

Policy & Finance Committee – 6 April 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **6 April 2006** when there were present:-

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

Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr J R F Mason
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

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Thomass and Mrs C A Weston

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Internal Services)
R Crofts	- Corporate Director (External Services)
S Fowler	- Head of Administrative and Member Services
S Clarkson	- Head of Revenue and Housing Management
S Logan	- Revenue and Benefits Manager
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

127 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 March 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

128 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the Schedule relating to Progress on Decisions. Outstanding issues would be carried forward.

129 IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the Implementing Electronic Government 2006 Return (IEG6). The actual 2005/06 year-end figures relating to section 4 (Access Channel Take-Up) were tabled at the meeting.

Members concurred with the observation of the Chairman that the report was encouraging and that achievement of the target of 100% e-enablement was particularly commendable. It was agreed that the Head of Administrative and Member Services and her Team should be complimented for all the work associated with the Return.

Responding to a Member question the Head of Service advised that, whilst this is the final year that Government funding is available for e-government initiatives, funding to date has meant that most key services are now on-line. Focus over the coming year will be on the implementation of projects utilising software that has already been purchased.

Resolved

That the IEG6 Return be approved for submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. (HAMS)

130 COUNCIL TAX IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN – BEST PRACTICE PROPOSALS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on progress towards implementing the Council Tax Improvement Plan.

It was noted that officers were in consultation with Chelmsford Borough Council and Maldon District Council on joint funding possibilities for introducing independent quality officers for all three local authorities on a shared service basis. There would be a report to Committee on this aspect in June 2006.

The Committee concurred with the observation of the Chairman that the overall position was commendable.

Resolved

That closure of the Council Tax Improvement Plan be endorsed. The six monthly update reports on overall service improvements for Revenue and Benefits to be used to monitor continuous improvement in the Revenues area. (HRHM)

131 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATE – DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management reviewing the revised scheme for awarding Discretionary Rate Relief.

Resolved

That the introduction of the revised policy adopted in April 2005 into the normal working practices for all future applications for Discretionary Rate Relief be endorsed. (HRHM)

132 TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2006/07

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the adoption of a timetable of Meetings for the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

Referring to the revised timetable the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised that, where possible, regulatory and probity related meetings were scheduled for Tuesday evenings and policy meetings for Thursday evenings. The first Audit Committee had now been scheduled for 7 June 2006 to facilitate consideration of the Statement of Internal Control.

The Committee noted that the time-frame associated with the issue of Council Tax documentation pointed to it being advantageous to reserve 21 February 2007 for the purpose of Council Tax setting. Such an arrangement would introduce a practicable time-scale for the identification of benefit entitlement followed by billing/bill despatch.

Members endorsed the observation of the Chairman that, notwithstanding the outcome of the current review of the size of the Planning Services Committee, it would be appropriate for Member training arrangements between Annual Council and the first meeting of a Development Control Committee to facilitate induction/refresher training for Members appointed to that Committee. It was noted that the Standards Committee would be discussing the detail of the forthcoming Member training and development programme at its next meeting when this aspect would be considered.

Officers confirmed that the paperwork and arrangements for contact with newly appointed Members were designed to facilitate early understanding of key documents and protocols.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That, subject to the 21 February 2007 being reserved for the purpose of Council Tax setting, the revised timetable of Meetings for the 2006/07 Municipal Year be adopted. (HAMS)

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

133 STAFFING MATTERS

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

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive advised on the involvement of occupational health in cases of long term sickness and the current position relating to paternity leave.

Resolved

That the current level of vacancies, long term sickness and maternity absence, as detailed in the exempt report, be noted. (CE)

The meeting closed at 7.50pm.

Chairman

Date