
ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces a draft Annual Report for 2007/08 for Members' consideration. The Annual Report will replace the Best Value Performance Plan.
- 1.2 The Annual Report presents information on performance and finance that has already been seen and approved by Council.
- 1.3 The main driver to producing an Annual Report is to produce an easy to read publication that gives a clear summary of the Council's finances and performance over the previous financial year and to build on the summarised accounts that have been published in previous years.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 2007/08, the Government announced changes to the way in which the performance of Councils is reported. As a result of these changes, Councils are no longer required to publish a Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2008/09 onwards. However, there was still a statutory requirement to report on the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for 2007/08 and a Performance Report containing the BVPIs was approved by Council on 26 June 2008.
- 2.2 At the meeting on 26 June, Council approved the draft Financial Statements which comprise over 60 pages of detailed technical financial statements.
- 2.3 Each year, the Council is assessed on its Use of Resources using a Key Lines of Enquiry approach based on 5 themes, one of which is Financial Reporting. This theme includes a number of criteria around reporting of financial information which are recommended best practice. The Use of Resource assessment will be one of the factors taken into account in the Comprehensive Area Assessments and is already included in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter that is produced by the Audit Commission each year.
- 2.4 To improve the reporting to residents and other stakeholders on the achievements and performance of the Council, it is proposed that an Annual Report is produced. This will report on performance over the previous year, including the summarised Accounts. It will be reporting on how well the Council has done in delivering the promises made in our Corporate Plan.
- 2.5 In order to develop the contents and format of the draft Annual Report, a consultation with stakeholders was carried out. Research conducted by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA) which examined the results of consultations carried out by other authorities and identified

examples of best practice around the country was also considered. We took into account the criteria in the Use of Resources assessment.

3 CONSULTATION

3.1 We carried out a consultation by questionnaire to a list of identified stakeholders, which included residents, Members and Local Strategic Partnership members. Although there was a limited number of responses to the consultation, 85% of respondents said that they would find an Annual report useful. The areas of financial reporting that came out as most important were:-

- Where does the Council get its money from
- How does the Council spend its money
- Comparisons to previous year's spend
- Money owed by the Council
- Money owed to the Council

Other information that users said they would like to see included:-

- Simple definitions
- Gross income and expenditures (not just net position)
- Capital expenditure compared to planned and what added value achieved
- More narrative to provide explanations
- Comparison to others
- Small pictures of the accounts team

4 CIPFA RESEARCH

4.1 In view of the fact that we received a limited response to our consultation, it is useful to learn from the experiences of other authorities. CIPFA's research found that the consultation focused on 4 areas: whether summarised accounts and/or an annual report should be produced, content of summary reporting, formatting/publishing preferences and use of terminology.

4.2 On the whole authorities reported that the majority of stakeholders found the summary accounts useful and informative with interest in an Annual Report ranging from 36% to 94%. The more positive response was in those authorities that already produce an Annual Report. A clear message was that residents did not want money "wasted on a glossy brochure".

- 4.3 Financial Statements such as the Cashflow and Collection Fund were found to be of little interest.
- 4.4 As far as formatting was concerned, the research indicated that making use of graphs, charts, colour and pictures helped to explain financial issues to a wider audience but care needed to be taken with the graphics for size and clarity.
- 4.5 Most authorities publish their summary accounts/annual report on their websites, mainly because it was cost effective. Some authorities also provided copies at public buildings such as libraries and council offices.

5 USE OF RESOURCES – KEY LINES OF ENQUIRY CRITERIA

- 5.1 The main reason for producing an Annual Report is to replace the BVPP and report on performance to our residents in a clear and easy to read way. Another factor is the desire to improve our Use of Resources score under the Financial Reporting theme, where Level 3 means performing consistently above minimum requirements and Level 4 is performing strongly.

- 5.2 The criteria specific to the Annual Report are as follows:-

5.3 Level 3

- The council can demonstrate that it is considering the views of a range of stakeholders in making its decision whether to publish an annual report
- The council publishes summary financial information that meets the needs of a range of stakeholders.

5.4 Level 4

- The council publishes in accessible formats an annual report or similar document which includes summary accounts and an explanation of key financial information/technical terms designed to be understandable by members of the public.
- The annual report or similar document includes information and analysis about the Council's environmental footprint

6 PROPOSED ANNUAL REPORT

- 6.1 Taking into account the responses to our consultation and those of other authorities, the attached draft Annual Report has been prepared.
- 6.2 Compared to the previous Summary of Accounts we have made the following changes:
- 6.3 The Income and Expenditure account has been completely revised to show our spend against Corporate Objectives rather than the prescribed headings.

This provides a direct link between the Council's finances and its Corporate Plan. In order to provide comparison to 2006/07, we have made some adjustments to the capital entries that had to be shown under the Housing Revenue Account – this enables a more reasonable like for like comparison between the two years. The Balance Sheet has been simplified with more narrative and we have not included the Collection Fund and Cashflow Statements.

- 6.4 The Annual Report provides some comparisons on our performance in collection of taxes, spend per head and council tax rates.
- 6.5 It has not been possible or practical to include everything suggested by the consultation and research. The Annual Report does invite feedback on its contents and we will take this into account each year as we develop this means of reporting to our residents.
- 6.6 To report on our performance, we have focused on the key achievements over the past year under each of the Corporate Objectives.
- 6.7 The Sustainability Agenda is becoming increasingly important with private sector companies starting to develop environmental accounting. Although not mandatory for local government, based on previous experience, it will probably eventually become something that we will have to do. In order to start building up this skill, the Annual Report includes a brief summary of what the Council has been doing to reduce our own environmental footprint. This is an area of work that we will develop over a number of years. To start with we have followed the limited guidance provided by the Audit Commission and CIPFA and focused on our own impact on the environment, and less on how we reduce residents' impacts on the environment through services.

7 PUBLICATION

- 7.1 The draft Annual Report attached to this report will be formatted to improve its layout and to follow Royal National Institute for the Blind's Clear Print Guidelines.
- 7.2 The financial information is currently unaudited as the external audit will not complete until mid September. It is therefore proposed that initially the Annual Report is published on the website, with hard copies available on request.
- 7.3 Once the financial information has been audited, a copy of the information presented in the Annual Report will be included in the pages of the Autumn edition of the Rochford District Matters to give it as wide an audience amongst residents as possible.
- 7.4 At this stage, it is not proposed to produce hard copies of the Annual Report because of the costs involved and because we do not know how much interest there will be.

8 RISK IMPLICATIONS

Failure to report on our performance means that we are missing the opportunity to let residents and stakeholders know about our achievements.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Developing reporting on Sustainability issues will demonstrate to stakeholders that this Council is responding to this important agenda.

10 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 By restricting production of the Annual Report to website and Rochford District Matters, with hard copies limited to public buildings and requests, the costs will be kept to a minimum. The major resource implication is the time involved in bringing the information together.

11 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It is proposed that the Council **RESOLVES** that, subject to any suggestions for changes to the content of the Annual report made during this meeting and changes arising from the audit of the accounts, the Annual Report be agreed for publication as set out in the report.

Yvonne Woodward

Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management

Background Papers:-

CIPFA - A Rough Guide to Consulting On and Preparing Summary Financial Reporting in Local Government – June 2008

Key lines of enquiry for use of resources - 2008 assessments – Audit Commission

For further information please contact Mrs Y Woodward on:-

Tel:- 01702 318029

E-Mail:- yvonne.woodward@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.

DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT – 2007/08

SUBJECT TO FINAL FORMATTING AND LAYOUT CHANGES

SUMMARY OF ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE AND SPENDING DURING THE PAST FINANCIAL YEAR

IF YOU WOULD LIKE THIS INFORMATION IN LARGE PRINT, BRAILLE, OR ANOTHER
LANGUAGE, PLEASE CONTACT 01702 318135

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We are pleased to introduce this new report which will be produced annually and will set out both our financial performance for 2007/08 and how we performed against the targets we set for last year and in comparison to other authorities.

This Annual Report provides an overview of the Council's performance, spending and financial position for the year. It also aims to show what has been achieved in terms of service delivery and outcomes for our residents.

The last year has been a year of good progress with improved performance in a number of key areas, for example improved processing times for benefits and planning applications. Membership at the Rayleigh Leisure Centre has continued to grow, the recently refurbished Windmill in Rayleigh is seeing increasing numbers of visitors and has hosted its first wedding. The transfer of our housing stock to the Rochford Housing Association was completed successfully in accordance with the tenants' wishes.

I hope you find the content of this Annual Report useful and informative and I look forward to another successful year.



Terry Cutmore
Leader of the Council

ADD PHOTO

Paul Warren
Chief Executive

If you are interested in finding out more detailed information about the Council's performance or our plans for 2008/09 onwards, this can be found in the following documents:-

- Corporate Plan 2008-2013
- Financial Statements 2007/08
- Performance Report 2008
- The Rochford District Sustainable Community Strategy (to be published in the Autumn)

These documents are available on our website www.rochford.gov.uk.

The Council's Budget Book and Medium Term Financial Strategy are also available on our website.

Any of these documents can be obtained by contacting:

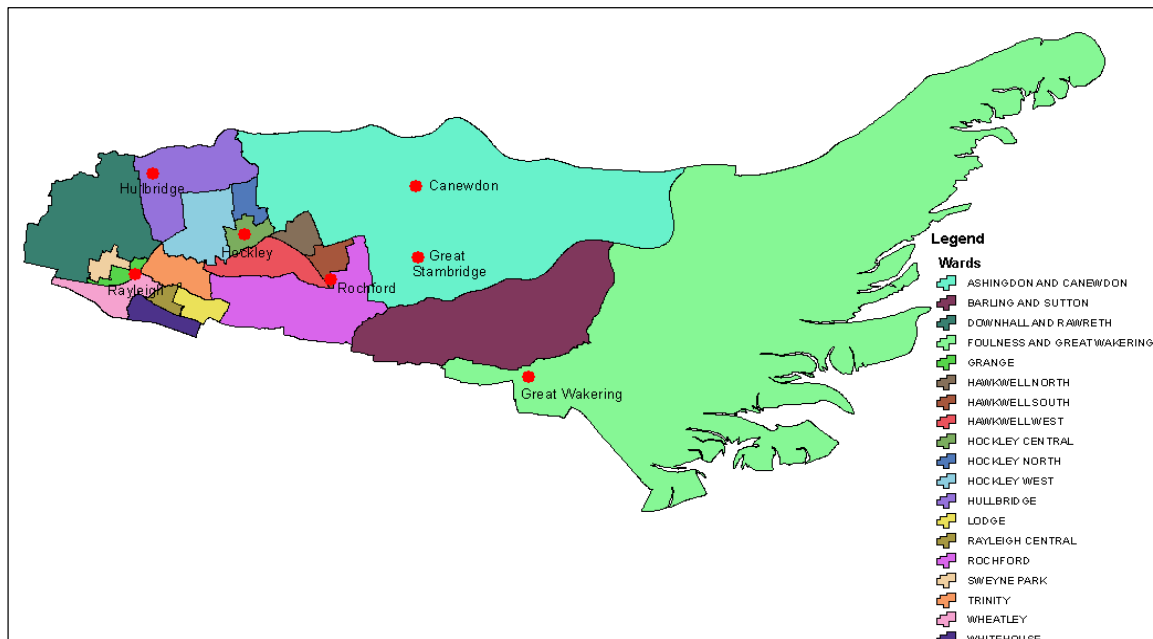
Contact:	Linda Kirby
by email	financial.services@rochford.gov.uk
Writing to:	Council Offices South Street Rochford Essex SS4 1BW

Facts and Figures about Rochford District

The District Council's responsibilities include:-

- Community Development
- Economic Development
- Licensing
- Environmental Health
- Housing
- Leisure & Arts
- Local tax collection and benefits
- Parking
- Planning
- Refuse collection and recycling
- Local Elections

Population: 81,100
Households: 34,063
Council Tax base: 30,851.63
Annual Revenue Budget: £12.4m
Number of staff: 238 (2007/08)



How have we performed?

Our vision is to make the District “the place of choice in the County to live, work and visit”.

We want to create an environment that is vibrant, inclusive, safe, sustainable and modern while retaining the essential characteristics of the salt marshes, rivers, woodland, open countryside, villages and market towns that make Rochford what it is today. We see the District as a place with high quality natural and built environments that retain their distinctiveness, foster civic pride and where all have access to quality accessible services.

In achieving this vision we carry out our work in accordance with a set of values which we think are important. We will:-

- Be an open, accountable, listening, responsive Council.
- Put the customer and citizen at the heart of everything that we do, delivering services in a caring and sensitive manner.
- Coordinate the management of resources with an emphasis on sustainability.
- Value the contribution of partners, employees and citizens, trusting each other and working collaboratively.

To underpin that vision, the Council has 6 corporate objectives that reflect our areas of responsibility and seek to improve Council services. Over the past year, the Council has delivered the following achievements against its agreed objectives.

TO PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT COST EFFECTIVE FRONTLINE SERVICE FOR ALL OUR CUSTOMERS.

- The Council made efficiency savings during 2007/08 of over £250,000. These savings were achieved through improved recycling rates, using better ways of buying goods and services.
- Our Staff have also contributed to these savings with a reduction in sickness to 5.29 days per member of staff from 9.44 in 2004/05. A recent report by the Confederation of Business Industry and Axa reported that the average absence levels in the public sector stood at 9 days with 5.8 days for the private sector.
- The Council was successful in gaining the Investors in People standard , demonstrating the Council’s commitment to staff in order ensure that we deliver an improved service to residents. The Council also reduced staff turnover to 14% which means a reduction in spend of recruitment.
- We changed the way complaints are handled in order to ensure that we learn from the few complaints we receive and also the comments and compliments received from residents.

- We have made major improvements in the delivery of our Benefits Service, which was awarded the Charter Mark this year, to recognise excellence in customer service.
- The Planning Service has also improved its handling of applications and is now amongst the best performers in the country for 2007/08. Our Planning Enforcement Guide has been rewritten and received Crystalmark accreditation for its ease of use.
- Improvement of our website has been a priority for the Council and following consultations with residents on what they liked and didn't like about our website, it was substantially redesigned and relaunched last year. It is amongst only 5 in Essex which are considered easy to access and provides a range of online transactions and application forms providing 24 hour access to a range of Council services

TO WORK TOWARDS A SAFER AND MORE CARING COMMUNITY.

- We continue to give significant funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau who provide essential assistance and advice from their offices in Rayleigh and Rochford.
- Reducing crime is the primary objective of the Council's Community Safety team and since 2004, there has been a significant decrease in offences. Since April 2004, Rochford has reduced crime * by 33% against a target of 13.5%. The Government have acknowledged the achievement: "This, in percentage terms, is the biggest decrease across the whole of the Eastern Region. This is a monumental achievement and something all the partners should be very proud of." (*as measured by the British Crime Survey)
- Working with the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction partnership, we have introduced:-
 - Initiatives to reduce cycle theft and vehicle crime, including raising public awareness and safer parking areas.
 - a 'no cold calling zone' in one area of the district
 - Working with year 9 students to understand the risks of drugs, alcohol, antisocial behaviour and peer pressure through a pioneering interactive educational initiative – 'Infology'.
- Residents who have attended our Area Committees will have heard regular updates from the local police and also had the opportunity to ask questions about policing in the district.
- Following significant improvements to our homelessness services there has been a reduction in the time spent in temporary accommodation from an average of 7 weeks down to 4 weeks and, in hostels, from 27 weeks down to 8 weeks. The proportion of cases determined within the target of 33 days has improved from a low of 40% to 98% in 2006/07 which has been maintained for the last year.
- We have continued the work on the cemetery extension in Hall Road.

TO PROVIDE A GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT.

- The Council went through a lengthy tendering process for the 3 main environmental contracts, recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance, in order to achieve substantial improvements to service delivery.
- The Council recognised the need and desire of residents to increase the opportunities for recycling. Initially we concentrated on kerbside recycling schemes, starting with pilot schemes but extending the schemes so that in 2007/08, 97.4% of households were participating in the recycling scheme. Although recycling rates have improved to 19.5%, these are still far below what we would like to see and the Council, in partnership with SITA UK, will be commencing a new Maximise Recycling Scheme in the summer 2008.
- The Council has delivered a reduction in the proportion of land and highways with graffiti, fly-posting and litter.
- We have continued our focus on investigating and removing abandoned vehicles, with the result that 93% are removed within 24 hours of the time we are legally allowed.
- The first phase of the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park/Hockley Woods development and expansion was completed in 2007. This work included a significant increase in the bio-diversity of the area with 6 different woodlands now in place, a 300m lake established and new bridleways. The next phase will continue following the acquisition of land to improve access to this new facility.
- We started the land preparation for the extension of Sweyne Park and the link with the new Rayleigh Leisure Centre.
- The Council has also been responding to the Climate Change agenda in its own buildings – more information on this in the later section on Our Environmental Footprint.

TO ENCOURAGE A THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMY.

- In 2007, the Council's long term vision for Rochford Town Centre saw the opening of a new development incorporating a supermarket, library and housing, with improvements to the highways. We also worked with the South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust to secure the development of a state of the art facility on the former Rochford Hospital site.
- The Council has also been improving the way that we connect with local businesses with organised Business Breakfast meetings to help raise awareness of what support services and opportunities are available to them. T

TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE IN OUR DISTRICT.

- The Council has increased the amount spent on disabled facility grants which enable residents to improve their homes and support independent living.

- The Council successfully transferred its housing to the newly established Rochford Housing Association. The housing association will be investing more than £40m in major works and improvements over the first 10 years following transfer. The Council would only have been able to spend about £16million and would not have been able to achieve the Government's target for Decent Homes by 2010.
- The Council has worked with our leisure partner, VirginActive and Rayleigh, Rochford & District Association of Voluntary Services (RRAVS) to offer free swimming passes to young carers, which gives them the opportunity to do something healthy whilst also sharing time with peers in a social setting. We have also funded a leadership skills course for young carers to build confidence and self-esteem.
- After consulting with residents and young people, a youth shelter was installed in Great Wakering to give the youths somewhere to meet other than congregating outside shops.
- For our older residents, the Council has put in additional funding to its very popular Gardening and Handyperson services, which help vulnerable people to stay independent. The Council also provides grants for Home Maintenance and Adaptations and to top up "Warm Front" grants.

TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE OUR LOCAL HERITAGE.

- The Council secured external funding to complete a well received restoration of the Rayleigh Windmill and is now working in partnership with the National Trust to ensure that this building is used by the widest range of people. The Windmill is now a major tourist and educational attraction with over 2000 visitors last year. The Windmill has been registered as a site for small weddings and the museum is open 3 days per week.

Financial Summary

This Annual Report provides a summary of the Council's statutory Statement of Accounts for 2007/08. The Statement of Accounts runs to over 60 pages and its content is largely prescribed by accounting standards that apply to all local authorities. The figures in this summary were originally compiled in line with proper accounting practice. This summary information is produced in the hope that it will give the reader a brief and uncomplicated picture of the main features of the council's financial results for 2007/08.

The Statement of Accounts were approved by Full Council on 26 June 2008 and will be audited by the Audit Commission's independently appointed external auditors, PKF (UK) LLP.

The audited Statement of Accounts will be available from 30 September 2008 by contacting:-

Contact:	Linda Kirby
by email	financial.services@rochford.gov.uk
Writing to:	Council Offices South Street Rochford Essex SS4 1BW

This is the first year that we have presented the financial performance of the Council in this way and we would be very interested in your comments and views on both the content and format of this report, so that we may continue to improve how we communicate with you. Please use the above contact details and let us know what you think about this Annual Report and its contents.

Yvonne Woodward CPFA
Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management

What we spent

The Council produces a detailed Income and Expenditure Account, which can be found in the Statement of Accounts and which is set out in a prescribed manner. The account below shows the cost of services in 2007/08 under each of our Corporate Objectives and the amount left to be financed from local and national tax income. Our average spend per head was £130.30. The national estimated average spend per head by district councils was £136.18.

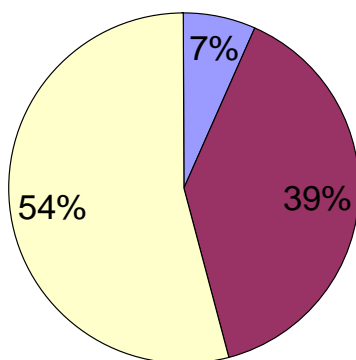
What we spent:	Net Expenditure 2007/08 £000s
To encourage a thriving local economy.	
Economic Development	
Highways/Roads (Routine)	339
To improve the quality of life for people in our District.	
Sports and Leisure	
Planning & Building Control	
Environmental Health	
Street Cleansing	3,700
Public Conveniences	
Parking	
To maintain and enhance our local heritage.	
Mill Tower	111
To provide a green and sustainable environment	
Woodlands	
Parks and Open Spaces	
Coast Protection	2,236
Waste Management	
To provide an excellent cost effective frontline service for all our customers.	
Corporate Management	
Collection of taxes	
Licensing	
Property Management	2,203
Democratic Services	
To work towards a safer and more caring community.	
Cemeteries	
Public Health	
Concessionary Fares	
Housing Services	1,860
Housing Benefit	
Council Housing	
Net Cost of Services	10,449
Less internal capital charges for running Rochford's Services	(346)
Less income from cash investments	(869)
Plus interest on borrowing	607
Less money taken into reserves to offset future costs	351
Cost of local services to be met by local and national taxes	10,192

For the previous year, 2006/07, the Net Cost of Services was £10.47m broken down by Corporate Objective as follows:-

What did we spend last year:	Net Expenditure 2006/07 £000s
To encourage a thriving local economy.	243
To improve the quality of life for people in our District.	5,012
To maintain and enhance our local heritage.	66
To provide a green and sustainable environment.	1,462
To provide an excellent cost effective frontline service for all our customers.	2,527
To work towards a safer and more caring community.	1,159
Net Cost of Services for 2006/07	10,469

Where did the money come from?

The £10.3m that we spent on providing local services, after income raised from various fees and charges, came from local and national taxes and redistributed business rates.



Our total income for the year was £10.36m, which was split 7% Government Grant, 39% redistributed business rates and 54% from Council Tax.

■ Government Grant
■ Redistributed Business Rates
■ Council tax

We spent slightly less than we received in income last year leading to a small surplus of £168,000 on our revenue account. The surplus for the year was added to those from previous years to give a new working balance of £1.95m

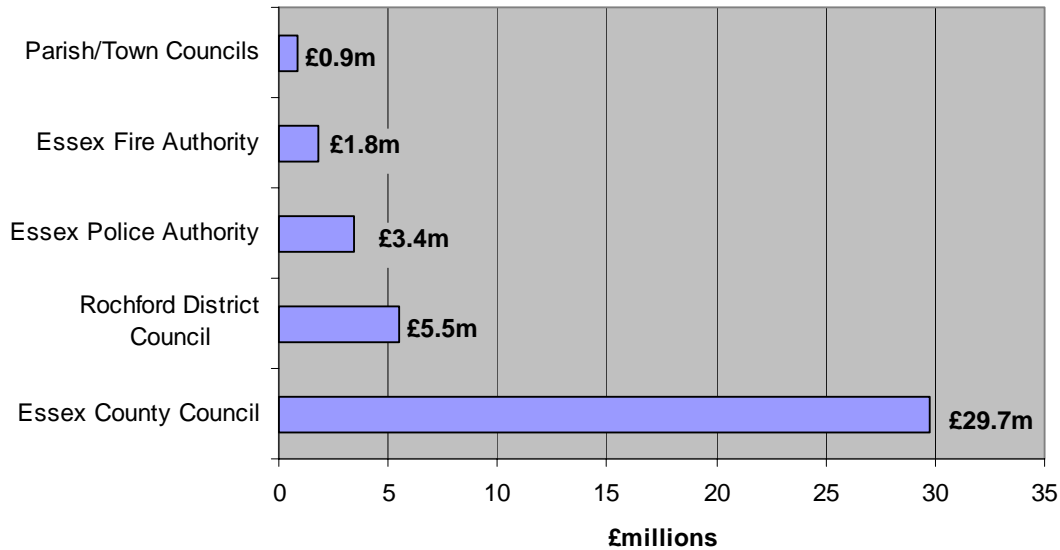
How we paid for services	Income 2007/08 £000s
Government Grant	684
Redistributed Business Rates	4,074
Council tax	5,602
Total Income	10,360

Revenue Account Surplus	2007/08 £000s
Total Income	10,360
Total Cost of Services	10,192
Surplus for the year	168

Council Tax

The Council was responsible for collecting £41m of Council Tax last year, but we only kept £5.5m, equivalent to 13p in every £ collected. The majority of what's collected is paid to others as shown in the graph below:

Amount of Council Tax collected for each organisation



The average council tax for Band D property for 2007/08 was made up as follows:-

	2007/2008
Rochford District Council	£179.28
Essex County Council	1,003.95
Essex Fire Authority	£59.94
Essex Police Authority	£116.46
Town/Parish Councils (average)	£29.06
Total	£1,388.69

The national average for district councils' Council Tax for 2007/08 was £155.02. From Government Grant we received £59.84 per head, compared to a national average of £78.40.

Capital Expenditure

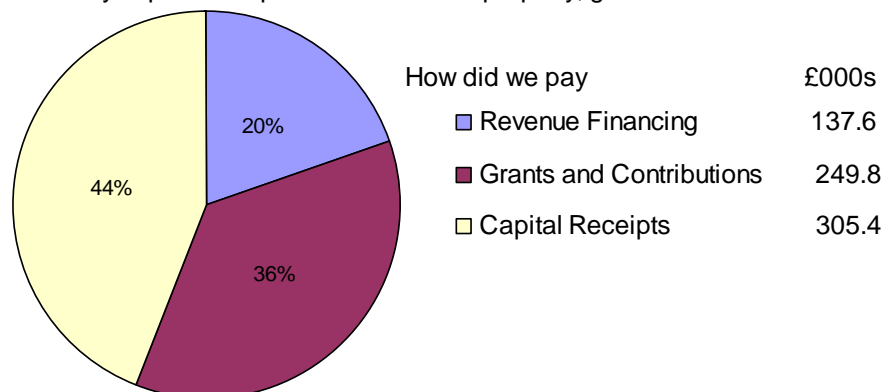
We also spend money on improving land and buildings in order to continue delivering excellent cost effective services for all our customers. Capital Expenditure is the money spent on the purchase and improvement of buildings, vehicles, equipment and computer software. It is called capital expenditure it normally results in assets which the Council and the community can use for more than one year.

For 2007/08, our expenditure on capital compared to what we planned to spend was:-

What we spent:	Planned £000s	Actual £000s
Vehicles & Equipment	65.7	72.9
Hall Road Cemetery extension	40.0	4.4
Leisure & Play Facilities	501.0	75.3
Private Sector Renewal Grants	147.0	146.9
Disabled Facilities Grants	171.6	170.0
Depot building improvements	20.0	20.0
IT infrastructure	18.0	103.0
Rochford Regeneration Programme	0.0	67.6
Freight House Car Park Lighting	18.0	21.1
Oxford Parade Footway repairs	10.0	11.4
Totals	991.3	692.8

The main leisure project not completed during the year was the purchase of land for the extension to the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, which will be completed during 2008/09. The Rochford Regeneration Programme was paid for by grant which came in after the estimates had been set. The IT infrastructure capital spend was higher than planned because it was originally planned as part of the Revenue estimates. However, at the end of the year, it was better financially to move it into capital expenditure, although it was still financed by revenue

We spent £692.800 on our land and property assets which was paid for by capital receipts from the sale of property, grants and from revenue.



What is the Council worth?

At the end of each financial year, 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008, the Council draws up a balance sheet that shows how much our land and buildings are worth, what is owed to others, what others owe us and how much cash we have.

Net Assets	31 March 2008 £m
Value of land and property	36.0
Cash in bank and cash investments	13.4
Money owed to Rochford	1.9
Money owed by Rochford	(23.6)
Total Assets less Total Liabilities	27.8

Revenue Reserves and Balances	31 March 2008 £m	Rochford's net worth is £27.8m. This is represented by capital reserves of £4m, revenue reserves of £7.8m and £16m other balances
Working Balances	5.4	
Earmarked Reserves	2.4	
Total Revenue Reserves	7.8	

Delivering Value for Money

The Council planned to make savings during the year of £189,000. We were delighted to report the achievement of £262,000 worth of savings.

This has been achieved by more efficient service and better organisation – not by a lower quality or reduction in services.

Some examples of savings are:-

- Improved recycling has generated additional income of £66,000
- A further £59,000 has been saved through a number of actions including collection of business rates and sharing the costs of training with other authorities.
- Sickness levels and staff absences reduced in the last 12 months have saved the Council over £71,000

Councillor Peter Webster, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, said “Value for Money savings have been made without compromising on the quality or level of service to our residents. Rochford District Council believes that saving residents’ Council Tax is always our first priority.”

Over the last 3 years, the Council has saved £878,000. This money has been reinvested in improving services. The main areas of investment are the new environmental contracts for recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance and meeting the additional costs of the Concessionary Fare scheme. Further information on the Council's 2008/09 budget and 5 year Medium Term Financial Plans are available on the website, www.rochford.gov.uk.

Financial Performance – How Do We Compare

Rochford District Council collected 98.9% of the £41m Council Tax due in 2007/08, this was an improvement on the previous year (98.7%). Our collection rate for Council Tax was in the top 15% for 2007/08. The average collection rate for similar authorities was 98.1% (98% in 2006/07). We also collected 98.6% of business rates due last year (98.4% in 2006/07), which compares to a national average of 99%.

We are continually comparing our performance to other authorities in order to ensure that we maintain our high standards. It also means that we can learn from others whose performance may be better than us. An example of this is the following comparison of tax collection performance in Essex:

Authority	Collection Rates					
	Council tax			Business rates		
	2006/07 %	2007/08 %	Movement	2006/07 %	2007/08 %	Movement
Basildon	97.6	97.5	↓	99.1	99.3	↑
Braintree	98.5	98.6	↑	99.1	99.3	↑
Brentwood	98.3	98.6	↑	98.8	99.0	↑
Castle Point	98.7	98.8	↑	99.3	99.7	↑
Chelmsford	98.5	98.6	↑	99.3	99.2	↓
Colchester	98.4	98.3	↓	99.5	99.7	↑
Epping Forest	98.2	98.1	↓	99.0	98.4	↓
Harlow	95.1	95.5	↑	99.1	99.6	↑
Maldon	98.4	98.8	↑	99.0	98.3	↓
Tendring	97.6	97.9	↓	99.2	98.6	↓
Uttlesford	99.4	99.1	↓	99.6	99.2	↓
Rochford	98.7	98.9	↑	98.4	98.6	↑

Council's Environmental Footprint

Although the Council has an important role to play in influencing business and residents to reduce their energy usage, we also have a responsibility to reduce the Council's impact on the environment.

The Council has been working with the Carbon Trust to find out how we can reduce our environmental footprint. The Carbon Trust was set up by Government in 2001 to accelerate the move to a low carbon economy by working with organisations to reduce carbon emissions and develop commercial low carbon technologies. The Trust carried out an audit of the Council's energy usage in order to identify potential energy saving measures.

Using the Carbon Trust's model, our carbon footprint is approximately 435 tonnes of CO₂ per year.

In 2007 the Council's Review Committee conducted a review of the implications of global climate change and the role the District Council and its communities might play. The Council is developing a Sustainable Energy (Climate Change) Strategy to be ready by September 2008 and will implement a detailed action plan to ensure that the strategy is delivered.

The Council has become a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change. The declaration is a voluntary pledge to address the issues of climate change. It represents a high-level, broad statement of commitment that Councils make to their own community. The declaration was originally launched in October 2000 at a conference in Nottingham with 200 leaders, chief executives and senior managers of UK local government. Further information can be found at the website

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/housingbuildings/localauthorities/NottinghamDeclaration/>

The Council has responded in many areas to reduce its own environmental impact, including:

- A number of buildings have had boiler replacements to install the latest condensing boilers and controls which include intelligent controls which learn how the buildings operate and optimises the use of boilers to predetermined conditions. As a result there has been a reduction of 40% in gas usage.
- Another improvement has been in the use of water. Toilets have been refurbished with the use of low level cisterns with dual flush, non percussive taps and waterless urinals. The hot water system has been changed to provide hot water at point of use, removing stored hot water systems and cold water tanks. Low energy light fittings and more efficient ventilation have also helped to reduce energy use. Overall the estimated savings are £2,300 per year in energy and over 1 million litres of water. Removal of cold water storage has also produced efficiency savings in removing the need for disinfecting the tanks (costing previously some £2,000 per year).
- Encouraging recycling of paper, plastic cups and ink cartridges from printer in its offices
- Introducing Electronic Document Management to reduce the amount of paper used
- Introducing targets for vehicle emissions and fuel use included in the new recycling and grounds maintenance contracts.
- Ensuring that the Rochford Housing Association continues the work previously undertaken to improve the energy efficiency of council housing to a standard higher than the Government's Decent Homes standard.
- Signing up to a Travelbuddi scheme that will enable officers to share cars.
- The introduction of special Screensavers on PCs has saved over £600 per year from energy costs
- All arisings from our Woodlands are sold as woodlands products, logs, posts, timber, chippings
- Bark chippings from our Playspaces are recycled after 2 years as garden mulch

What next?

The new recycling scheme which comes in during 2008/09 should see our recycling rates increase from just under 20% to 35% in the first year, with a target of 50% in 2009/10.

The Authority has set itself the target of reducing our own carbon dioxide emissions by 30% (based upon a 2005 baseline) within the next 5 years, with a 60% reduction by 2017.

Development of Sustainable Energy (Climate Change) Strategy by September 2008