

Policy & Finance Committee – 15 November 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **15 November 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr T G Cutmore
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr C I Black
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr C G Seagers

Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr Mrs M J Webster

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr K H Hudson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J R F Mason and Mrs C A Weston

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
R J Honey - Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
R Crofts - Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
S Clarkson - Head of Revenue & Housing Management
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

448 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

449 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs J A Mockford declared a personal interest in any items relating to Rayleigh by virtue of being a Rayleigh Town Councillor.

450 ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – PROCUREMENT AGENCY FOR ESSEX

The Committee considered the report of the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee on membership of the Procurement Agency for Essex.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advised that:-

- He had every confidence that the Authority would see benefits from Procurement Agency membership. Not all benefits would be strictly

financial. The Agency's expertise would be available to the Council and utilisation of its services would mean that District Council officer time was saved.

- The Council's forward looking Gershon Statement included reference to the Procurement Agency.
- The Centre of Regional Excellence is currently concentrating on a number of large projects that are additional to its procurement activity.
- The Procurement Agency has concentrated its activities on relatively large contracts associated with areas such as stationery/vehicles and utilities. Contracts associated with the Council's repairs and maintenance activity are made available to local contractors within the District.

Resolved

That membership of the Procurement Agency for Essex continues into 2007/08 and that provision is made in the five-year rolling budget strategy. (CD(F&ES))

451 REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) on the proposals made by the Finance & Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee for changes to the Committee structure following that Committee's review of Overview & Scrutiny.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) advised that:-

- Whilst the revised Constitution would need to be specific about the names of Committees and their terms of reference, it would be possible for documentation produced during the transitional period to provide an indication that the Development Control Committee was formerly named the Planning Services Committee and that the term 'Town and Country Planning Regulation' included the granting of planning permission.
- The involvement of outside representatives in the work of the proposed Review Committee would depend on the nature of that Committee's work at any particular point in time.
- Specific questions, such as whether woodlands and countryside should be within the terms of reference of the proposed Environmental Services Committee, would be a matter for Full Council to decide in due course when agreeing the amended Constitution. It was, however,

likely that work projects would involve cross-referencing between Committees.

- The Council had previously determined that use of the term 'Local Agenda 21' was appropriate to reflect the existence of a policy but the term 'sustainability' could be used as an alternative.
- The term 'Town and Country Planning Regulation' was currently included in the Constitution.
- If Full Council agreed to adopt the proposals, associated Constitutional changes would be brought forward for agreement.

Recommended to Full Council that:-

- (1) Subject to Committee documentation produced during the transitional period providing an indication that the Development Control Committee was formerly named the Planning Services Committee and that the term 'Town and Country Planning Regulation' includes the granting of planning permission, the Councils Committee structure (including the names, size and terms of reference of Committees) be on the basis set out at the Appendix to the report with effect from the new Municipal Year.
- (2) That the Council consider a revised Constitution to take account of these changes. (CD(LP&A))

452 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2005/06

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which reviewed the current Capital Programme following the closure of accounts for 2004/05.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- Government funding associated with the IS/IT Strategy had now concluded. IS/IT Strategy estimates had been compiled in consultation with service heads and would be reviewed as appropriate during the budget process.
- The funding bid associated with the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park had been submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for approval. Should the bid be unsuccessful, the Council would need to consider making monies available from its own budget.
- Under previous arrangements, the Council had been able to retain 100% of the capital receipts associated with Council house sales. Whilst only 25% could be used for new projects, interest could be earned on the remaining 75%. Now the 75% has to be passed over to

the Government. The cost of a sale could no longer be set off against capital receipts unless the sale is successful.

- The figure against wheelie bins related to the Annual Replacement Programme. Wheelie bins had tended to exceed estimated life expectancy.
- It is of better value to purchase rather than lease photocopiers.
- The budget provision for the cemetery provided for land and some ancillary costs.
- The unused reserved associated with Town Centre regeneration will be applied to the Capital Programme.
- There is no longer a need to budget for monies under the Housing Revenue account to improve TV/Digital aerials.

Resolved

That the revised Capital Programme for 2005/06 be agreed. (HFS)

453 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue & Housing Management on a revised Community Transport Partnership Agreement which would span the period to March 2011 with associated funding.

During debate, a Member expressed concern that aspects of the Community Transport Scheme had similarities to the former problematical Dial-A-Ride Scheme.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- The recommendation in the report reflected conclusions reached following a review of Community Transport through the Council's overview and scrutiny process. Review conclusions had been endorsed by this Committee, including aspects surrounding the need for a community bus run along the lines of the Chelmsford Community Transport model.
- The Council had already entered a five-year funding agreement with Wyvern Community Transport who were in negotiations to acquire premises at St. Luke's Place, Rochford and who had already engaged drivers on longer term employment contracts.
- Funding for transport schemes is made available by the County Council by virtue of the existence of the Community Transport Scheme. Where no provision existed, then County funding would be withdrawn

and redistributed to other local authorities providing such schemes. Where there are concerns, these can be taken up with the Wyvern Community Transport Trust Board. Two Rochford District Councillors sat on this Board.

- Different clientele can be associated with the Community Transport Bus and the Taxi Voucher Scheme. Users of the Taxi Voucher Scheme need to be in receipt of Higher Level Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance (Mobility Component) or War Disablement Pension (Mobility Supplement). Whereas Community Transport can be utilised by anyone with difficulty accessing public transport and included those living in the more rural areas of the District.
- Some volunteer drivers within the District are prepared to operate a social car scheme and are registered with Wyvern Community Transport.
- The Taxi Voucher Scheme is not fully taken up. A report being prepared for the next meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee will indicate that only 50% of vouchers issued are being used.

The Committee felt that it would be appropriate to defer a final decision on this item pending the provision of additional information, including the contents of reports and minutes leading up to the latest recommendation and any further information that is pertinent to reaching a conclusion, such as the volume of passengers carried on the Community Bus, the number of journeys made and whether the journeys suit customer requirements.

Resolved

That consideration of this item be deferred and referred to the next meeting of the Committee to facilitate the provision of additional information including the contents of reports and minutes leading up to the latest recommendation and any further information that is pertinent to reaching a final conclusion, such as the volume of passengers carried on the community bus, the number of journeys made and whether journeys suit customer requirements. (HRHM)

454 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the Economic Development Strategy for Rochford District.

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- Whilst there is a broad fit with the Regional Economic Strategy, the District document will need to be kept under regular review in the context of that Strategy.

- Paragraph 7.13 can be reworded to reflect that the Market Town Health Check had led to the setting up of the Rochford Regeneration Project, which was funded by Rochford District Council, Rochford Parish Council, Rochford Chamber of Trade and Essex County Council amongst others.
- The second line of paragraph 7.34 can be reworded to read ‘In addition with Essex County Council and RRAVS, we currently support Community Transport initiatives such as a Community Transport Bus and a Taxi Voucher Scheme’.
- Reference to London Southend Airport being a key employment focus was a reflection of the concentration of employment around the Airport.
- Reference to working with developers to bring new sites into economic use (Paragraph 7.40) had been part of the Strategy for the last three years, with new sites identified through the Local Plan process.

Resolved

That the Economic Development Strategy, as revised, be approved. (CE)

455 TOURISM STUDY

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which introduced the stage 2 report produced by the Tourism Company.

There was general consensus that it would be appropriate to establish a sub-committee that could recommend short term tourism projects to go forward as part of the 2006/07 budgetary process and highlight areas of work associated with the tourism study that could be considered in the longer term. Reference was made to the value of ensuring that the Council’s approach to the development of tourism is as considered as possible, particularly given its potential within the context of Thames Gateway.

On a motion, moved by Councillor M J B Starke and seconded by Councillor Mrs M A Starke, it was:-

Resolved

That a Sub-Committee be established to recommend short-term tourism projects that could go forward as part of the 2006/07 budgetary process and to highlight areas of work associated with the tourism study that could be considered in the longer term. The Sub-Committee to comprise five Members: Councillors C I Black, T G Cutmore, C A Hungate, D G Stansby and Mrs M A Starke. (CE/HAMS)

456 REVENUE & BENEFITS – ENFORCEMENT SERVICES REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue & Housing Management on an external consultant's independent review of the recovery and enforcement function within the Revenue & Benefits service.

Resolved

That the officer responses and agreed actions to the consultant's recommendations, as set out in the report, be endorsed. (HRHM)

457 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which provided an update on the Citizen of the Year Award scheme and presented options for future years.

Members agreed that it would be appropriate to combine the 'Community Spirit' and 'Charitable Support' categories for the 2006 Awards and that a themed approach should be introduced to the 'Young Citizen' category.

Resolved

- (1) That the 'Community Spirit' and 'Charitable Support' categories be combined for the Citizen of the Year Awards 2006.
- (2) That a themed approach be introduced to the 'Young Citizen' category. Themes to be based on the Council's Corporate Objectives and to change each year, with this year's theme being 'The Environment'. (CE)

458 ESSEX LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT: UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive providing the latest update on the Local Area Agreement process.

Responding to questions the Chief Executive advised that, whilst there would no doubt be merit in working on specific areas such as reducing crime and the fear of crime and child welfare, detailed thinking on areas of particular interest to the Authority should be undertaken once more detail is known on likely targets and their resource implications.

Resolved

- (1) That progress on the Essex Local Area Agreement process to date be noted.

- (2) That the detailed implications from the evolving Local Area Agreement process be considered within the context of the Council's budget process. (CE)

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 7 and 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

459 REVENUE COLLECTION – PAYMENT POINT AGENCY

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the way forward with regard to the existing Revenue Collection Payment Point Agency.

In presenting the report the Head of Revenue and Housing Management provided detail on the residential locations of users of the current facility. He also clarified the various alternative methods of payment available to customers and the reasons why the Council had withdrawn from introducing Payment Points in stores.

Members felt that the economic grounds for discontinuing the facility were clear and it was:-

Resolved

That the Payment Point Agency identified in the exempt report be closed on 31 March 2006 following appropriate publicity. (HRHM)

460 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S APPRAISAL

The Committee received the exempt note of the Chief Executive's appraisal.

The meeting closed at 9.50pm.

Chairman

Date