

## Policy & Finance Committee – 8 March 2005

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **8 March 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 J R F Mason  
Cllr P K Savill

Cllr C G Seagers  
Cllr D G Stansby  
Cllr Mrs M A Starke  
Cllr M G B Starke  
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

### OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R Crofts	- Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
D Deeks	- Head of Financial Services
J Bourne	- Leisure and Contracts Manager
Y Woodward	- Accountancy Manager
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

### 96 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 97 ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the report of the Finance & Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee on recommendations made at its meeting on 16 February 2005.

#### 1 Pay and Grading

##### Resolved

- (1) That staff adversely affected by job evaluation be provided with a three year period of salary protection.
- (2) That Scale 1 be retained within the pay structure.
- (3) That the Discretionary Market Forces Supplementary Payment Policy as set out at Appendix 1 to the officer's report be adopted. (CD(LP&A))

### 98 GRANTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services setting out the applications to be considered for financial support in 2005/06.

Responding to Members' concern that the applications for grants that had been received were not representative of the array of community groups that were active within the District, officers advised that there were initiatives underway within the Thames Gateway South Essex area aimed at developing voluntary sector and community capacity. It was recognised that many voluntary groups were not managing to obtain funding, from a variety of sources, and this issue was being examined within the TGSE area.

During debate, the following concerns were noted:-

- There was insufficient information available about the level of help given to local voluntary organisations by the Parish Councils.
- Some of the community organisations who had received grants appeared to retain considerable reserves.
- There was no contingency available within the budget for later in the year in order to allocate any urgently required grants.

There was a general consensus that there would be merit in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertaking a detailed review of the system for allocating grants to community groups, with a view to any findings being implemented next year and reviewed by this Committee after a period of six months' operation.

On a Motion moved by Cllr S P Smith and seconded by Cllr M G B Starke, it was:-

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the grant awards for 2005/06 be on the basis of the amounts proposed at Appendix 3 to the report, plus the following:
  - Hullbridge Parish Council - £2,400
  - Royal Association for the Deaf - £600
- (2) That the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee conduct a detailed review of grants to outside bodies, with recommendations to be implemented next year and progress reviewed after six months. (HFS)
- (3) That it be agreed that officers enter into discussions with the CAB to report back on the possibility of a three-year service level agreement covering the service. (CEX)

## **99 THREE YEAR REVENUE AND CAPITAL SETTLEMENTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) asking Members to agree a response to the above consultation paper issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, received

on 20 December.

During debate Members broadly concurred with the views of the Society of District Council Treasurers. However, there was a general consensus that, although Parish Councils should provide three-year budget projections in the same way as District Councils, it was somewhat authoritarian to enforce this by means of legislation.

It was further considered that a legal requirement to publish forward projections of budgets and corresponding figures for contributions to council tax to mirror three-year settlements was unnecessary and undemocratic.

Responding to a Member concern relating to the revenue support grant, officers advised that the system should be retained, but that the Government should be encouraged to subsidise any protection necessary for those Authorities that would lose out financially under the new rules.

### **Resolved**

That, subject to the following Member views, the response from the Society of District Council Treasurers be endorsed and that the points set out in Sections 3 to 6 of the officer's report form the basis of this Council's response:-

- Q14: Although Parish Councils should publish forward projections of budgets, a legal requirement appeared unnecessary;
- Q15: This was anti democratic. (CD(F&ES))

### **100 ROCHFORD PARISH COUNCIL: 2004 VISION STATEMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive bringing to Members' attention the vision statement now produced by Rochford Parish Council and providing a commentary as to whether and how the items contained within it align with our own aims and aspirations.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to the possibility of the Parish Council requesting funding from this Authority for initiatives identified within its vision, officers confirmed that the Parish Council would not have sufficient resources to be able to fund initiatives by itself.

In response to a query about ownership of Connaught House, officers advised that it was understood that the Essex County Council owned the building and that it might be difficult to convert the building in such a way as to make it fully accessible to the public. Ownership of all the properties identified within the Vision was a key factor.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to whether resources might be available from Thames Gateway South Essex in order to develop Rochford as an arts and crafts centre, officers confirmed that it might be possible to obtain such funding, but on a more long-term basis.

Concluding the debate there was a general consensus that, while the Vision was to be commended, there was a danger that public expectations could be raised over initiatives for which there was no available funding.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the suggestions made by Rochford Parish Council under its Vision statement be noted.
- (2) That, in any review of its own strategies and action plans, the District Council considers the suggestions made in the Rochford Parish Council Vision Statement. (CEx)

## **101 LOCAL VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT FOR ROCHFORD DISTRICT**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking Members' approval to a Local Voluntary Sector Compact which has now been finalised, following consultation with interested parties.

### **Resolved**

That the finalised version of the Local Voluntary Sector Compact be agreed. (CEx)

## **102 HABITUAL AND/OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) proposing a policy to deal with habitual and/or vexatious complainants.

Members welcomed the policy and considered that there would be merit in Members receiving notification of all habitual or vexatious complaints so that Members were fully informed of any potential issues. There was a general consensus that the policy should be reviewed after a period of time.

During debate, Members suggested some minor amendments to the policy.

### **Resolved**

That the policy, set out at appendix 1 to the report, be adopted, subject to the following amendments:-

#### Page 13.3

Para. 1, third sentence: insert after "this notification" the following:-  
"will be copied to all Members and"

Third bullet point, second sentence: delete "and that further letters received on the same matter will be acknowledged"

Fifth bullet point, third line: delete “the”  
fifth line: insert “or” after “Ombudsman”

Page 13.4

At end of para. 2: insert: “A complainant will have the right of appeal to the Appeals Committee if unhappy with the outcome of a review under this part of the procedure”. (CD(LP&A))

**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 Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

**103 NEW LEISURE CENTRE – FORMER PARK SCHOOL, RAYLEIGH**

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) on tenders received.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to how long a period would lapse between completion of the building works and opening of the leisure centre, officers advised that the centre should open 2 – 3 weeks after completion of the building.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to the additional sub structure costs, officers confirmed that bore holes had been conducted, which had established that ground conditions were poorer than initially expected. It was noted that these ground conditions should be taken into consideration with respect to other parts of the site.

**Resolved**

That the additional cost of £88,379 required to build the new Rayleigh Leisure Centre be approved and that the building contract be awarded on that basis to Total Construction. (CD(F&ES))

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....