

Council 22 February 2000

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **22 February 2000** when there were present:

Cllr D R Helson - Chairman

Cllr D E Barnes
Cllr P A Beckers
Cllr C I Black
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr J M Dickson
Cllr D F Flack
Cllr D M Ford
Cllr Mrs J E Ford
Cllr G Fox
Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr Mrs J M Giles
Cllr Mrs H LA Glynn
Cllr J E Grey
Cllr Mrs J Hall
Cllr N Harris
Cllr Mrs E M Hart
Cllr Mrs J Helson

Cllr Mrs A R Hutchings
Cllr V D Hutchings
Cllr C C Langlands
Cllr V H Leach
Cllr Mrs S J Lemon
Cllr T Livings
Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr R A Pearson
Cllr P D Stebbing
Cllr Mrs W M Stevenson
Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr R E Vingoe
Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr D A Weir
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs R S Allen, B R Ayling and A Hosking

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts - Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)
D Deeks - Head of Financial Services
A Smith - Head of Administrative and Member Services
L Lapite - Assistant Solicitor
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

65 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to (b) in the final paragraph on page 8 being changed to (a).

66 SETTING THE LEVEL OF COUNCIL TAX 2000/2001

Council considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) which sought agreement to the level of Council Tax for 2000/2001.

In presenting his report the Corporate Director advised on the content of responses received from the Rayleigh and District Chamber of Trade and Commerce and the Essex Chamber of Commerce on the Council's National Non Domestic Rating Consultation document.

The Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee made the following statement:-

"Chairman, Members, Members of the Public and Press,

We agreed our budget at the council meeting held on the 18th of January. We are a hung Council and everyone needs to recognise that fact. The budget has to be a compromise; we cannot meet every group's total aspirations, but I believe we have gone a long way in achieving as much as we can from the very tight financial constraints under which we are working.

We have managed to maintain the same level of service to all members of the public even though the financial pressures on us were great and the Government has required us to perform extra duties. In addition, we will be able to provide:-

- A continuation of the summer holiday activity programme for young people which was such a success last year.
- Subject to Essex County Council releasing the land at no cost we will begin work to create a new country park in the District.
- We will try to preserve the heritage contained within our historic town centres, such as West Street in Rochford.
- We will work with parishes to improve many of the village centres in our District.
- We will continue to provide resources for community safety, in line with our Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, which is admired throughout the county.
- We have also had to put money aside for new duties placed upon us - for such items as Best Value and a contaminated land survey.
- Much work will be needed in preparation of the new Local Plan.

Standard Spending Assessment (or SSA) has always been a contentious issue for this Council. This year, our SSA has increased

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from 5.649 million pounds to 5.824 million pounds. This is an increase of 3.1%, which amounts to £175,000.

This year, our SSA on a per head of population basis will be the 13th lowest in England.

The Government had intended this Council to receive £17,000 to implement the Best Value regime. Unfortunately, because of a quirk in the grant system, we will not benefit from this particular allocation. The reason for this is, in the past, Rochford was one of the Councils which received a balancing allowance because of our very low SSA. This means, because of this year's increase which I have just mentioned, we now lose part of our balancing allowance.

Fortunately, this Government has acknowledged that the SSA system is unfair and needs to be changed. We are now into the second of a three-year review and it is essential that we have a voice in the debate. So we have tried to be heard in the following ways:-

Rochford is a founder member of the Town and Country Finance Initiatives Group (or TACFIG) and is also supporting the Shire Districts initiative to get a better deal for our type of authority. I have attended TACFIG meetings whenever possible in order to ensure our point of view is taken on board when the case for change is presented to Government.

We have decided to increase council tax by 4.5%, which is in accordance with Government guidelines.

The effect of that decision is that Rochford's council tax on a Band D property will rise from £107.01 to £111.87. This is an increase of only 9 pence per week.

In conclusion, the total council tax for a Band D property will be:-

Essex County Council	£648.09
Police Authority	£67.95
Rochford	£111.87

Depending on where you live in the District, the council tax for a Band D property will range between £842.20 and £862.66.

Both Rochford District Council and the Police Authority have contained the council tax increase to 4.5. The County Council tax increase is 8.3%. When our residents receive their new tax bill, they do need to be aware that any increase above 4.5% is totally outside this Council's control."

In addressing proposals the Chairman reminded Members that in order to set the total Council Tax precept information had been required from

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Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, and the Parishes and Local Councils within the District.

On a motion moved by Councillor C R Morgan and seconded by Councillor G Fox it was :-

Resolved

- (1) That the total for economic development is estimated at £20,000
- (2) That the total for gross expenditure of the District together with the Parish precepts be £21,766,164.
- (3) That the total of income for the District Council be £14,525,100.
- (4) That the total net expenditure of the District Council together with the Parishes be £7,241,064.
- (5) That the total of the sums payable into the general fund in respect of redistributed non domestic rates, revenue support grant, central support protection grant, together with adjustments from the collection fund be £3,301,088. There is no sum payable by the District Council in respect of reductions to Council Tax Benefit subsidy.
- (6) That the budget requirement for the year of £7,241,064 less the net income receivable of £3,301,088 which, divided by the tax base of 29,952.32 is equal to £131.54, which is the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
- (7) That the total of Parish precepts included within the above is £589,264.
- (8) That the Council Tax relating to the District Council without Parish precepts is £111.87.
- (9) That the total tax for both District and Parishes be as set out in the schedule which is included as Appendix A. These sums are calculated as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.
- (10) The sums given above for Band D but now shown in the particular valuations bands A-H are set out in the schedule shown as Appendix B.
- (11) The precepts issued to the Council in respect of Essex County Council and Essex Police Authority for each valuation band A-H as set out in the schedule as shown as Appendix C.

- (12) The total Council Tax for the area for each valuation band A-H is set out in Appendix D. These are the amounts set as Council Tax for the year 2000/01. (CD(F&ES))

67 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2000/2001

Note: Councillor Mrs H LA Glynn declared a pecuniary interest in any reference to the contractor appointed to the Mill Hall Improvement Programme and left the Meeting during discussion of the Programme. Council considered a presentation and supporting paperwork from the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) which sought agreement to the Capital Programme for 2000/2001. A report from the Head of Administrative and Member Services setting out a Motion from Councillors V H Leach and Mrs J M Giles (referred from the last Meeting of Full Council) and other proposals from the political groups was received together with:-

- A revised schedule setting out the result of recent discussions held between the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Chairman of the Member of the Member Budget Monitoring Working Group.
- The recommendations from the Housing Management Sub-Committee relating to the Housing Capital Programme 2000/2001.

(i) Housing Capital Programme and Financing

On a motion moved by Councillor Mrs M S Vince and seconded by Councillor D M Ford it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That the sum of £49,000 currently shown as unallocated in the 2000/2001 Housing Capital Programme be authorised towards fire prevention works.
- (2) That the sum of £31,000 currently in the 1999/2000 estimates for the Local Authority Social Housing Grant, Bardfield Way, Rayleigh be authorised towards fire prevention works.
- (3) That a sum of £30,000 be released for fire prevention works from the provision in 2000/2001 of £150,000 for Local Authority Social Housing Grant.
- (4) That the freeze on private sector renewal grants be lifted with immediate effect.

- (5) That the Housing Capital Programme and financing estimates for future years, as set out in the schedule attached at appendix E to these Minutes, be approved. (CD(F&ES))

(ii) General Fund Capital Programme and Financing

In addressing the General Fund Draft Capital Programme and Financing estimates the Corporate Director expanded on the rationale for accepting a position whereby the programme could be overdrawn with effect from 2002. At this stage it was possible to be optimistic that asset disposal options would meet likely shortfalls. It was also unlikely that, in practice, all the expenditure identified for 2000/2001 would actually occur during that period. The Council always had the option of being able to review its programme should Capital receipts not arrive as predicted.

The Capital Programme and Financing estimate proposals were moved by Councillor C R Morgan and seconded by Councillor G Fox. In addressing the Motion, Councillor Morgan commented that, given the balanced nature of the Council, the Capital Programme should not be the prerogative of any one political group. Proposals were aimed at addressing areas of work that had been previously constrained by Government capping formulae and the associated impact on the Standard Spending Assessment. The intention was to introduce improvements across the District as a whole.

Responding to Member questions, the Corporate Director advised that:-

- The £206,500 proposed for Mill Hall improvements was a global sum of which the contract with Ramoss contractors formed a part.
- At this stage it was only possible to identify general provisions for Capital proposals. With specific projects, such as play spaces, the formulation of actual scheme designs and the tender process may lead to a review of some plans. With Town Centre regeneration projects District Council plans were developed with lead partners such as the County Council.

On a requisition pursuant to Standing Order 24(2), a recorded vote was taken on the above Motion as follows:-

For (37)	Councillors R Adams, G C Angus, D E Barnes, P A Beckers, C I Black, T G Cutmore, J M Dickson, D F Flack, D M Ford, Mrs J E Ford, G Fox, K A Gibbs, Mrs J M Giles, J E Grey, Mrs H L A Glynn, Mrs J Hall, N Harris, Mrs D M Hart, D R Helson, Mrs J Helson, Mrs A R Hutchings, V D Hutchings, C C Langlands, V H Leach, Mrs S J Lemon, T Livings,
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G A Mockford, C R Morgan, R A Pearson,
P D Stebbing, Mrs W M Stevenson, Mrs M S Vince,
R E Vingoe, Mrs M J Webster, P F A Webster.
D A Weir and Mrs M A Weir.

Against (0)
Abstentions (0)

The Motion having been unanimously carried it was:-

Resolved

That the general fund Capital Programme and financing estimates for future years, as set out in the schedule attached at appendix F to these Minutes, be approved. (CD(F&ES))

68 QUESTION ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 10(1)

The following question had been submitted by Councillor V H Leach pursuant to Standing Order 10(1):-

"Would the appropriate Officer advise the Council of the approximate costs to date and approximate future costs of the numerous known initiatives emanating from Central Government (recycling targets, Boundary Commission, Modernising Agenda etc.)"

The Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) had provided the following response to the question:-

"Areas of Activity

There are a considerable number of issues which officers are required to deal with over the coming year which emanate from Central Government.

In response to the question, the issues are set out below. It should be noted that the initiatives listed include a number emanating from the previous Government.

Production and monitoring of plans:

Corporate Plan District Plan
LA21 Strategy
Recycling Strategy
HIPS
HIMP
Crime and Disorder
Local Transport Plan
Air Quality

Employment Strategy
Millennium
Best Value Performance Plan
Best Value Consultation Strategy
Emergency Plan
Community Cultural Strategy
Asset Management Plans
Community Plan
Procurement Strategy

Issues being dealt with:

Recycling
Local Government Commission
Best Value
Modernising Agenda
Resource accounting for HRA
Health Agenda
Air Quality Monitoring
Contaminated Land
Verification Framework/BFI response
E-government
Tenants compact
Disability Discrimination Act
Performance Indicators

COSTS INVOLVED

It is not possible to fully cost all of the issues set out above. As Members will appreciate, the main resource will be senior officer time which will be considerable over the next year. This is not a problem that is new to Rochford and officers have always had to carry out strict prioritisation of work to cover tasks placed upon the Council by Central Government.

Where it has been possible to identify specific costs, they are set out below. It should be noted that no staffing costs are included unless specifically mentioned in the comment columns.

Item	Revised 1999/2000 £	Estimate 2000/2001 £	Comment
Corporate Plan	200	200	
District Plan	-	7,000	
LA 21 Strategy	27,600	27,800	Includes cost of LA21 Officer
Air Quality Control	6,500	-	
Local Government		500	

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Commission	3,500		
Best Value	39,300	89,000	Includes consultation 1.5 staff and audit fees. Additional audit fees of £30,000 pa in future years.
Contaminated land	-	9,000	
Verification Framework	500	-	
Tenants compact	10,000	13,000	
Performance Indicators	1,300	1,300	

In order to comply with recycling targets the cost to the Council, based upon the Hawkwell trial would be approximately:-

Capital - £510,000 (bins and boxes only - no infrastructure) Revenue - £300,000 per annum.

Additional staff would be required if the whole of the District were to become involved in recycling. This could be as much as 5 full time staff."

In support of the above response, the Corporate Director provided an example of a Supplementary Credit Approval received in respect of air quality and grants received for work on Tenants Compacts and housing resource accounting.

By way of a supplementary question Councillor V H Leach asked for details of the net costs of initiatives emanating from Central Government.

It was confirmed that the Corporate Director would write directly to Councillor V H Leach on the supplementary question.

69 ROYAL GARDEN PARTIES

Council considered the report of the Head of Corporate Policy and Initiatives seeking nominations to attend one of the Royal Garden Parties to be held in July.

During debate Councillor G Fox advised that, should other Members be keen to attend, he would be prepared to withdraw as a nominee. Council concurred with the view of the Chairman that, should

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Councillor G Fox not attend this year, his name should be top of the list next year.

Resolved

- (1) That Councillors Mrs M A Weir and D E Barnes, together with their partners, be nominated to attend one of the Royal Garden Parties to be held in July.
- (2) That, in view of his gesture in foregoing attendance this year, Councillor G Fox be the first preferred attendee for a Garden Party next year. (HCPI)

The Meeting closed at 7.49pm

Chairman

Date