
Minutes of the meeting of the **Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee**
on 7 February 2001 when there were present:

Cllr G Fox (Chairman)

Cllr Mrs J Helson

Cllr C R Morgan

Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R E Vingoe

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
R J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
J Bourne	Leisure & Contracts Manager
J Bostock	Principal Committee Administrator

128 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 January 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

129 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

Purdeys Industrial Estate

The Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) confirmed that the District Valuer was under instruction and that a check would be made of current status.

130 POWER TO PROMOTE WELL BEING

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the contents of a Government Consultation Draft on guidance to Local Authorities on the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental well being. The Chief Executive confirmed that, as comments on the Consultation Draft were required by 9 February, he would utilise the urgency procedure for forwarding the Council's views.

Responding to Member questions, Officers confirmed that the well being power could be applied subject to there not being explicit limitations and restrictions in any other legislation. From current indications existing explicit legislative regulation and restrictions

associated with the planning function would continue to take precedence.

The power should enable Local Authorities to be involved in joint commissioning/funding with partner agencies. There is a prohibition on using the well being power as a means of raising money which seeks to ensure that a Local Authority can only obtain the funds to pursue well being objectives through existing sources of income.

In endorsing the views of Officers on specific aspects of the Consultation Paper, the Sub-Committee made the following additional observations:-

- The guidelines were not particularly clear on specific mechanisms for funding projects under this power given the restrictions on raising money. Because of the importance of the legislation, there should be minimum ambiguity.
- There is clearly a potential for some confusion when considering the application of the well being power against regulatory powers emanating from other legislation, eg Planning.
- There would be value if the anticipated nature of partnership working could be further defined. At this stage, it could be perceived that the application of income from Council Tax to fund projects previously fully supported by Central Government funding was a new form of Local Authority subsidy for Central Government activity.

RECOMMENDED

That the above observations, together with the Officer comments set out in the appendix to these Minutes, be forwarded as this Council's response to the draft guidance on the power to promote well being.
(CE)

131 TOWN & COUNTRY FINANCIAL ISSUES GROUP

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on progress made to date by the Town & Country' Financial Issues Group (TACFIG) and seeking approval to proposals for future liaison with other bodies.

Responding to Member questions, the Corporate Director advised that, during initial stages, the Treasury had very much taken the lead on public sector agreements for shire districts and there had been an emphasis on those Authorities responsible for service areas delivering Central Government targets. Whilst the Shire Districts Initiative was the largest Group and had been received direct contact from the Government, it had not operated as democratically as TACFIG.

Members were pleased to note that the main proposal from TACFIG for a standard level of grant of £250,000 for all Authorities in order to implement Government initiatives was receiving very serious consideration. The Sub-Committee endorsed the view of a Member that it was important for contributions from Councils such as Rochford to be the position which had agreed by TACFIG. Financially, it would be of value for Councils to be prepared to contribute sufficient monies to research to enable involvement in methodology and questioning.

RECOMMENDED

That, subject to the above observations, the suggestions of the TACFIG Steering Group, as set out below, be supported.

Districts having a Voice on the Method of Distribution or a District-Wide Grant Allocation

The Steering Group is of the view that we must have an input into these discussions in order for our particular problems to be properly addressed. If we stay out, and the concept is eventually agreed by Government, we could have a system similar to that now in place which badly serves out type of Authority.

Sharing the Cost of Research on Various Issues

The Steering Group is of the view that this could be considered provided the research being carried out is something we would have been required to do to present our own case.

The Steering Group is mindful of the good impression that TACFIG has created with Ministers and Civil Servants. We must not allow ourselves to become too aligned with any activity that might then reduce our current level of impact.

Public Service Agreements

The Steering Group will be recommending that TACFIG should be actively involved in promoting public service agreements for shire districts. Taking this stance ensures our continued involvement in all aspects of Local Government finance issues. It also helps to ensure that districts do not become “side lined” and regarded as minor players in the debate.

Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business

on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act

132 THE PROVISION OF EFFECTIVE CONTRACT MONITORING IN CONJUNCTION WITH AN IN-HOUSE CIVIC CHAUFFEUR SERVICE

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) setting out proposals for contract monitoring in conjunction with a chauffeur service.

Responding to Member questions, Officers were that-

- The repair of signs would be part of the role of the Depot Assistant.
- Given that account needs to be taken of the potential life expectancy of the Civic car, it would be possible to build a fixed term element to the contract for a chauffeur.
- The intention was for the Depot Assistant post will provide cover for this chauffeur, rather than the Monitoring Officers.

Further to discussions of the last Meeting of the Transportation and Environmental Service Committee, Members noted the current position on monitoring of the Sweeping Contract relating to Rayleigh Town Centre. Officers confirmed that issues raised by Members would be taken up with the Contractor.

RECOMMENDED

That in order to enable the Contract Monitoring Officers to undertake full and effective monitoring of contracts in line with the retention of the Civic chauffeuring in-house, approval be given to:-

- (i) Recruitment to a post of part time Civic chauffeur on scale 1 for a two year fixed term contract.
- (ii) Contracting out the installation of bins/street name plates.
- (iii) Recruitment to a post of part time Depot Assistant on scale 3 (CD(F&ES))

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

Chairman:

Date:

1 OFFICER COMMENTS

- 1.1 Any guidance, albeit in draft form, which helps to outline the breadth of the new well-being power is to be welcomed. The power is a wide ranging one and the draft guidance, without being too prescriptive, attempts to outline the key parameters, with examples. However, it is interesting to contrast this approach, in terms of content, illustrated by the guidance on this and community planning, with that coming forward on new political structures. Both this and the community planning guidance attempt to be as informative and yet as non-prescriptive as possible, whilst that relating to new political structures remains very detailed.
- 1.2 Much emphasis is placed in the draft guidance on partnerships and the need to work with other organisations to secure well-being, but it is important for the Government to ensure that these other organisations also receive similar advice and guidance and work within a similar legislative framework to ensure that this does in fact happen.
- 1.3 At this stage, a key concern of officers relates to how this power and the guidance now produced by Central Government will be interpreted by external audit and the Audit Commission in the guidance that it issues. It is fine for the Government to suggest a flexible and innovative approach to the use of the well-being power; however, in practice much will depend upon the attitude and actions of the Audit Commission and external audit as to whether such flexibility and innovation takes place.