

Policy & Finance Committee – 4 December 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **4 December 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr P F A Webster (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs M A Starke (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr J E Grey
Cllr K H Hudson
Cllr A J Humphries
Cllr C A Hungate

Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr P K Savill
Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr D G Stansby

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J R F Mason, S P Smith and D A Weir

SUBSTITUTES

Councillors Mrs H L A Glynn and Mrs M S Vince

VISITING

Councillor C I Black

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
R J Honey - Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
D Deeks - Head of Financial Services
S Fowler - Head of Administrative and Member Services
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

551 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 November 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of apologies from Councillor J R F Mason.

552 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the schedule relating to Progress on Decisions.

Police Community Support Officers (Minute 435/03)

It was noted that the budget strategy report to be considered later in the meeting included reference to police community support officers.

Rochford District Replacement Local Plan – Cherry Orchard Brickworks, Rochford (Minute 294/03)

It was understood that planning conditions associated with the Cherry Orchard Brickwork site would come into force once brickwork activity ceased. Consideration of site designation needs to form part of the Local Plan debate.

Beacon Council Scheme Round 5 (Minute 370/03)

It was noted that the Council had now been advised that the joint bid submitted with Essex County Council and other Districts in respect of crime and disorder had been unsuccessful.

Rochford Community Strategy Consultation (Minute 490/03)

It was noted that a report on the consultation on the Community Strategy was being submitted to Full Council on 18 December 2003.

553 BUDGET STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on the Budget Strategy.

It was confirmed that the report set the scene and facilitated the process of budget review which would culminate in final decisions being made by Full Council on 27 January 2004. In the interim period, there was an opportunity for discussion at group meetings together with a scheduled Member away day. Consultation was being undertaken with representatives of the business community and Council tenants.

The Head of Financial Services confirmed that, following the outcome of recent consultation with the Department of Works and Pensions, he was satisfied that all appropriate financial information was available.

The report was presented on a paragraph by paragraph basis. Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- At this stage it was not possible to be precise about final additional payments to Essex County Council which may be required in respect of pension liabilities. The County was in the process of changing actuaries. It was understood that the movement of investments was a key driver and that there are indicative deficits.
- Should the Government actually pay the full amount of grant determined by the Government model the projected balance on the Budget Strategy would improve.
- From current indications, it appeared that any funding for additional police community support officers would need to come from the Council. The

Police Authority was already recruiting six Community Support Officers for the Rayleigh Division. Whilst police visibility was an issue raised during the consultation on the Community Strategy, Police Community Support Officers may not be the vehicle for addressing this. There may be a case for reviewing resourcing possibilities once the effectiveness of the current batch of recruits were in post in, say, six to twelve months time.

- The financial aspects associated with the capital receipts pooling arrangement should be included in the list of items for which additional resources are required to meet government and statutory requirements. Inclusion of this meant that, for 2004/05, initially these items are now estimated to cost £187,500. This would equate to a tax increase of around 4.3%. Broadly speaking, approximately 50% of any increase in Council tax seemed to be attributable to government requirements.

Members noted the budget recommendations which were emanating from the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 3 December.

During debate, the Committee endorsed the proposed contents of a letter to be sent to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister making representations about the inequality of the draft Local Government Settlement. It was agreed that copies should be sent to the Local Government Association and the two local Members of Parliament. An associated press release could also be produced.

The Chairman confirmed that any suggestions Members may have on, for example, possibilities for minimising the procurement costs associated with a rolling three year housing capital programme would be welcomed.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Financial Services for such a comprehensive report.

Resolved

- (1) That the report of the Head of Financial Services on progress and issues to be considered within the Budget Strategy be noted.
- (2) That a letter be sent to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the terms set out by the Head of Financial Services as (appended to these minutes). Copies of the letter to be sent to the Local Government Association and the two local Members of Parliament. An associated press release to be produced. (HFS)

554 PROPOSAL TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE METHOD OF THE ANNUAL CANVASS OF ELECTORS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services which sought approval to the introduction of an automated registration system as part of the annual canvass of electors in September 2004.

Responding to questions, the Head of Administrative and Member Services advised that the telephone number given out for the automated telephone response service would be a freephone number. Associated paperwork would indicate this clearly. Householders would continue to be able to return forms by post if they so wished.

Resolved

- (1) That, subject to the retention of provision for residents to return forms by post if they wish, the system of automated telephone registration be introduced as part of the canvass conducted from September to December 2004.
- (2) That the practice of hand-delivery of the electoral registration forms and the direct contact with non-responders during the final stages of the canvass to ensure the continued accuracy of the Register be continued. (HAMS)

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

555 HOUSING RESOURCE ISSUES

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on the resource implications associated with a number of housing matters.

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive confirmed that the aim would be to have a Housing Services Development Officer in post by next summer at the latest. A Housing Manager would be appointed as soon as possible.

- (1) That a Housing Manager be appointed on a three year fixed term contract at grade PO 18 – 21. The position to be advertised immediately.

- (2) That the existing post, as described in the exempt report, be made permanent on grade PO6 – 9 with effect from 1 April 2004.
- (3) That a bid be made for resources in the budget strategy in order to employ a Housing Services Development Officer at grade PO6 – 9 with a view to recruiting in the financial year. (CD(F&ES))

556 STAFFING UPGRADE – INTERNAL AUDIT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive on a staffing upgrade in internal audit.

Resolved

That the post identified in the exempt report be re-titled as suggested and regraded SO1 –SO2 commencing 1 January 2004. (CE)

557 STAFFING ISSUES

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive on the current position regarding vacancies and long-term sickness absence within the Authority.

Resolved

That the exempt report on the current level of vacancies and long-term sickness absence be noted. (CE)

At the close of the Meeting, the Chairman wished a Happy Christmas and a successful New Year to all present.

The meeting closed at 9.02pm.

Chairman

Date