

FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE – Item 11(4)

14 February 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Corporate Resources Sub-Committee** held on **6 February 2002** when there were present:

Cllr D R Helson – Chairman

Cllr R Adams

Cllr T G Cutmore

Cllr Mrs J Helson

Cllr V H Leach

Cllr T Livings

Cllr C R Morgan

Cllr P J Morgan

Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs R A Amner, D A Weir, Mrs M A Weir

SUBSTITUTES

Cllrs G A Mockford, P D Stebbing

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren

R Crofts

J Honey

Mrs M Martin

Chief Executive

Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)

Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)

Committee Administrator

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

443 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2002 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following additional recommendations:

Minute 442 – Other Issues from the Chambers of Trade

Rayleigh Town Centre – Outstanding Issues

Members noted that the Rayleigh Town Centre Forum was the Working Group tasked with monitoring all issues relating to Rayleigh Town Centre. However, the Forum had not met since September 2001.

Recommended

- (1) That a copy of the last snagging list be forwarded to the County's Area Manager (Highways) and the Portfolio Holder.
- (2) That an update on outstanding issues be provided to the first meeting of the Environment Policy Committee.

- (3) That thereafter twice yearly updates be provided to the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee. (HPS)

Consultation Process with Chambers of Trade

Recommended

- (1) That the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider the structure for consultation with the Chambers of Trade on all relevant issues.
- (2) That the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee conducts meetings with the Chambers of Trade twice yearly with the next meeting in September or October 2002.

444 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES – REPORT OF THE REMUNERATION PANEL

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which presented to Members the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' Allowances.

Members agreed that detailed consideration of the report be deferred to the meeting of Council on 26 February 2002. However, Members of this Sub-Committee agreed that any system would need to be one that would be relatively straightforward for the purposes of administration. Concern was particularly raised over the following recommendations:-

- Travel – the one-off basic two-tier payment did not adequately recompense Members for travelling to meetings and was likely to be considered by the tax office as a 'benefit in kind'. Travelling by public transport would not necessarily be the most efficient method.
- Many proposed one-off payments were relatively small, but would still involve both Member time and officer time in processing.
- The recommendation that Group Leaders and an appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee monitor discretionary payments would be difficult to administer and time consuming.
- Pensions – Members queried the age of 70, which was quoted as a 'normal retirement age'.

Members noted that if agreement was given in principle to the estimate of £65,000, together with £6,700 for travel, it could be included in the Budget for 2002/2003 and the detailed split could be agreed at the meeting of Council. This Council would still have one of the lowest budgets for Members' Allowances in Essex.

Members agreed that following discussions within their Groups, they would pass details of their recommendations to the Corporate Director

(Finance & External Services) by Friday 15th February 2002, in order that they could be costed out in readiness for the meeting of Council.

Members noted that the Remuneration Panel would review the allowances each year prior to the Budget setting process and additionally if any change in role or responsibility occurred.

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

Recommended

- (1) That the estimated figure of £71,700 be included in the Budget for 2002/2003 for Members' Allowances.
- (2) That the existing method of payment for travelling expenses be retained.
- (3) That the method of administering discretionary payments be simplified.
- (4) That this item be referred to the meeting of Council on 26 February 2002 for detailed consideration. (CD(F&ES))

445 STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP – QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which brought to Members' attention the key proposals in the White Paper, which sets out the Government's vision for Local Government.

The local Government White Paper was published by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in mid-December. Members noted that it sets out the Government's thinking as to how Local Government should develop in the 21st Century as part of its agenda for modernisation and reform.

The first part of the White Paper developed the Government's main principles in relation to Public Sector performance and delivery, whilst the second part focused on changes to the Local Government finance regime.

The Chief Executive reported that once the action plan relating to implementation of this White Paper was received, more detailed consideration would be given to this.

During debate, Members noted the following:-

- There would be resource implications in the implementation of many of the areas listed.
- The Government would publish performance information from the comprehensive assessments for each authority and a 'scorecard' would be available to the public.

On a Motion moved by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr C R Morgan it was:-

Recommended

That detailed examination of the Government White Paper be referred to the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee. (CEX)

446 MARKET CAR PARK – RAYLEIGH OPERATIC & DRAMATIC SOCIETY (RODS) SCENERY STORE

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which apprised Members of the latest progress on the above issue.

Members noted that the Rayleigh Operatic & Dramatic Society had leased an area of land within the Market Car Park, Rayleigh, from the Council for some years. The shed which occupies the land is used as a scenery store and workshop and RODS are required under the terms of the lease to maintain it. The Council receives an annual licence fee of £50 from RODS.

Following the decision of this Sub-Committee on 19 June 2001, the Head of Legal Services informed RODS of the need to vacate the building in August, with a suggested target date of the Council taking possession by the end of December 2001.

Officers reported that whilst the building is not dangerous, it is dilapidated. The timber frame is in a reasonable condition, and an asbestos survey of the cladding had categorised the building as low risk.

Members noted that RODS were investigating the availability of any small vacant units on industrial estates, with a view to applying for financial support from the Foundation for Sports and Arts. However, there was concern at the amount of officer time which had been involved with this so far, with no satisfactory conclusion to date.

On a Motion moved by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr G A Mockford it was:-

Recommended

That this Council gives notice that the Scenery Store in the Market Car Park, Rayleigh is vacated by the Rayleigh Operatic & Dramatic Society with effect from 1 May 2002, unless firm plans are presented for alternative premises. (CD(F&ES))

447 PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE – FEEDBACK FROM RAYLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which updated Members on the latest information received from the Town Council in respect of the Environment Centre.

The District Council had transferred the land adjoining the Windmill at Rayleigh and adjoining 21 London Hill to the Town Council for the purposes of building an environmental and/or educational centre. The Lease had been signed in January 2001.

The Chief Executive had recently been informed that the Town Council could not confirm when it would take a decision on whether to proceed with the project. The matter would be considered again at a meeting of the Town Council to be held on 11 February 2002.

Recommended

That the outcome of the Town Council's meeting be reported to the Finance & General Purposes Committee on 14 February 2002 and a decision be taken on the way forward. (CEX)

448 ASSET MANAGEMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) advising Members on the steps taken to date to implement the recommendations arising out of the Best Value Review on Asset Management.

The Asset Management Working Group had considered a the Inspector's report in detail and a copy of the Chief Executive's letter containing Members' comments was appended to this report.

One of the first outcomes of the Asset Management Review had been the development of a draft asset management plan. This had been approved and adopted by the Council in November 2000. Following further development in 2001 it had been submitted in a bid for funding as part of the Single Capital Pot Round 1. Together with the capital strategy, this had achieved a discretionary allocation of £75,000.

In approving the plan Members noted that further refinements, in line with comments from Go East, would be submitted again in July 2002 for discretionary funding as part of the Single Capital Pot Round 2.

Members noted progress made in relation to Performance Indicators, Monitoring, Condition Surveys and Strategy. A Member expressed concern that the principal resource implication was officer time in developing and overseeing the implementation of the plan.

Recommended

- (1) That the Asset Management Plan be endorsed and developed in line with the suggestions of the Government Office for the East of England for submission in the Single Capital Pot – Round 2.
- (2) That further consideration be given to the position of Corporate Property Officer following the letting of the leisure contract and submission of the Single Capital Pot Round 2 bid. (CD(LPA))

449 LABURNUM GROVE PLAYSACE

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which sought Members' views in response to a proposal received from Hockley Parish Council prior to their taking ownership of the playspace.

Members noted that during a review of Council land assets, the option of disposing of Laburnum Grove playspace had been considered. Following a public consultation exercise, the Council had received strong representations from the local community for the area to remain as a playspace. Hockley Parish Council had agreed in principle to take ownership of the site and it had been resolved at the meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 7 December 2000 to transfer the land.

A request had been received from the Parish Council to assist in providing remedies that would help to alleviate any nuisance to neighbouring residents prior to the transfer taking place. District Council officers had developed outline estimates of the types of works proposed. The Parish Council had funds of £6,000 available and were asking the District Council to meet the balance of £13,000. Currently there was no budget provision for this.

Members noted that the lease had been with the Parish Council for almost 12 months awaiting signing. The report identified an additional list of requests from the Parish Council, including a request to make arrangements for the closure and locking of the site. The estimated cost of this to the District Council would be in the region of £9,800 per annum, for which there was no budgetary provision.

Members noted that even if the Council's Contractor were able to engage an operative, it would be unlikely that they would agree to the person being responsible for evicting people from the area prior to lockup.

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

Recommended

- (1) That if Hockley Parish Council wish to acquire ownership of the site, the least will need to be signed by 31 March 2002, but the District Council will not be able to assist with their requests.
- (2) That if Hockley Parish Council does not wish to take ownership of the site, the District Council would again review the use of this area.

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 paragraphs 1, 3 and 9 of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

450 LAND AT FRANCIS WALK, RAYLEIGH

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management which sought Committee approval to sell a strip of land.

Recommended

That the strip of land in Francis Walk be sold at Market Value, to be determined by an independent valuer and including the Council's legal costs. (HRHM)

451 EQUITY SHARE PROPERTY – 30 WOODSTOCK CRESENT, HOCKLEY

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management which asked Members to consider the "repurchase" of 25% equity share of a property following the death of the tenant/leaseholder.

Recommended

That the 25% Equity Share in 30 Woodstock Crescent, Hockley be repurchased at valuation. (HRHM)

452 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advised Members in confidence of the regulations with regard to early retirement under the Local Government Pension scheme. In re-

affirming existing Council policy, Members concurred with the suggestion of the Director that this issue should be considered in greater detail by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Considering the effects of the regulations on the early retirement of a particular officer, and on the basis that each case must be treated strictly on its own merits, it was moved by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr T G Cutmore and

Recommended

- (1) That postholder 37205, Principal Engineer, be offered early retirement on the basis of efficiency of the service with full added years in accordance with existing policy.
- (2) That the vacant post be advertised in due course.
- (3) That Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee review the Council's policy on early retirement. (CD(F&ES))

453 STAFFING MATTERS

Members noted the exempt report of the Chief Executive on the current position with regard to staffing vacancies, recruitment and long-term sickness absence within the authority.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm

Chairman

Date