

CROUCH HARBOUR AUTHORITY – FUNDING SUPPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 When the grants to voluntary and other organisations were considered the Council's representative, Cllr C G Seagers, reported that the Crouch Harbour Authority was having some difficulties in attracting sufficient funding to maintain the service that is required. Members therefore requested a report on the situation.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This Council has provided financial support to The Crouch Harbour Authority (CHA) over many years. The approved grant for 2006/07 is £2,000.
- 2.2 The CHA was formed by Act of Parliament in 1974 to manage the rivers Crouch and Roach. At the time there was a mix of commercial and leisure interests but over time there has been a significant increase in the leisure focus of the rivers. This has been recognised in the Leisure strategy in the current debate around leisure and tourism. The role of the CHA will be important in the future development of leisure, tourism and economic activity in both rivers.
- 2.3 The key authorities that are either involved in river management or have an interest are Rochford, Maldon, Chelmsford and Essex County Council.

3 WHAT ARE THE ISSUES

- 3.1 The members of CHA are all unpaid and are selected to represent all the interests in the two rivers. However there has been a large increase in the regulatory framework relating to the harbour, port safety, oil slick responses, land titles etc. In addition there are now more pressures to use the river for unauthorised houseboats and related structures and, therefore, enforcement costs are increasing. The Harbour Authority state that legal costs have increased from £7,500 in 2002/03 to £22,000 in 2005.
- 3.2 Although the CHA raise funds through harbour fees, mooring licences rents etc their funding will have to keep pace with their duties and future developments.
- 3.3 Faced with these pressures on the finances and the unpaid officers the CHA is raising the issue of its long term viability. In the event of the Authority ceasing to operate, the task will fall to the Authorities involved.

4 INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- 4.1 As previously mentioned Rochford currently provides grant funding of £2,000. Maldon have indicated that they will provide support of £1,000 and Chelmsford provide no grant.
- 4.2 CHA have stated that Essex County Council are sympathetic to their position and discussions have been held with Lord Hanningfield. However the reality remains that CHA has to be put on a firmer financial footing not only to deal with the issues that are currently facing it but also to be a strong partner in the development of leisure and tourism related to the rivers.

5 POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

- 5.1 The first course of action that is recommended is for this Authority to write to Chelmsford and Maldon to point out the support that Rochford gives to CHA and request them to urgently reconsider their own financial support. A suggestion is that a standard grant support of £2,000 for 2006/07 be given and index link this for the future. A recognition of the importance of CHA in the management of the rivers and the potential for leisure and tourism would also be useful.
- 5.2 Essex County Council is the major influence in this matter as officers currently provide support for the CHA. Here it is suggested that this Council's representative on CHA and a Rochford County Councillor together with a representative of CHA request a meeting with Lord Hanningfield to clarify the future role and policy of Essex County Council and the viable future of CHA.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) To write to Maldon and Chelmsford Councils with a view to obtaining further support for CHA together with a standardised financial support.
 - (2) That a meeting be requested with Lord Hanningfield to identify the future policy and commitment of Essex County Council

Yvonne Woodward

Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management

Background Papers:-

None

For further information please contact Yvonne Woodward on:-

Tel:- 01702 318029

E-Mail:- yvonne.woodward@rochford.gov.uk