

Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee 12 December 2001

Minutes of the meeting of the **Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee** on **12 December 2001** when there were present:

Cllr Mrs J Helson – Chairman

Cllr D R Helson

Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs G Fox and R E Vingoe.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr P D Stebbing.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive

R Crofts – Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)

D Deeks – Head of Financial Services

J Bostock – Principal Committee Administrator.

153 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

154 BUDGET STRATEGY

The Sub-committee considered a position report from the Head of Financial Services on Government announcements and the draft budget. It was noted that the figure for Air Quality Investigations within paragraph 5.2 of the report should be £9,000.

During debate and in response to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- The Local Government Association had communicated with the Secretary of State for Local Government, Transport and the regions, expressing concern at the presentation of the recently released Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Local Authorities. The Association wants the Government to provide for a grant position whereby each authority receives an increase of at least 2.3%. Should the Government make adjustment there is a possibility that, without introducing additional monies, this will have implications for those currently in receipt of a higher assessment.

Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee

12 December 2001

- The Council's increase in SSA from Central Government assumed a Council tax increase of just under 8.5%
- The SSA announcement again placed Rochford as the 11th lowest Authority in the country in terms of external finance. Whilst the gap with Castle Point Borough appeared to have narrowed slightly, Rochford has the lowest external finance per head of population within Essex.
- The Governments freeze arrangements relating to SSA conclude in 2002/3. The approach which will be taken in future years is, as yet, unknown.
- The draft estimates currently exclude repairs and maintenance items in relation to leisure premises as leisure contract options involved the transfer of risk to the leisure contractors. These would, however, be built back into the estimates for the purposes of next stage consideration.
- Once the budget strategy reserve ends in 2002/3, the Council ought to maintain the General Fund Balance Reserve in line with Government Guidance, which currently sets it at a minimum of 10% of the net revenue budget. The finance annex to the Government White Paper just released is proposing legislation to ensure authorities maintain a Balance at an adequate level.

It was noted that Service Committees had already submitted some bids for additional revenue funding, which would need to be considered in the Draft Estimates. The Sub-committee concurred with the view of the Chairman that it would be appropriate to formalise arrangements for the submission of bids from the Political Groups and identify which tax strategies should be included in considerations to enable Officers to produce alternative models to that provided for within the tabled report

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That, in addition to the model used for the report, Officers produce working models on the basis of Council tax increases of 8.5% and 10%.
- (2) That any bids from the Political Groups must be submitted to the Chief Executive by Friday 11 January 2002, to enable consideration at the Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee on 16 January which will formulate recommendations to the budget setting meeting of Council. (HFS)

155 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on the overview of the Capital Programme for the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund.

During presentation of the report it was noted that the costings being identified for drainage at Sweyne Park would encompass integration of the Park School open space and that the Government had still not formally announced the Capital Grant funding which would be associated with the Council's IS/IT Strategy. From informal indications, the figure for the first two years could be in the region of £200,000 per annum.

The Sub-Committee gave line by line consideration to the schedules for both the General Fund Capital Programme and the Housing Capital Programme.

General Fund Capital Programme and Financing Estimates

Responding to Member questions, officers advised that:-

- The Leisure Contract commitment figure of £200,000 would need to be considered within the context of the Leisure Contract submissions and might not be required.
- The Head of Financial Services would be consulting with the County Council to amend the figure given for the schemes which they are responsible for.
- The Chief Executive would be reporting to the Community Safety Sub-Committee in January in relation to the residual funding left in the CCTV in Local Shopping Parades budget.
- Notwithstanding revenue support for St Mark's Field, the monies identified within the Town Centre regeneration reserve were available to be applied to revenue.

Housing Capital Programme and Financing

Responding to Member questions, officers advised that:-

- The Housing Revenue Account was relatively healthy because of Government funding.

Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee

12 December 2001

- The scheme to provide units of accommodation for the homeless would be implemented without a further committee report, providing the proposals from Housing Associations were broadly in line with the original Council objective. The Head of Housing, Health & Community Care would advise Group Leaders of the current position regarding provision of accommodation for the homeless.
- The legal requirement of responsibility for the economic, social and environmental well being of residents meant it would be more difficult to identify which services are discretionary as opposed to statutory. Nonetheless, officers would review the position to indicate which services are mandatory and which discretionary and submit a report on this to the next Sub-Committee meeting.

It was noted that the Head of Financial Services would be reviewing whether there is a need to consult partner organisations on future budget strategies. The Chief Executive referred to the high number of strategies relating to various service areas which were now produced and the value of giving consideration to combining consultation documents where consultation is statutory. Recent correspondence had indicated that the Government recognised there is currently a requirement for a particularly high number of strategies. A report was to be submitted to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee identifying monies spent on Government initiatives during the current year.

RECOMMENDED

That the Capital Programme be submitted to the budget setting meeting of Council. (HFS)

156 ROLLING PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENT BUDGET/SKATEBOARDING

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on play areas improvement and the provision of further skateboarding facilities in the District. A schedule setting out current play space provision and identifying the fourteen areas which remain to be improved was tabled at the meeting.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- The prioritisation of work to play spaces depended on inspection outcomes. A report setting out recommendations for refurbishment was usually submitted to the Community Services Committee each year following budget setting.
- Under the new Political Structure, if Council took the decision not to refurbish a play area identified for improvement within the rolling

Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee 12 December 2001

programme, the matter could be referred to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration in terms of alternative use and disposal.

During debate it was recognised that the levels and nature of usage of play space areas was likely to vary from location to location.

RECOMMENDED

That the play space rolling programme be retained and that consideration be given to each play space area (including the possibilities for skateboarding) on merit as they come forward within the programme. (CE)

The meeting closed at 9.32pm.

Chairman:

Date: