and Parishes be as set out in the schedule which is attached as Appendix A to these minutes. These sums are calculated as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.
- (10) The sums given above for Band D but now shown in the particular valuations bands A-H are set out in the schedule attached as Appendix B to these minutes.
- (11) The precepts issued to the Council in respect of Essex County Council, Essex Fire Authority and Essex Police Authority for each valuation band A-H as set out in the schedule as attached as Appendix C to these minutes.
- (12) The total Council Tax for the area for each valuation band A-H be as set out in Appendix D to these minutes. These are the amounts set as Council Tax for the year 2006/07. (HFS)

### **70 KEY POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR 2006/07**

Council considered the report of the Chief Executive on key policies and actions for 2006/07.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the work programme for 2006/07, as set out in Appendices A, B and C and the public notification of its content, as outlined in the report, be agreed.
- (2) That those areas of work for consideration by the Review Committee, as outlined in Appendix D of the report, be agreed.
- (3) That the programme for the monitoring of the 2006/07 Budget and the development of the 2007/08 Budget framework, as outlined in Appendix E of the report, be noted. (CE)

### **71 ROYAL GARDEN PARTY**

Council considered the report of the Chief Executive on the appointment of four representatives, including guests, to attend one of this year's Royal Garden Parties to be held in July.

#### **Resolved**

That Councillor T Livings and guest and Councillor Mrs L Hungate and guest be nominated as the four representatives to attend one of the Royal Garden Parties to be held in July 2006, using the Civic Car and driver. (CE)

Prior to the close of the Meeting, Councillors concurred with the comments of the Leader of the Council that particular thanks should be extended to both the Chief Executive and officers involved in the Budget process for their contributions to the work of the Council.

Best wishes were extended to both Mr Roger Crofts and Mr David Deeks for their contributions to what would be the last Council Tax Setting Meeting they will be attending prior to retirement. The Council's sustainable five year Budget Strategy was a tribute to their work and dedication.

The meeting closed at 8.02 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

**APPENDIX A**

	<b>Band D Equivalents</b>	<b>Parish Precept</b>	<b>Parish Charge</b>	<b>District Charge</b>	<b>Total Charge</b>
Ashingdon	1,210.78	32,287	26.67	170.91	197.58
Barling	618.65	24,000	38.79	170.91	209.70
Canewdon	542.28	13,750	25.36	170.91	196.27
Foulness Island	67.25	2,700	40.15	170.91	211.06
Great Wakering	1,957.94	60,000	30.64	170.91	201.55
Hawkwell	4,500.06	112,763	25.06	170.91	195.97
Hockley	3,795.87	177,062	46.65	170.91	217.56
Hullbridge	2,338.89	74,801	31.98	170.91	202.89
Paglesham	104.58	3,500	33.47	170.91	204.38
Rawreth	428.33	7,750	18.09	170.91	189.00
Rayleigh	12,017.77	276,077	22.97	170.91	193.88
Rochford	2,840.40	97,000	34.15	170.91	205.06
Stambridge	231.71	7,800	33.66	170.91	204.57
Sutton	52.75	4,167	79.00	170.91	249.91
	<u>30,707.27</u>	<u>893,657.00</u>			

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### APPENDIX B

	Band D	Parish	Parish	District	Total	BAND							
	Equivalentents	Precept	Charge	Charge	Charge	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
						6/9	7/9	8/9	1	11/9	13/9	15/9	2
Ashingdon	1,210.78	32,287	26.67	170.91	197.58	131.72	153.67	175.63	197.58	241.49	285.39	329.30	395.16
Barling	618.65	24,000	38.79	170.91	209.70	139.80	163.10	186.40	209.70	256.30	302.90	349.50	419.40
Canewdon	542.28	13,750	25.36	170.91	196.27	130.85	152.65	174.46	196.27	239.89	283.50	327.12	392.54
Foulness Island	67.25	2,700	40.15	170.91	211.06	140.71	164.16	187.61	211.06	257.96	304.86	351.77	422.12
Great Wakering	1,957.94	60,000	30.64	170.91	201.55	134.37	156.76	179.16	201.55	246.34	291.13	335.92	403.10
Hawkwell	4,500.06	112,763	25.06	170.91	195.97	130.65	152.42	174.20	195.97	239.52	283.07	326.62	391.94
Hockley	3,795.87	177,062	46.65	170.91	217.56	145.04	169.21	193.39	217.56	265.91	314.25	362.60	435.12
Hullbridge	2,338.89	74,801	31.98	170.91	202.89	135.26	157.80	180.35	202.89	247.98	293.06	338.15	405.78
Paglesham	104.58	3,500	33.47	170.91	204.38	136.25	158.96	181.67	204.38	249.80	295.22	340.63	408.76
Rawreth	428.33	7,750	18.09	170.91	189.00	126.00	147.00	168.00	189.00	231.00	273.00	315.00	378.00
Rayleigh	12,017.77	276,077	22.97	170.91	193.88	129.25	150.80	172.34	193.88	236.96	280.05	323.13	387.76
Rochford	2,840.40	97,000	34.15	170.91	205.06	136.71	159.49	182.28	205.06	250.63	296.20	341.77	410.12
Stambridge	231.71	7,800	33.66	170.91	204.57	136.38	159.11	181.84	204.57	250.03	295.49	340.95	409.14
Sutton	52.75	4,167	79.00	170.91	249.91	166.61	194.37	222.14	249.91	305.45	360.98	416.52	499.82
	<u>30,707.27</u>	<u>893,657</u>											

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**APPENDIX C**

<b>County Charge</b>	<b>Police Charge</b>	<b>Fire Charge</b>	<b>Total Charge</b>	<b>BAND A 6/9</b>	<b>BAND B 7/9</b>	<b>BAND C 8/9</b>	<b>BAND D 1</b>	<b>BAND E 11/9</b>	<b>BAND F 13/9</b>	<b>BAND G 15/9</b>	<b>BAND H 2</b>
<b>960.39</b>			960.39	640.26	746.97	853.68	960.39	1,173.81	1,387.23	1,600.65	1,920.78
	<b>110.97</b>		110.97	73.98	86.31	98.64	110.97	135.63	160.29	184.95	221.94
		<b>58.23</b>	58.23	38.82	45.29	51.76	58.23	71.17	84.11	97.05	116.46

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### APPENDIX D

	Band D Equivalents	Parish Precept	Parish Charge	District Charge	County Charge	Fire Charge	Police Charge	Total Charge	BAND A 6/9	BAND B 7/9	BAND C 8/9	BAND D 1	BAND E 11/9	BAND F 13/9	BAND G 15/9	BAND H 2
Ashingdon	1,210.78	32,287	26.67	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,327.17	884.78	1,032.24	1,179.71	1,327.17	1,622.10	1,917.02	2,211.95	2,654.34
Barling	618.65	24,000	38.79	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,339.29	892.86	1,041.67	1,190.48	1,339.29	1,636.91	1,934.53	2,232.15	2,678.58
Canewdon	542.28	13,750	25.36	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,325.86	883.91	1,031.22	1,178.54	1,325.86	1,620.50	1,915.13	2,209.77	2,651.72
Foulness Island	67.25	2,700	40.15	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,340.65	893.77	1,042.73	1,191.69	1,340.65	1,638.57	1,936.49	2,234.42	2,681.30
Great Wakering	1,957.94	60,000	30.64	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,331.14	887.43	1,035.33	1,183.24	1,331.14	1,626.95	1,922.76	2,218.57	2,662.28
Hawkwell	4,500.06	112,763	25.06	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,325.56	883.71	1,030.99	1,178.28	1,325.56	1,620.13	1,914.70	2,209.27	2,651.12
Hockley	3,795.87	177,062	46.65	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,347.15	898.10	1,047.78	1,197.47	1,347.15	1,646.52	1,945.88	2,245.25	2,694.30
Hullbridge	2,338.89	74,801	31.98	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,332.48	888.32	1,036.37	1,184.43	1,332.48	1,628.59	1,924.69	2,220.80	2,664.96
Paglesham	104.58	3,500	33.47	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,333.97	889.31	1,037.53	1,185.75	1,333.97	1,630.41	1,926.85	2,223.28	2,667.94
Rawreth	428.33	7,750	18.09	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,318.59	879.06	1,025.57	1,172.08	1,318.59	1,611.61	1,904.63	2,197.65	2,637.18
Rayleigh	12,017.77	276,077	22.97	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,323.47	882.31	1,029.37	1,176.42	1,323.47	1,617.57	1,911.68	2,205.78	2,646.94
Rochford	2,840.40	97,000	34.15	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,334.65	889.77	1,038.06	1,186.36	1,334.65	1,631.24	1,927.83	2,224.42	2,669.30
Stambridge	231.71	7,800	33.66	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,334.16	889.44	1,037.68	1,185.92	1,334.16	1,630.64	1,927.12	2,223.60	2,668.32
Sutton	52.75	4,167	79.00	170.91	960.39	58.23	110.97	1,379.50	919.67	1,072.94	1,226.22	1,379.50	1,686.06	1,992.61	2,299.17	2,759.00
	<u>30,707.27</u>	<u>893,657</u>														