

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 22 October 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **22 October 2002** when there were present:

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

Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr C G Seagers

Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr J Thomass

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr J R F Mason

REPRESENTING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Mrs J Helson – Rayleigh Chamber of Trade
Mrs J Mears – Rayleigh Chamber of Trade
H Squier – Rochford Chamber of Trade
J Sheaf – Essex Chamber of Commerce
K Wickham – Federation of Small Businesses

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive
R Crofts – Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
J Honey – Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
S Fowler – Head of Administrative & Member Services
H Drye – Corporate Policy Manager
S Rom – Economic Development Officer
M Martin – Committee Administrator

501 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2002 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

502 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Mrs J R Lumley declared a personal interest in the item on the Proposed Environmental Centre Site by virtue of being a Member of Rayleigh Town Council.

503 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Committee received the schedule relating to previous decisions.

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Rayleigh Operatic & Dramatic Society (RODS) – Update on Scenery Store

Members noted that a planning application had been received. The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) agreed to advise Members of this Committee to which Planning Services Committee meeting this would be presented.

50-54 West Street, Rochford

Members noted that this application was likely to be in the Member arena before the end of this year.

Outstanding issues would be carried forward.

504 CHAMBERS OF TRADE AND COMMERCE AND FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES

Note: Cllr M G B Starke declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of being a business proprietor.

The Chairman welcomed members from the Chambers of Trade and Federation of Small Businesses to the meeting in order that their representations be received. A list of these had been appended to the report of the Chief Executive.

In noting these, the following responses were made.

Federation of Small Businesses

- The federation asked the Council to consider providing small business units or an enterprise centre in the area. Officers advised that discussions have taken place with the East of England Development Agency and the owners of Rochford Business Park in respect of providing a Business Enterprise Centre or units for small businesses.
- Business Watch Scheme – The Crime and Disorder Partnership are looking in to this joint initiative to reduce crime in business areas.
- In noting the financial difficulties experienced by small businesses in recycling their waste, it was agreed that, as recycling centres are run by the County Council, this view can be referred to them and information sought to help businesses with waste collection and recycling. This Council will soon be appointing a new Recycling Officer.
- In response to concerns that the Council may be selling services to the community cheaper than local businesses, the County Council confirmed that it has contracted out all its major services and, therefore, there is no capacity to sell in competition with local businesses. However, this Council seeks to give a majority of its business to local contractors - these are mainly from within the District and South East Essex.

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Rayleigh Chamber of Trade

- The Chamber raised a number of issues relating to car parking in the Town. A key debate during this Municipal Year will be around the various car parking issues. The skateboarding event held during the recent School Summer holidays had been a major success and alternative venues may be considered in the future.
- The Chamber identified the need for a contingency fund for town centre maintenance to address any outstanding issues from the Town Centre Monitoring Group. The County Council have been invited to the next meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 19 November to discuss outstanding issues relating to Town Centre enhancement schemes.
- Skateboarding – the Chamber advised the Council that Fairview Park, Rayleigh has been suggested by the Police and the local Member of Parliament as a possible site for a skateboarding area. This has also met with the approval of the Chamber of Trade and local young people.
- The Chamber reported that local businesses sited on the Brook Road Industrial Estate, Rayleigh were very pleased to receive funding from the District Council. It is the view of the Chamber of Trade that this estate has the potential to be developed as a window in to the District. They felt that further work would be required to take advantage of this opportunity.
- In respect of crime issues on the Industrial Estate, it was felt that it should be possible to link this in with the Business Watch scheme identified by the Federation of Small Businesses.
- Further funding for industrial estates may be available via the Thames Gateway South Essex partnership.
- A number of sites were identified by the Chamber of Trade as requiring Dog Bins as litter bins were being used for the purpose at present. The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) agreed to investigate the possibility of providing additional dog litter bins in Rayleigh town centre.
- The Chamber were pleased to note that the issue of chewing gum on the pavements in the town centre had been discussed by the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee and that action was being taken to address it.
- Issues around the Windmill site were to be discussed later on in this meeting.
- The Chamber requested the Council to encourage Essex County Council to provide more brown signage to indicate the shopping area and other facilities as well as the industrial estate.
- An update on Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) was requested. The Police have monitored Grove Road and Hambro Hill shopping parade areas over the last 6 months and concluded that the installation of CCTV could not be justified on the basis of the number of incidents noted. Home Office research now published suggested that the impact on crime rates through the use of CCTV is inconclusive. However, it had been shown to be of benefit when used in tandem with improved lighting, particularly in car park areas.
- In response to the Chamber's request for a Taxi Shelter, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) informed the meeting that the Rayleigh Town Centre Sub-Committee had concluded that the issue of a taxi shelter

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within the Boots Lagoon area in Rayleigh High Street was a matter for the taxi trade and the Chamber of Trade.

- The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) agreed to ask Essex County Council to look at pruning certain trees in the town centre area which were becoming dangerous, particularly for the partially sighted.
- The issue of public toilet facilities in Rayleigh would be considered as part of the redevelopment of the Civic Suite, in the light of the closure of the existing facilities in the Civic Suite to the public.

The members of the business community noted that the points they had raised would be taken forward where appropriate and considered as part of the budget process. They would be invited back again during this process.

505 CONSULTATION WITH THE DISTRICT CHAMBERS OF TRADE AND BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which advised members on the view of businesses and their representatives on consultation with Rochford District Council.

At the meeting of this Committee held on 23 July, Members had resolved that representatives of the business community and a sample of non-represented businesses should be consulted and asked their views on how the Council should consult with them.

Officers had undertaken discussions with the Chambers of Trade and Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses at their regular meeting with District officers on the 6 August 2002.

Fifty companies in the area had been surveyed to ascertain their views on consultation with the Council and whether they would like to be consulted on the Community Strategy. During discussion, the following points were noted:-

- Members of the business community were concerned that they are often given very little time in which to respond to consultation, particularly as some groups only meet monthly or bi-monthly.
- The results of consultations are always taken into account by the District Council.

On a Motion moved by Cllr M G B Starke and seconded by Cllr T G Cutmore it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That a formalised consultation protocol with representatives of the Chambers of Trade, Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses be developed by officers for consideration by this Committee.

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- (2) That the large employer be invited to join the Local Strategic Partnership.
(CEx)

506 FEES AND CHARGES – UPDATE

The Committee received the report of the Head of Financial Services which informed Members of the progress on issues relating to fees and charges.

At the meeting of the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 20 June 2002, Members had agreed a plan of action to gather information to be used when making recommendations to this Committee on the schedule of fees and charges within the budget process for 2003/04.

Members noted that:-

- a response from the external auditors, relating to a revised method for calculating depreciation, was expected by early December.
- evidence suggests that there is no significant change regarding the benefits of the free Saturday afternoon parking and the trader refund scheme.
- car park charges within other areas of Essex will form part of the overall budget setting process.
- consideration of further suitable land for a cemetery would be considered within the Local Plan process.
- work is well underway in those areas where information is still being gathered.

507 IEG 2002 STATEMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) which invited Members to comment on the Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Statement and recommend to Council accordingly, prior to submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) by 31 October 2002.

The Council's IS/ICT Strategy 2001/02 to 2005/06 had been considered by Council on 24 April 2001 and Section 5 of the Strategy had been submitted as the Council's first IEG Statement in May 2001.

As a result of a satisfactory assessment, a £200,000 capital grant for e-government projects was received for 2002/03.

For 2003/04, the Government has again made a capital grant of £200,000 available, subject to the submission and approval of an IEG Statement for 2002.

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Members noted that partnership working is essential in order that this Council progresses with the aim to provide shared and seamlessly delivered local services.

Recommended to Council

That the IEG Statement be approved for submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. (CD(LPA))

508 FINANCE BEST VALUE REVIEW – INTERIM REPORT

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which apprised Members of interim actions and outcomes identified so far in this Best Value Review.

As identified in the Council's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2002/03, a review of Financial Services is being carried out this year. The review encompasses all aspects of work carried out in the Finance Directorate apart from car parking, Hackney carriage licensing and housing.

Members congratulated officers regarding this Council's performance in respect of local taxation and national non-domestic rates.

509 ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) which invited Members to comment on a policy paper produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on the current and future framework governing access to information for local authorities in England. A copy of the Executive Summary had been appended to the report. Responses were required in the form of replies to questions, which had also been appended to this report.

Members noted that the policy document was principally concerned with the operation of executive rather than alternative arrangements, so the suggested response had been compiled in the form of a general comment on those issues which had been outlined in the Executive Summary.

Following discussion, the following amendments were agreed to the comments listed in the report:-

- Paragraph 4.5 – delete the word “appropriate”.
- Paragraph 4.8 – amend the words “as a means of achieving” to “to achieve”.

Resolved

That, subject to the amendments listed above, the comments outlined in the report form this Council's response to the policy paper on access to information in local government. (CD(LPA))

510 OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER – CONSULTATION ON BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2003/04

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which detailed the proposals put forward by Government for changes to the performance indicators for local authorities for 2003/04 and sought Members' comments on the suggested officer response to this proposal, which had been appended to the report.

Members requested that officers be commended on the excellent response.

Resolved

That the officer comments, which had been appended to the report, form this Council's response to the consultation on Best Value Performance Indicators 2003/04. (CEX)

511 PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE SITE – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Committee received and noted the report of the Chief Executive which updated Members on the progress made in respect of securing the return of this site from Rayleigh Town Council.

Members noted that:-

- The Clerk to the Town Council would be invited to any meetings between the District Council and the National Trust on the 'Gateway' project and its environs.
- A decision should be received by the end of November in respect of the District's application for a lottery grant in respect of the Windmill.

The meeting ended at 9.53 pm.

Chairman

Date

