

## **Council – 24 October 2000**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & General Purposes Committee** held on **12 October 2000** when there were present:

Cllr G Fox - Chairman

Cllr R Adams  
Cllr T G Cutmore  
Cllr D F Flack  
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn  
Cllr D R Helson  
Cllr Mrs J Helson  
Cllr V H Leach  
Cllr Mrs S J Lemon  
Cllr T Livings

Cllr G A Mockford  
Cllr C R Morgan  
Cllr S P Smith  
Cllr M G B Starke  
Cllr R E Vingoe  
Cllr P F A Webster  
Cllr D A Weir  
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J E Grey and P J Morgan

### **SUBSTITUTES**

Councillors R A Amner and P A Capon.

### **VISITING**

Councillor P D Stebbing

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	Chief Executive
R J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)
A Smith	Head of Administrative and Member Services
D Timson	Property Maintenance and Highways Manager
J Bostock	Principal Committee Administrator

### **323 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs H L A Glynn declared an interest in the item on renewal of the Council's Approved List of Contractors for construction related activities (Agenda item 18) and left the meeting during consideration thereof.

NOTE: The Committee agreed that Item 18 should be considered following exclusion of the public and press as Members wished to raise matters which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as

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defined in Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **324 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **325 OUTSTANDING ISSUES**

The Committee was satisfied that all necessary action had been or was being taken. Minutes 42/00, 118(4)/00, 120/00 and 132(6)/00 were carried forward.

### **326 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARENT COMMITTEES**

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Parent Committees.

#### **(1) Transportation and Environmental Services - 21 September 2000**

##### **Minute 279 – Relating to Minute 142 of Transportation Sub Committee – Bellingham Lane/Mill Hall Car Park, Rayleigh**

The Committee agreed with the view of a Member that it should be possible to accommodate the costs of work required for car parking redesignation at this site from within the Capital Programme.

##### **Resolved**

That the cost of works associated with the redesignation of car parking spaces at the Bellingham Lane/Mill Hall Car Park, Rayleigh be included in the Capital Programme. (HRHM)

#### **(2) Community Services – 10 October 2000**

##### **Minute 322 – Sheltered Accommodation.**

##### **Resolved**

That the request to provide £10,000 from the Housing Revenue Account and £5,000 from the General Fund to enable a survey of frail elderly needs to be undertaken in the current year be approved. (CD(F&ES)).

### **327 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

The Committee received the Minutes of the following Sub-Committees and considered the recommendations contained therein:

### **(1) Partnership – 20 July 2000**

The recommendations under Minute 97 had been addressed at the last meeting of Full Council.

The Head of Administrative & Member Services updated Members on the latest communication from the Local Government Commission that they intended to publish their revised draft proposals on 28 November 2000. There would be a period of consultation until 9 January 2001 with final recommendations published next February. Copies of the latest draft would be furnished to Members as soon as available.

### **(2) Corporate Resources – 26 July 2000**

### **(3) Member Budget Monitoring – 27 July 2000**

#### **Minute 92 – Capital Programme and Capital Strategy**

##### Purchase of Land at Great Wakering from Ministry of Defence (MoD)

Noting that the MoD was still unable to produce title it was suggested that they should be requested to let the land to the District on a weekly basis. Members were concerned by the delay in implementing the project and requested that the matter be progressed as a matter of urgency.

##### Mill Hall Improvements

A Member requested that the condition of the handrail within the Mill Hall building be addressed as part of the improvement works.

##### Vehicles

The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) confirmed that a report was to be submitted to the next Meeting of the Contracts Sub-Committee identifying possible options for the provision of a civic car/chauffeur service.

##### Public Conveniences

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive confirmed that Officers would be making future contact with Members on official opening arrangements.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the revised capital programme be agreed.
- (2) That the draft capital strategy statement be noted. (HFS)

- (3) That, pending the production of title, the MoD be requested to let the land at Great Wakering to the District Council on a weekly basis.  
(HLS)

### **Minute 93 – Microsoft Office 97**

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Council's position be maintained until further information is received from both the manufacturer and supplier.
- (2) That the Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee be kept informed of developments. (CD (L,P & A))

### **(4) Structural & Procedural Review – 19 September 2000**

#### **Minute 62 – The Local Government Act 2000 – New Ethical Framework**

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the proposed general principles of conduct produced by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions be endorsed.
- (2) That, subject to the adjustments in the Minute preamble, the suggested Officer responses to the Local Government Association's Model Code form the basis of the Council's response to that consultation document.  
(CE)

#### **Minute 63 – The Local Government Act 2000 – New Political Structures**

Members noted that the Chief Executive was to be attending a Meeting with officials from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions relating to Government proposals for new political structures. Meetings of the Structural & Procedural Review Sub-Committee could be convened as soon as Government guidance was available.

#### **Minute 64 – Substitutes**

Given that the Standing Order relating to substitutes could be interpreted to provide for the notification of substitutes at any time up to Meeting commencement, Members agreed that it would be appropriate to formalise this within Standing Order documentation and:-

### **RECOMMENDED**

That the first part of Standing Order 12(13)(e) be revised to read:-

“A list of substitutes nominated in accordance with paragraph 12(13)(a) should be supplied to the Proper Officer at any time up to the commencement of the Meeting to which it relates.....”

### **Minute 65 – Referencing up of Decisions**

### **RECOMMENDED**

That Standing Order 18(6) be adjusted to read:-

“(6) Delegated decisions of a Sub-Committee or Committee other than the Planning Services Committee or when acting in a quasi-judicial capacity shall be deemed to have been resolved four working days after the date of the Meeting, unless a Member(s) has provided the Proper Officer with the names of three Members of the Council who require the relevant Minute to be referred to the Full Council for decision. If such a request is received the Minute will be included for debate at the next Full Council Meeting.”  
(HAMS)

### **(5) Corporate Resources – 27 September 2000**

### **Minute 358 – Position of Chief Executive**

### **RECOMMENDED**

That the Council offer the permanent position of Chief Executive to Mr Paul Warren on expiry of his current contract with the Council.  
(CD(L,P&A))

### **Minute 359 – Position of Head of Planning Services**

### **RECOMMENDED**

That the Head of Corporate Policy & Initiatives be confirmed in the post of Head of Planning Services on a permanent basis with the Local Plans Unit transferring back to the Planning Services Division under his control. (CE)

### **(6) Corporate Resources – 3 October 2000**

### **Minute 364 – Membership of East of England Local Government Conference**

Members noted that a report was to be submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee in November on Membership of the Conference.

### **Minute 365 - Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action**

#### **Resolved**

That this Council's response to the draft Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action incorporates the comments received from local voluntary organisations as outlined. (HFS)

### **Minute 366 - National Non Domestic Rating Discretionary Rate Relief**

In considering the recommendations under Minute 366 Members agreed that it would be appropriate for a press release to be issued setting out the current position.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That when considering applications for Mandatory Relief the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) continues to exercise his delegated authority to grant this Relief.
- (2) That when considering applications for Discretionary Rate Relief:-
  - The Financial Status of each club/organisation be scrutinised and a copy of their latest accounts be submitted to the Sub-Committee.
  - The Central Government's "National Guidelines" continue to be followed
  - That "Top-Up" Relief continue to be granted to those organisations listed earlier in this Minute.
  - That consideration be taken as to whether the organisation supports the Council's Corporate Strategy.
  - If Rate Relief is refused, the Minutes must specify the reasons for refusal.
  - The "Wednesbury Principles" of reasonableness should always be observed when considering cases.
  - That sports club in particular must be registered members of the Rochford Sports Council.
  - Where membership of clubs/organisation have less than 50% of their members living within the area their relief be reduced pro rata.
  - All Council "handouts" concerning relief be revised to reflect the above recommendations.
- (3) That a press release be issued setting out the current position. (CD(F&ES))

### **Minute 367 – Committee Responsibility for Information Technology**

During debate of Minute 367, Members referred to recent arrangements for a Presentation Evening on the IS/IT strategy. Whilst timetable commitments were such that it could be difficult to make arrangements that are suitable for all Members, it would be of value to further review the possibilities. Officers confirmed that there would be further investigation of proposed arrangements with a view to maximising Member attendance and that, if necessary, a further session would be arranged.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That Service Committees consider and make recommendation to the Corporate Resources Sub-committee concerning the IT implications arising from the development of services.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee to determine all operational IT matters and to make recommendations on issues affecting IT strategy and policy to the Finance & General Purposes Committee. (HAMS)

### **Minute 368 – Members' Post**

It was noted that consideration may have to be given to further adjustments to post arrangements at the end of the municipal year, depending on changes emanating from the modernising agenda.

#### **Resolved**

That the current arrangements for a twice weekly delivery of Members' post, on Mondays and Thursdays, be retained. (HAMS)

### **Minute 369 – South Essex Chamber of Commerce**

#### **Resolved**

That this Council should not become a member of the South Essex Chamber of Commerce. (CD(F&ES))

### **Minute 370 – Application for Waiver of Public Entertainment Licence Fee – Lubards Farm, Rayleigh**

#### **Resolved**

That a fee waiver of 100% be granted in a Public Entertainment Licence is obtained. (HHHCC)

### **Minute 371 – Best Value Review – Asset Management**

#### **Resolved**

That four Members, one from each party, be nominated to assist in the Best Value Asset Management Reviews. (CD(LP&A))

### **Minute 372 – Single Status Agreement and Job Evaluation**

#### **Resolved**

That the progress made to date be noted and that the potential budgetary implications of job evaluation, including the one off costs of undertaking the process and its longer term implications, be considered by the Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee. (HAMS)

### **Minute 373 – Part-time Workers Pro Rata Holiday**

#### **Resolved**

That the Unison request be agreed and the existing conditions of service of the staff be effectively protected until 30 June 2002. (HAMS)

### **Minute 374 – Office and Window-cleaning Contracts**

#### **Resolved**

That the Office and Window-cleaning contracts with Mayfield Cleaning Contractors be extended on current terms and conditions to 24 August 2001. (HAMS)

### **(7) Member Budget Monitoring – 4 October 2000**

#### **Minute 97 – Budget Strategy**

Members noted that the Chief Executive was currently undertaking an investigation aimed at identifying how information detailed in the exempt report associated with this item had been obtained by the media. A report explaining the legal position on disclosure of exempt and confidential information would be submitted to the next meeting of Full Council by the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration).

#### **Resolved**

That it be accepted the Council needs to consider a possible tax increase up to the level identified in the report of the Head of Financial Services and recognised that the position will have to be reviewed in the light of the final Standard Spending Assessment, grants and income levels. (HFS)



### **Minute 98 – Albert Jones Court, Rochford**

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That Essex County Council be advised that this Council does not wish to purchase Albert Jones Court in the event it becomes redundant.
- (2) That, in such circumstances, Essex County Council be urged to work with and consult this Council and other relevant organisations to identify a suitable alternative use that would be of benefit to the local authority. (HHHCC)

### **Minute 100 – Blatches Farm – Park School – Progress**

#### **Resolved**

That consultants be employed to assist the District Council in negotiations with the County Council on the matter set out in the exempt report at a cost of £5,000. (CE)

### **328 CORPORATE PLAN/BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN – HALF YEARLY REVIEW**

The Committee received the report of the Chief Executive updating Members on progress on the Corporate Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan.

It was noted that the Appendix to the report should have indicated that work on demolition of the Rayleigh Sports and Recreation Club/Laying Out for Car Park provision was scheduled for completion in December 2000.

### **329 BEST VALUE AND AUDIT COMMISSION PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 2001/2002**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which sought comments on a consultation document issued by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and outlining changes to Best Value and Audit Commission indicators for 2001/2002.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive indicated that some performance indicators were subject to annual and bi-annual change and that, in some cases, their value to individual Local Authorities was difficult to identify. Definition was sometimes an issue, as was terminology. To illustrate this point, the Chief Executive referred to proposed new BVPI 167 and the term 'Local Sporting Event'. Data collection and resourcing were issues for a small

authority such as Rochford, particularly if they impacted on service delivery.

The Chief Executive advised that the Council had now received a further Paper, this time from the Audit Commission on proposed “Quality of Life” Performance Indicators. He considered similar comments would apply.

The Committee endorsed the view of a Member that documents such as this consultation paper emphasised the challenges facing a Local Authority in having to increasingly concentrate on the production of statistics rather than focus on service delivery and outcomes.

### **Resolved**

That subject to the observations above, the views set out in the report of the Chief Executive be forwarded as this Council’s views on the DETR Consultation document. (CE)

### **330 TRANSPORT ACT 2000 – MANDATORY CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenues and Housing Management on the implications of the Transport Act 2000 for the provision of free half fare bus passes to people of pensionable age and people with the same categories of disability as defined in the Transport Act 1985.

With regard to the proposal to discontinue the rail card option, officers advised that new minimum order levels for the purchase of passes would mean acquiring a ten year supply at current rates of demand. Such a scheme is, therefore, no longer viable for an authority the size of Rochford

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that individuals renewing their bus pass would have to pay for a full year’s pass between now and 1 April 2001.

A number of Members felt that it would be preferable if arrangements could have been such that purchase up to the 1st of April next year could be on some form of pro rata basis.

The Corporate Director (Finance & External) Services confirmed that it would be possible to introduce an arrangement for advising future applicants that tickets would be free with effect from 1 April.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That this Authority continues to participate in the existing Countywide Concessionary Fare Scheme.

- (2) That a Public Notice be issued confirming the intention to fulfil the Mandatory Scheme by offering the Enhanced Mandatory Scheme.
- (3) That Budget provision of £35,000 be made in the 2001/2002 Estimates to meet the additional costs of the Scheme.
- (4) That Passes continue to be issued for Companions in accordance with existing criteria.
- (5) That concessionaires currently using Rail Cards be notified:
- (6) That the Rail Card will cease to be available under the Enhanced Mandatory Scheme with effect from 2001/2002.
- (7) That a Rail Card may be obtained as an additional concession for renewals occurring during 2001/2002 only, for existing users, at the current cost of £4.00. (HRHM)

### **331 SUPPORTING PEOPLE – CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which advised Members of proposed new arrangements for supporting vulnerable members of the community in their own homes and sought views on phasing proposals.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- The Government wishes to ensure that direct grants to authorities such as Rochford should be no less favourable than funds currently received through the Housing Benefits System.
- Proposals involved a number of agencies, including the Health Authorities.
- The County Council could be asked to index link its payments relating to sheltered scheme managers in accordance with national wage increases.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the proposals within the new initiative be noted and that Officers arrange suitable Member training at the appropriate time.
- (2) That the Department of Environment, Transport & the Regions be advised that this Authority would not wish a phased implementation of the scheme. (CD(F&ES))

### **332 RATE RELIEF FOR HORSE ENTERPRISES ON FARMS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue & Housing Management on a consultation paper from the Department of

the Environment, Transport & the Regions (DETR) setting out proposals for Rate Relief for horse enterprises linked to farm premises.

During debate Members commented on the possibility that proposals could result in the further sub-division of farms and expressed concern at the possible impact on the planning process and the landscape of the area. Relief may lead to road safety problems assuming an increase in the amount of horse related traffic. Concern was raised that the document addressed one sector of the community, possibly at the expense of others. In terms of natural justice, it appeared wrong to provide concessions for one economic area. There should be uniformity of treatment across the farming community.

### **Resolved**

That the above comments be forwarded as this Council's views on the DETR consultation paper. (HRHM)

### **333 ANNUAL REPORT ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT 1999/2000**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services produced in accordance with the Council's Treasury Management Policy.

### **Resolved**

That the Annual Report be accepted. (HFS)

### **334 THE WINDMILL, RAYLEIGH**

That Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal Services which provided an update on discussions with the Rayleigh Antiquarian Society and proposals for the consideration of trust arrangements to progress the matter.

### **RESOLVED**

- (1) That a Windmill Working Group be formed, comprising three Members of the Council (Councillors Mrs S J Lemon, Mrs M J Webster and one Labour nominee), two adviser representatives from the National Trust (one an Officer) and two adviser representatives from the Rayleigh Antiquarian Society.
- (2) That the Terms of Reference of the Working Group be to consider the issue of charitable trusteeship and aim to report to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee on 28 November 2000 with recommendations for the future ownership, management and maintenance of The Windmill. (HLS)

### **335 BENEFIT, COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES AND SUNDRY DEBTORS – WRITE-OFFS**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on items written-off under delegated authority and items which needed to be written-off.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That items written-off under the Corporate Director's delegated authority be noted.
- (2) That items shown in Appendix B to the Corporate Director's report be now written-off in the accounts of the Authority. (HRHM) (HFS)

### **336 Contract Standing Orders – Monitoring Report – Financial Services Division**

The Committee received the report of the Head of Financial Services dealing with orders placed by the Financial Services Division.

In discussing this item the Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to amend contract Standing Order 3.6 so as to remove the necessity for Corporate Directors to report to the appropriate service committee on exemptions granted relating to contracts not exceeding £5,000.

#### **RECOMMENDED**

That contract Standing Order 3.6 be adjusted to read:-

“Each Corporate Director shall report to the appropriate Service Committee and to the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) at least once every six months summarising their Register of Exemptions for any contract exceeding £5,000 in value”. (HFS)

### **337 Contract Standing Orders – Monitoring Report – Revenues and Housing Management Division**

The Committee received the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management dealing with orders placed by the Revenue and Housing Management Division.

### **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

#### **Resolved**

That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public 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 Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

#### **338 MEMBER BUDGET MONITORING SUB-COMMITTEE**

Further to Minute 327(7), Members discussed the factors associated with determining that the report of the Head of Financial Services on budget strategy, submitted to the meeting of the Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee on 4 October 2000 was an exempt item.

#### **339 RENEWAL OF THE COUNCIL'S APPROVED LIST OF CONTRACTORS FOR CONSTRUCTION RELATED ACTIVITIES**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) which sought Members approval to the new recommended approved list of contractors.

A Member commented on problems being experienced with the shower facilities at Clements Hall. The Committee debated contract monitoring arrangements and the type of information which would be of value to Members when considering the list.

Responding to Member questions, Officers indicated that:-

- They would write to Members of the Committee giving details of incidences and the action being taken in respect of the showers issue at Clements Hall.
- All contracts were let in accordance with contract standing orders and reported through the Committee process.
- There would be some over-run with the refurbishment of the Crown Hill toilets due to utility work being undertaken.
- The Council processes approximately 6,000 orders per annum.
- Like other Council activities, the placing and monitoring of contracts will be subject to Best Value Review.
- All the organisations on the proposed list were professionally registered and subject to stringent financial checks. Charges were checked against national indicators.

- Information on any contract was made available to Councillors on request.
- It is customary to have a contract audit when there has been major works
- Consideration will be given to arranging for a Member training session on contracts.

The Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) offered to circulate to Members a more detailed version of the new approved list giving further details about the contractors on the list.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the new approved list of contractors be agreed for use on construction works and service categories.
- (2) That an updated list be reported to this Committee on an annual basis.
- (3) That authority be delegated to Officers to remove contractors from the list if they fail to meet the monitoring standards.  
(CD(F&ES))

The meeting closed at 10.12 pm.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_