
Minutes of the meeting of the **Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee**
on **26 June 2001** when there were present:

Cllr Mrs J Helson – Chairman

Cllr D R Helson
Cllr R E Vingoe

Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. G Fox

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive
R J Honey – Corporate Director (Law Planning & Administration)
D Deeks - Head of Financial Services
G Woolhouse – Head of Housing Health and Community Care
J Bostock – Principal Committee Administrator

136 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Sub-Committee received the Schedule relating to decisions since May 2000. Outstanding Issues would be carried forward.

137 CAPITAL STRATEGY STATEMENT

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which set out a draft Capital Strategy Statement 2001/02.

It was noted that this was an annual document.

RECOMMENDED

That the draft Capital Strategy Document and consultation process, as appended to these Minutes be approved. (HFS)

138 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 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

139 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Financial Services on options relating to an anticipated capital receipt.

The Head of Financial Services indicated adjustments which would be required to elements of the report given that the receipt was likely to be £100,000 lower than originally anticipated. The revised report is appended to these Minutes.

During debate, the Sub-Committee agreed that there was a need for the Political Groups to be given further opportunity to consider the details of the document. It would be of value to clarify elements of the report during the Meeting, with a view to Groups submitting their observations to the next Meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee (to which the latest revised figure work could be reported by Officers).

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- Given that negotiations associated with the capital receipt had concluded, future consideration of the programme could be in public session.
- The number of persons in Bed and Breakfast accommodation could vary from day to day and that, in almost all cases, the use of such accommodation was not suitable for homeless people. There was a need to increase the number of self contained properties to which the Council could have access to house homeless people, and that a previous proposal to look into the disposal of an existing property in High Road, Rayleigh would exacerbate the problems.
- Further information had just been received from the County Council's Agents on the County's position in respect of the Blatches Farm/Park School sites, including development possibilities. In giving further consideration to this matter, it would be important for the Council to remain mindful of connections between the sites (not treating them in isolation).

In terms of the Blatches Farm/Park School sites, Members felt there would be value in seeking an early Meeting with local County Councillors. The District could be represented by Members of this Sub-Committee together with the Chairman of the Cherry Orchard Park Working Group and the Chairman of the Park School Working Group. Given timescales, it was agreed that, should it be possible to convene a meeting in advance of the next Finance & General Purposes

Committee, the Chief Executive should make arrangements utilising the urgent business procedure.

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That an early meeting be arranged between County Councillors, Members of the Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee and Chairmen of the Cherry Orchard Park and Park School Working Groups with a view to progressing discussion of the Blatches Farm/Park School sites. The County Council Members to be provided with a background briefing note in advance of the Meeting. (Note: The Chief Executive will utilise urgent business procedure with a view to commencing meeting arrangements in advance of the next Finance & General Purposes Committee).
- (2) That a revised report on Capital Programme possibilities be submitted to the next Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee (the Political Groups to give detailed consideration to proposals in the interim) with the intention of reporting into Full Council for decision. (HFS)

140 SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Financial Services on responses received from registered social landlords following a request for expressions of interest in the Council's sheltered housing unit at Hardwick House and the adjoining site. Members noted that none of the submissions identified a future for the existing property as sheltered accommodation.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- The submissions from the Housing Associations should, at this stage, be seen as fairly broad, in principle, proposals. There was no guarantee the Housing Corporation would make funds available
- It would be possible to identify a sale valuation for the property.
- The housing needs survey had identified the requirement for 20 units of rented accommodation each year, as well as frail elderly accommodation
- There was a covenant relating to the site which provided that the Council could repurchase the land adjoining the sheltered scheme at cost.

In terms of progressing this matter, the Sub-Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to include disposal possibilities within deliberation

on the future of this site. Associated with this, it was also felt that budget considerations should include the establishment of plans to undertake conversion work to bathroom areas at other sheltered accommodation within the District so as to provide individual bathroom facilities.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL

- (1) That the Council enters detailed discussions with Swan Housing Association and the Housing Corporation.
- (2) That when these discussions are concluded, a detailed report be submitted back to Full Council.
- (3) That, in the interim, special meetings are held for tenant representatives, existing tenants and staff to keep them informed of discussions.
- (4) That consideration be given to site disposal possibilities.
- (5) That, future budget considerations include plans to undertake conversion work to bathroom areas at other sheltered accommodation within the District so as to provide individual bathroom facilities.
- (6) That 0.77 acres of land adjacent to Hardwick House, Rayleigh be reconveyed to the Council by Springboard Housing Association at cost in accordance with an Agreement dated 14 September 1993. (HFS/HLS)

141 CONSULTANCY ADVICE – DEVELOPMENT AT WEBSTERS WAY, RAYLEIGH

Note: The Chairman admitted this item of business as urgent in view of the need for early appointment of consultants.

The Chairman referred to the Meeting of the Rayleigh Town Centre Working Group held earlier in the day. The Working Group had now identified a preferred consultant to provide advice to on the possible redevelopment of Websters Way, Rayleigh. Whilst there was a need for early appointment, the Working Group had recognised further consideration may need to be given to identifying funding given that the consultancy fee would be approximately £4000 above original estimates.

It was noted that the Chief Executive would utilise urgency arrangements on this matter if appropriate.

142 STAFFING ISSUES/WORK PROGRAMME

Note: All officers with the exception of the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) left the meeting for this item.

The Sub-Committee considered a report in confidence from the Chief Executive outlining the effect on the authority at the present time of staffing vacancies and long term absences.

Although problems existed in specific areas, difficulties had a consequential effect across the authority and Members agreed that some matters would be delayed or deferred as a result. It was confirmed that no policy decision had been taken to hold posts vacant but that some jobs had proved difficult to fill and a number had been readvertised. The Advertising Budget, which had been reduced by 50% from last year, was now exhausted and required a virement.

Whilst agreeing that the matters raised by the Chief Executive should be kept under review and an update reported to Corporate Resources Sub-Committee together with a review of Job Evaluation in the autumn cycle, the Sub-Committee felt that a more detailed report, including a breakdown of the current work programme, should be submitted to Full Council in the meantime.

Members also noted that when considering the outcome of Job Evaluation, the Council would need to take into account market rates in assessing posts.

Recommended

- (1) That a further detailed report be submitted to Full Council outlining the impact of staff vacancies and sickness absence on the Council's current work programme.
- (2) That a virement of £20,000 from the post vacant savings be made to the Staff Advertising Budget. (CEX)

The Meeting closed at 10.30 pm

Chairman:

Date: