

Minutes of the meeting of the **Member Budget Monitoring Working Group** held on **5 July 2000** when there were present:

Cllr G Fox
Cllr Mrs J Helson

Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr T G Cutmore.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R E Vingoe.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
R J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
D Deeks	Head of Financial Services
A Smith	Head of Administrative Services
J Bostock	Principal Committee Administrator

76 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor G Fox was appointed Chairman of the Working Group.

77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T G Cutmore declared a pecuniary interest in the item on Treasury Management by virtue of employment with HSBC Bank and took no part in the discussion thereon.

78 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2000

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 February 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

The Chief Executive advised that the Authority had now closed its accounts for the last Financial Year. The Group agreed that it would be appropriate to give early consideration to the accounts and that, in view of the amount of business to be transacted, the Meeting should be adjourned and re-convened for this purpose at 5.30pm on Tuesday 11 July 2000.

Officers confirmed that budget statements would be submitted to the Group on a quarterly basis

79 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members noted the Working Group's Terms of Reference "to monitor the Council's Capital and Revenue Programmes and to make recommendations as appropriate".

The Group commented on the value of ensuring that the work of the Member Budget Monitoring Group and the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee was complementary, particularly given that both had involvement with areas such as the Council's assets.

Recognising that the Finance & General Purposes Committee was parent of both bodies, Members concurred with the Chief Executive that it would be appropriate for Working Group Agendas to identify 'financial position' and 'Asset' matters for each meeting. On the majority of occasions it could be expected that staffing matters would be submitted to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee in the first instance. The Working Group clearly undertake valuable ground work on aspects of Asset Management.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive confirmed that an Officer Working Party was reviewing Audit Commission observations on Best Practice for Asset Management and reports would be submitted to the Working Group. The Group recognised the value of consultation with local Ward Members as part of the Asset Review process.

80 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

NOTE: Councillor G Fox declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item by virtue of the employment of a relative in the telecommunications industry.

The Head of Administrative and Member Services advised that Officers were in consultation with contractors aimed at reducing telecommunications costs. Work included a review of the return call mechanism?

81 TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Working Group considered the report of the Head of Financial Services, which set out proposals for the appointment of Treasury Management Advisors.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- There were links between the financial consultants used for preliminary discussions and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.
- A main issue would be determination of the criteria for future lending policies and the monitoring thereof. This would be the subject of further Committee reports.
- On the basis of information to date, the appointment of Treasury Management Advisors would more than cover associated costs.
- There are marginal implications for the Housing Revenue Account, with the interest on investments providing contribution to the general fund.

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That Treasury Management Advisors be appointed through the tendering process for a period of 5 years (notice of 3 years).
- (2) That a further report be submitted on the appointment of a Cash Fund Manager together with the criteria for investments following the initial work of the consultants. (HSF)

82 DRAFT REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR THE SOUTH EAST

The Chief Executive reported verbally on the decision of the Transportation and Environmental Services Committee that consideration be given to funding sufficient resources to enable a comprehensive review of factors likely to affect the demand for, and provision of, future housing and associated infrastructure.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- The formulation of an Urban Capacity Study was key and that work could be outsourced at a likely cost of up to £12,000.
- There remained a need to address aspects of other objectives and the associated staffing resources within the Corporate Policy and Initiative's division and reports could be submitted to the Planning Policy Sub-Committee as necessary during the summer months.

During discussion on the appointment of consultants for Urban Capacity Study work, a Member emphasised on the value of consultants in terms of both early production of a study and the independent perspective.

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That a sum of up to £12,000 be allocated for the appointment of consultants to produce an Urban Capacity Study
- (2) That reports on other planning associated objectives and the associated staffing resource within the Corporate Policy and Initiative's division be submitted to the Planning Policy Sub-Committee in the first instance.(HCPI)

83 THE WINDMILL, BELLINGHAM LANE , RAYLEIGH

The Working Group considered the report of the Head of Legal Services, concerning the current use and management of the Windmill Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. The building was currently licensed to the Rayleigh & District Antiquarian Society from year to year at a licence fee of 5 pence. The Society opened the ground floor of the Windmill to the public on Saturday mornings during the summer months. The Society had indicated a willingness to meet with the Council to discuss the future of the building.

In response to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- Work had commenced on the woodwork and sails using previously set aside monies. County Council experts were investigating possibilities for achieving lottery funding for work on the brickwork.
- The building had potential for uses additional to the activity of the Rayleigh & District Antiquarian Society.
- It would be possible to give consideration to setting up a more broadly based Windmill Trust to include partners such as the Town Council, Civic Society, Antiquarian Society and the National Trust. In this regard, it would be of value to continue consultation with windmill experts aimed at identifying all possible funding possibilities/criteria.
- The possibility of making the windmill available for a site visit prior to Full Council would be investigated and reported to the next Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That work be undertaken to establish the possibilities for setting up a Trust arrangement for the Windmill capable of meeting funding criteria.
- (2) That arrangements be put in hand to open the Windmill to all Councillors between 6pm and 7.30pm before Council on 25 July 2000

- (3) That the Group meet with the Rayleigh & District Antiquarian Society to discuss the future of the building with a report back to Finance & General Purposes Committee in due course.(HLS)

84 TOWN & COUNTRY FINANCIAL ISSUES GROUP AND SHIRE DISTRICT INITIATIVES PROGRESS REPORT

The Working Group considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) which provided an update on the activities of the Town & Country Financial Issues Group (TACFIG) and the Shire District Initiative (SDI) and sought Members views in respect of the SDI submission relating to revenue support grant.

RECOMMENDED

That the following be this Council's comments on the SDI proposals:-

- That support is given to TACFIG proposals for plan based funding based upon the community plan.
- The view that there should be a predetermined control total of the grant payable to Shire Districts fixed for 5 years with annual inflation updates is not an unreasonable concept.
- The proposed simplified formula for distribution to individual Shire Districts could be supported in principle, but more detail would be required.
- Support cannot be given to the proposal that the distribution of the control total to individual authorities should be determined by Shire Districts themselves operating as a self-regulating community.
- The proposal that there should be a real term increase in the aggregate sum available to Shire Districts could be supported.
(CD(F&ES))

85 FUNDING ISSUES AFFECTING THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STOCK

The Working Group considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on the broad issues facing the Housing Revenue Account and options on the way forward.

During debate Officers confirmed that facilities provision within the Council's sheltered housing blocks was being addressed as part of the Best Value Review of the housing service, the strategic element of which was due to conclude prior to Christmas. It could be recognised that Housing Associations had more freedom to borrow monies against their asset base than Local Housing Authorities.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Resolved

That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and Press be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraphs 9 and 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

86 ASSET REVIEW – LAND NEAR THE CIVIC SUITE, RAYLEIGH

The Working Group considered the confidential report of the Head of Legal Services on review of unused land to the east of the Market Car Park, Rayleigh

Members agreed that it would be of value to have further information on possibilities for operational use of the site, including the storage building located in the Car Park.

RECOMMENDED

That Officers investigate and report further to the Group on possible operational uses for the site. (HLS)

87 ASSET REVIEW – LAND AT HIGHFIELD CRESCENT, RAYLEIGH

The Working Group considered the confidential report of the Head of Legal Services on the review of land at Highfield Crescent, Rayleigh.

In noting the potential within the site Members felt that further sensitive investigation should be undertaken with regard to the current use of the property.

RECOMMENDED

That the matter be reconsidered following further investigation.(HLS)

88 ADMINISTRATIVE AND MEMBER SERVICES - STAFFING

The Working Group considered the confidential report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on staffing issues within the Division.

Whilst recognising that it had been previously accepted that a review of the Divisions would be appropriate, the Group endorsed the view of a Member that, given potential pressures on the staffing resource across the Authority, it would be inappropriate to deal with most of the matters set out in the report in isolation. Reference was also made to the need to be mindful of job evaluation and Best Value review activity.

Item 5

The Group recognised the value of addressing the scale associated with a specific post given that it had been clearly undergraded for some time.

Members concurred with the view of the Chief Executive on the value of giving consideration to the total staffing resource and

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That the sum staffing resource position be reported to the Member Budget Monitoring Working Group in the first instance to enable it to be placed in financial context.(CE)
- (2) That post 23500 be regraded from scale 3-4 to scale 5. (HAMS)

The Meeting adjourned at 10.16pm to be reconvened at 5.30pm on Tuesday 11 July 2000.

Chairman.....

Date.....