

Policy & Finance Committee – 8 February 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **8 February 2005** when there were present:-

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)
Cllr S P Smith (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C I Black
Cllr K H Hudson
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr P K Savill

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

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J R F Mason.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
D Deeks	- Head of Financial Services
S Clarkson	- Head of Revenue and Housing Management
S Fowler	- Head of Administrative and Member Services
Y Woodward	- Accountancy Manager
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

43 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the schedule relating to progress on decisions.

CCTV Evaluation (Minute 308/04)

It was noted that, although interested in the specification, Rayleigh Town Council was not interested in forming/contributing to a partnership. Officers were currently in consultation with Hullbridge Parish Council and finalisation of the specification was imminent. Whilst the cameras at Hockley had been paid for by traders, these had been included in the consultation.

Revision of Contract Procedure Rules (Minute 484/04)

The Construction Line presentation to staff on 26 January had been successful and arrangements were being put in place for the Authority to join Construction Line Services.

Development of Council Owned Land (Minute 600(17)/03)

A report on the current position with regard to the Tylney Avenue scheme was to be submitted to the Community Services Committee on 1 March 2005.

Budget Strategy 2004/05 – 2008/09 (Minute 46/04)

An offer had been made with regard to the appointment to the newly created Housing Service Improvement Officer post, which was subject to references.

Special Interest Group for Fourth Option Authorities (Minute 457(14)(a)/04)

It was noted that Corby Council was organising a seminar in March for all Fourth Option Authorities on the subject of overview and scrutiny. A Minister would likely be in attendance and arrangements would be made for two Members and two officers to attend.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) – Improvement Plan (Minute 500/04)

It was noted that the first meeting of the Improvement Panel had been held on 7 February. Assistance of the IDeA had been sought in producing the final bid submission for capacity building funds, which was at a final draft stage. There was to be a light touch direction of travel assessment commencing this September and involving the Audit Commission Relationship Manager in consultation with the ODPM and external auditors. The Audit Commission intended undertaking a best value inspection during next January/February, probably on the subject of environment.

Draft Animal Welfare Charter (Minute 555(13)(a)/04)

It was recognised that some Members had views on the value/content of the Charter.

Outstanding issues would be carried forward.

45 IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT – COUNCILLOR WEB PAGES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister e-government requirement R6, which related to the provision of Councillor web pages.

Responding to questions, the Head of Administrative and Member Services advised that:-

- If proceeding with the Committee Management Information System (CMIS), all Members will be consulted on their specific page content requirement.
- The question of whether it could be possible for individual Members to adjust web pages directly could be investigated, although this would have to be considered in tandem with potential legal liability aspects, as identified in the report. The adoption of report proposals would meet requirement R6 and not prevent future consideration being given to the development of IT facilities for Members.
- All Members that wish to could have an email facility. Officers would need to investigate if it is possible to identify the levels of email traffic from the public to Members.

During debate it was observed that, given that CMIS was already very close to meeting the requirements of R6, it would be appropriate to develop it for this purpose. It was also recognised that, given that the website was the Council's official presence on the net, care needed to be taken with regard to content and very careful consideration would need to be given to the question of Members being able to input on an individual basis.

Resolved

That the Council's Committee Management Information System be developed for the purposes of complying with Implementing Electronic Government Requirement R6. (HAMS)

46 RETIREMENT AGE

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) on revising the Council's policy on compulsory retirement at 65 as a move to best practice and to help alleviate recruitment and retention issues in some areas.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- Given the need to be certain that change would not introduce any element of discrimination, it would be appropriate to review the factors associated with introducing twelve month contracts.
- It was understood that forthcoming legislation was likely to require the Council to consider applications and, therefore, specifically identify a business case for refusing.
- From the financial perspective, there was unlikely to be significant additional costs given that applicants would have probably reached the top of a post's grade/leave provision.

The Committee endorsed the observation of a Member that it would be useful to have some detailed information on the application of the Performance Development Review process and the type of scenarios that could arise.

It was agreed that the principle of policy revision could be endorsed.

Resolved

That revision of the Council's policy on compulsory retirement at 65 be endorsed in principle, subject to further reports on:-

- the factors that could be associated with introducing twelve month contracts;
- the application of the Performance Development Review process;
- the type of scenarios that could arise. (CD(LP&A))

47 PROPOSALS FOR COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT 2005 – A FURTHER CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on proposals put forward by the Audit Commission for changes to the framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessments from 2005.

It was noted that the Audit Commission still needed to undertake further work on the specific application of its proposals to District Councils.

Resolved

That the responses detailed in Appendix B of the report be forwarded to the Audit Commission as this Council's response to the consultation, subject to additional observations that:-

- the public are unlikely to understand such a complicated assessment process. The process results in a Local Authority being in a 'single worded category' and it should be possible to explain such categorisation to the public in a few words;
- the proposed direction of travel ratings should be provided for authorities achieving an average progression;
- the word 'should' should replace the word 'could' in the first line of the proposed response on local priorities and the highest possible weighting given to such local priorities.

48 PAYROLL AND HUMAN RESOURCES - DEVELOPMENTS

The Committee received the report of the Head of Financial Services on developments taking place with regard to improvements to the payroll and human resources service.

During debate, it was observed that the developments demonstrated great potential for the delivery of an enhanced service. The Head of Financial Services advised that the existing payroll system was being run in tandem with the new system to ensure a smooth transition.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That the public and press be excluded from the Meeting for the remaining items of business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 5, 3 and 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

49 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATING DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on an application for discretionary rate relief.

Responding to questions, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management confirmed that relief could be given for a one year period to facilitate the review of future accounts.

Resolved

That 50% Discretionary Rate Relief be granted to the organisation identified in the exempt report for the current financial year only. (HRHM)

50 DECRIMINALISED PARKING ENFORCEMENT - STAFFING

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on staffing implications associated with decriminalised parking enforcement following its implementation on 1 October 2004.

During debate, it was agreed that the performance of the Parking Enforcement Team to date was very satisfactory.

Responding to questions, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management advised on the timeframes and charges associated with penalty charge

notices and confirmed that Rochford was the best performing Authority in Essex. It was noted that it was possible that there could be a plateau with regard to the number of notices issued.

Resolved

- (1) that the revised hours attached to each post be noted.
- (2) that the authorised hours relating to Post 33445 be increased from 12 hours per week to 25 hours per week with effect from 1 February 2005. (HRHM)

51 STAFFING MATTERS

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

The Chief Executive provided a verbal update on the current position and approaches taken to the advertising of posts. It was noted that increasing levels of interest were emanating from the jobs on-line facility and that officers would be reviewing whether electronic advertising provided any savings for the recruitment budget.

Resolved

That the current level of vacancies, long-term sickness absence and maternity absence within the Authority be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.12pm.

Chairman

Date