

Council – 18 February 2003

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **18 February 2003** when there were present:

Cllr R S Allen (Chairman)

Cllr Mrs L Barber	Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr C I Black	Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr Mrs R Brown	Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr P A Capon	Cllr Mrs M D McCarthy
Cllr T J Capon	Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr R G S Choppen	Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr D F Flack	Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr K A Gibbs	Cllr P K Savill
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr T E Goodwin	Cllr J Thomass
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr C A Hungate	Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr Mrs L Hungate	Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr C C Langlands	Cllr Mrs M A Weir
Cllr T Livings	Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs R A Amner, A J Humphries, Mrs M A Starke, M G B Starke and Mrs E Marlow.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
M Martin	Committee Administrator

80 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

81 SETTING THE LEVEL OF COUNCIL TAX 2003/04

Council considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) which sought authorisation to set the Council Tax for the year 2003/04.

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:-

“CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC,

This is the first budget of the new Conservative administration of the Council.

We firmly believe that our residents would much rather spend their own money as opposed to the Council spending it for them. Consequently, we have ensured that the council tax will be set at the lowest possible level.

Unfortunately, we have so many requirements imposed on us by Central Government that have to be funded by the local council tax payer, and it makes it impossible for us to keep the council tax as low as we would wish.

For the next 12 months, additional Government requirements will amount to over £194,000 which, by themselves will increase our council tax by 5%.

This Conservative administration does wish to continue to have improvements in service – which I will talk about when I come to future issues. These are estimated to cost some £46,000, which equals over a 1% increase in the council tax.

Many other elements of expenditure are outside of our control. Firstly, there is the annual staff pay award, which is nationally negotiated. Secondly, there is other inflation on our core costs such as electricity and gas. Thirdly, for many years, because of the lack of Government support - which I will come to later - this Council has used balances to keep its expenditure down and keep the level of council tax increases reasonable.

These balances are now exhausted and we now have to balance our budget. The impact of these three items, together with numerous other smaller budgets which are demand led, is offset to some extent by additional income such as planning applications. Nevertheless, there is a net cost which accounts for the remaining 3% increase in council tax.

The major problem faced by this District is that, because of the way local government is funded, every 1% increase in our budget translates to a 2% increase in our council tax.

For many years this Council has received the lowest level of Government funding in Essex and for the 2002/3 financial year was the 9th lowest in the country. The Government has now concluded a review of the way in which it funds local government. Although we have benefited from this review, we will still receive the lowest settlement in Essex - and the 14th lowest in the country. I cannot accept – nor will many residents - that Rochford is the 14th wealthiest District in England.

The scale of underfunding is stark. We will receive £5.56 per head less than the next lowest in Essex – Uttlesford. Harlow receives the best settlement which is £50.13 per head more than Rochford. If we received their level of grant, we would get a staggering £3.9m. increase. Even Brentwood gets £18.79 per head extra, which would increase our grant by £1.48m.

At the levels of Government funding for Districts like Brentwood, we would not be talking about any increase in council tax!

The total level of Government funding includes the redistribution of national non domestic rates, which we have to collect for the Government. It is interesting to note that we will collect around £10.7m. in the year beginning in April, but will only receive back £2.7m.

Although Rochford has always been and will, in my view, continue to be underfunded, this Conservative administration will ensure that the Council continues to move forward by providing new and improving current services.

Already we have achieved much since last May. We have started the verification framework for housing benefits to help deter fraud. In other authorities, the introduction of this initiative has led to considerable disruption from claimants. I am pleased to say that this is not the case in Rochford District.

We are continuing to develop the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Park and we have been successful in attracting £50,000 towards the cost of the lake development from Thames Gateway. The poor weather of late has led to a temporary halt in the improvement works planned. I am sure I speak for many Members here when I say how delighted I am that this Council will have the honour of hosting a short visit from the Princess Royal to the park on 11 April. We will invite representatives from the main stakeholders, funding agencies and press to an official tour of the park to mark the occasion. They will see the big strides we have made – despite the weather of late.

Our intention, weather permitting, is to have the park opened to the public by the autumn, when the key first phase including the lake, fencing, bridleway, footpath and signposting, will be complete. The areas will be safe to explore unsupervised and the park will be looking its best.

Holmes Place completed a very smooth takeover of our leisure facilities from Leisure Connection with the assistance of our officers last April. We have already agreed plans for improvements to Mill Hall and work started there on 3rd February. Work is planned to start in the next few weeks on the ambitious major refurbishment of Clements Hall. We will shortly be agreeing the mix of facilities in respect of the new Park Sports Centre, which is still on programme for completion in 2005.

In June last year, we provided an additional 25 dog bins throughout the District.

In July, our quarterly performance indicators showed that we were exceeding our targets in respect of street cleansing and removal of fly tipping.

During August, we improved on our summer playscheme activities. I believe everyone was particularly impressed with the success of the skateboarding event in The Market Car Park in Rayleigh, and we shall certainly be continuing with this activity in the future.

Early this January we started work on The Lavers Sheltered Housing Scheme conversion and staff have started work on drawing up a scheme for the improvement of Spa Court in Hockley.

By the end of March, we will have completed the installation of footpaths within Sweyne Park, Rayleigh and improved the drainage for the site.

When Conservatives took control of this Council in May, we promised that we would improve our sheltered accommodation to ensure that no resident was required to share bathroom facilities. We promised that we would progress the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Park Scheme. We promised that we would have a new Park Sports Centre by 2005. As members of the public can see from the statements I have made, this Conservative administration is delivering on its promises.

What of the future?

Next year we will be required to complete a homelessness strategy and the Government wants to see far less use made of bed and breakfast accommodation. Fine words, but give us the resources to do the job, which they haven't.

We will be required to administer elements of the Government's Tax Credit Scheme through the housing benefit system. The Government also wants us to carry out even more work in respect of pensioner benefits and fraud prevention and detection. We have no option but to provide this service. When the Government wants us to do extra, I say again give us the resources to do the job.

With regard to recycling, we fully support the introduction of kerbside recycling to the whole of the District by 2010, provided we receive full funding from Government.

We will continue the development of Cherry Orchard Country Park and seek further funding from outside the District.

The Lavers project will be completed and a start will be made on Spa Court.

The Mill Hall refurbishment will be completed in May this year and work on Clements Hall will start in late March or early April.

We will also be starting on the programme of works for the refurbishment of our public conveniences which will take place during this year and 2004.

We are still awaiting the outcome of our Lottery bid in respect of the development of the Rayleigh Windmill. If that is successful, work will start this year.

Chairman, the budget you have before you is both forward looking and prudent. The increase of 9%, equates to £11.79 per annum on a Band D

property or 23p per week, less than a pint of milk – definitely less than a pint of beer!

Although the impact is small compared to some authorities, I do sincerely regret the increase as old age pensioners will only get a 1.4% rise in pension and, for the majority, salaries may only increase by around 3%.

Our Band D council tax will be £142.29 a year. I would say, Chairman, that this is a lot less than the £181.32 suggested by this Government when they provided us with details of this year's grant settlement.

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

Essex County Council	£896.40
Police Authority	£92.97
Rochford	£142.29

Depending on where you live in the District, taking into account town and parish council charges, the Band D council tax overall will range from £1,148.91 to £1,178.51.

I believe that, without the help and diligence of our two Members of Parliament – Sir Teddy Taylor and Mark Francois – we would have fared even worse from the Government and our residents would be clobbered with more council tax.

Finally, I believe every Councillor of all political parties, and none, will agree that Members have received exemplary service and help from our officers in determining the council tax for the forthcoming financial year. Thank you.”

Other Members of the Council expressed sympathy with the Leader's comments relating to the low level of Government funding received by the District. In particular, it was hoped that this would not have an adverse effect on the planned introduction of kerbside recycling to the whole of the District by 2010.

Resolved

- (1) That the total for economic development be estimated at £82,500
- (2) That the total for gross expenditure of the District together with the Parish precepts be £19,270,684.
- (3) That the total of income for the District Council be £10,318,450
- (4) That the total net expenditure of the District Council together with the Parishes be £8,952,234.

- (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 £3,859,585.
- (6) That the budget requirement for the year of £8,952,234 less the net income receivable of £3,859,585 which, divided by the tax base of £30,457.62 is equal to £167.20, which is the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
- (7) That the total of Parish precepts included within the above is £758,834.
- (8) That the Council Tax relating to the District Council without Parish precepts is £142.29.
- (9) That the total tax for both District and Parishes be as set out in the schedule attached as Appendix 1 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) That the valuations for bands A-H be as set out in the schedule attached as Appendix 2 to these Minutes.
- (11) That the precepts issued to the Council in respect of Essex County Council and Essex Police Authority for each valuation band A-H be as set out in the schedule attached as Appendix 3 to these Minutes.
- (12) That the total Council Tax for the area for each valuation band A-H be as set out in Appendix 4 to these Minutes. These are the amounts set as Council Tax for the year 2003/04. (HFS)

82 KEY POLICIES AND ACTIONS

Council considered the report of the Chief Executive which formally set out the main areas of policy development for 2003/04, and identified the main projects to be progressed and implemented together with highlighting the main areas of service development/change.

Members also noted suggested areas which the Overview & Scrutiny Committees might wish to consider in 2003/04, together with the timetable for establishing the budget for 2004/05.

The Chief Executive provided Members with the following updated information:-

- The commencement date of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Inspection had been brought forward to 23 February 2004, which had resulted in the need to alter the following timescales.

- The CPA's Completion of Self-Assessment would be brought forward to October 2003 and the Peer Review to November-January 2004.
- The Environment Management/Stewardship Best Value Review would be brought forward to October 2003 and focus on the topics covered in the CPA.
- The Transport Activities & Parking Best Value Review would be postponed to the following financial year to free up time and resources for work on CPA. Nonetheless, the work on parking decriminalisation would continue.

Members noted with thanks the details contained within the comprehensive set of Appendices.

On a Motion moved by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr J E Grey it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That the work programme for 2003/04, as set out in Appendices A, B and C to the report, together with the amendments noted above and the public consultation on its content, be agreed.
- (2) That those areas of work for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny process, as outlined in Appendix D to the report, be agreed.
- (3) That the programme for the monitoring of the 2003/04 agreed budget and the development of the 2004/05 budget framework, as outlined in Appendix E to the report, be agreed. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.07 pm.

Chairman

Date

	Band D Equivalents	Parish Precept	Parish Charge	District Charge	Total Charge
Ashington	1,215.83	25,879	21.28	142.29	163.57
Barling	624.09	16,000	25.64	142.29	167.93
Canewdon	549.29	12,500	22.76	142.29	165.05
Foulness Island	67.74	2,300	33.95	142.29	176.24
Great Wakering	1,965.36	50,000	25.44	142.29	167.73
Hawkwell	4,470.52	87,576	19.59	142.29	161.88
Hockley	3,758.04	167,585	44.59	142.29	186.88
Hullbridge	2,335.48	68,684	29.41	142.29	171.70
Paglesham	101.05	2,000	19.79	142.29	162.08
Rawreth	427.09	7,368	17.25	142.29	159.54
Rayleigh	11,909.56	249,606	20.96	142.29	163.25
Rochford	2,747.11	60,436	22.00	142.29	164.29
Stambridge	233.10	6,400	27.46	142.29	169.75
Sutton	53.36	2,500	46.85	142.29	189.14
	<u>30,457.62</u>	<u>758,834</u>			

	Band D	Parish	Parish	District	Total	BAND							
	Equivalents	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	1,215.83	25,879	21.28	142.29	163.57	109.05	127.22	145.40	163.57	199.92	236.27	272.62	327.14
Barling	624.09	16,000	25.64	142.29	167.93	111.95	130.61	149.27	167.93	205.25	242.57	279.88	335.86
Canewdon	549.29	12,500	22.76	142.29	165.05	110.03	128.37	146.71	165.05	201.73	238.41	275.08	330.10
Foulness Island	67.74	2,300	33.95	142.29	176.24	117.49	137.08	156.66	176.24	215.40	254.57	293.73	352.48
Great Wakering	1,965.36	50,000	25.44	142.29	167.73	111.82	130.46	149.09	167.73	205.00	242.28	279.55	335.46
Hawkwell	4,470.52	87,576	19.59	142.29	161.88	107.92	125.91	143.89	161.88	197.85	233.83	269.80	323.76
Hockley	3,758.04	167,585	44.59	142.29	186.88	124.59	145.35	166.12	186.88	228.41	269.94	311.47	373.76
Hullbridge	2,335.48	68,684	29.41	142.29	171.70	114.47	133.54	152.62	171.70	209.86	248.01	286.17	343.40
Paglesham	101.05	2,000	19.79	142.29	162.08	108.05	126.06	144.07	162.08	198.10	234.12	270.13	324.16
Rawreth	427.09	7,368	17.25	142.29	159.54	106.36	124.09	141.81	159.54	194.99	230.45	265.90	319.08
Rayleigh	11,909.56	249,606	20.96	142.29	163.25	108.83	126.97	145.11	163.25	199.53	235.81	272.08	326.50
Rochford	2,747.11	60,436	22.00	142.29	164.29	109.53	127.78	146.04	164.29	200.80	237.31	273.82	328.58
Stambridge	233.10	6,400	27.46	142.29	169.75	113.17	132.03	150.89	169.75	207.47	245.19	282.92	339.50
Sutton	53.36	2,500	46.85	142.29	189.14	126.09	147.11	168.12	189.14	231.17	273.20	315.23	378.28
	<u>30,457.62</u>	<u>758,834</u>											

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APPENDIX 2

County Charge	Police Charge	Total Charge	BAND	BAND	BAND	BAND	BAND	BAND	BAND	BAND
			A 6/9	B 7/9	C 8/9	D 1	E 11/9	F 13/9	G 15/9	H 2
	896.40	896.40	597.60	697.20	796.80	896.40	1,095.60	1,294.80	1,494.00	1,792.80
	92.97	92.97	61.98	72.31	82.64	92.97	113.63	134.29	154.95	185.94

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APPENDIX 3