

Council – 27 January 2004

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **27 January 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr R A Amner (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs R Brown (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C I Black	Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr Mrs L A Butcher	Cllr P K Savill
Cllr P A Capon	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr R G S Choppen	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr K A Gibbs	Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn	Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr T E Goodwin	Cllr J Thomass
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr Mrs S A Harper	Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr A J Humphries	Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr C A Hungate	Cllr D A Weir
Cllr T Livings	Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins
Cllr C J Lumley	
Cllr J R F Mason	
Cllr G A Mockford	
Cllr C R Morgan	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs T J Capon, K H Hudson, Mrs L Hungate, C C Langlands, Mrs M D McCarthy and R A Oatham.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
R J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
D Deeks	-	Head of Financial Services
Y Woodward	-	Accountancy Manager
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

45 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

46 BUDGET STRATEGY 2004/05 – 2008/09

Note: Councillors Mrs M A Starke and M G B Starke each declared that they had a prejudicial interest in Quys Lane, Rochford, and would need to leave the meeting should there be any debate on the Lane.

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on the Budget Strategy 2004/05 to 2008/09.

In presenting the report, the Head of Financial Services outlined the background to strategy proposals. It was noted that spending requirements and Government support were key drivers. In relation to Government support, taking the last two years together, there was now an estimated £450,000 assessed by the Government as due to the Council but not released under the floors and ceilings arrangement. Of the proposed 9% tax increase, 5% could be associated with Government requirements. It was also noted that proposals meant Rochford would remain the lowest spending District Council in Essex and also the lowest funded District Council in Essex. As regards capping, based on the current interpretation of legislation, officers did not believe the Authority would be subject to capping. If there was no change to figures currently available for the tax increase associated with precepting bodies the total tax increase would be 6¼%.

During debate, a Member observed that it was pleasing that a budget could be set which did not involve increases to car parking charges and which provided for additional and improved services for the elderly. Overall, proposals meant the maintenance of services for District residents with a balanced budget. Reference was made to the continued high performance of the Council in collecting taxes and rents. Reference was also made to the low level of grant and lottery funding received and to the fact that significant elements of expenditure could be associated with implementing Government requirements.

Council concurred with the observation of a Member that it would be of value to publicise to pensioners the availability of tax benefits. Evidential national statistics pointed to a likelihood that a high number of pensioners may be suffering the hardship of being required to pay property taxes whilst on low incomes. The situation could worsen in 2007 when all properties were due to be revalued. It was recognised that the local press could play a role in publicising the availability of tax benefits. It would also be appropriate to include an advisory article in the Council's own newspaper, Rochford District Matters. Comment was made on the complicated nature of many Government grant forms.

Referring to the Member/officer Budget Strategy Away-day held on 24 January, Council endorsed the observation of a Member that, on the understanding that full external funding would be available, there would be merit in introducing a free and independent housing advisory service within the District to assist those in housing predicament. Council agreed a motion, moved by Councillor Mrs M J Webster and seconded by Councillor Mrs H L A Glynn, in this regard. Council also agreed that it would be appropriate for officers to work on further detailing of the long-term budget strategy in line with discussions held on 24 January. It was agreed to include specific items on Tourism and the Handyman Service in the 2004/05 budget to meet the Council's aims in those areas.

On a Motion, moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor T G Cutmore, it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That officers prepare a revised long-term Budget Strategy in line with discussions at the Member/Officer Budget Away-day held on 24 January 2004. (HFS)
- (2) That the detailed revised estimates for 2003/04, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed.
- (3) That the detailed estimates for 2004/05, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed.
- (4) That, subject to the inclusion of £20,000 for the development of tourism and £5,000 to extend the handyman service to £10,000, the Budget Strategy for 2004/05 to 2008/09, as set out at Appendix 2 of the report, be agreed.
- (5) That the Council Tax for Rochford District Council for 2004/05 includes a 9% increase of which 5% is to meet Central Government directives.
- (6) That, subject to any financial return associated with the properties at West Street, Rochford being considered for use in Quys Lane, Rochford, the Capital Programme as set out at Appendix 3 of the report, be agreed.
- (7) That the Housing Revenue Account, as set out at Appendix 4 of the report, be approved.
- (8) That the Housing Rents and Charges, as set out at paragraph 3.1 of the report, be agreed.
- (9) That the Schedule of Fees and Charges, as set out at Appendix 5 of the report, be agreed.
- (10) That, subject to full funding being available from external sources, officers progress the introduction of a free and independent housing advisory service within the District.

The meeting closed at 7.57pm.

Chairman

Date