

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 21 April 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **21 April 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)
Cllr J Thomass (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr P A Capon
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn

Cllr T Livings
Cllr C R Morgan

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs S A Harper and Mrs J R Lumley.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr Mrs T J Capon

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
S Clarkson	Head of Revenue and Housing Management
S Logan	Revenue and Benefits Manager
M Martin	Committee Administrator

196 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2004 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

197 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the Schedule relating to Progress on Decisions and in response to Member questions the following was noted:-

Consultation with the Business Community (Minute 562/03)

The Chief Executive reported that he was now planning to invite representatives from the County Council's Public Transport Unit to attend a meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee in addition to the bus companies, and that there might therefore need to be more than one meeting. Members agreed that it would be beneficial if meetings of this Committee were arranged solely for the discussion of this item. It was further agreed that Stephensons Coaches ought to be included in the invitations and that investigations be made into the value of the free bus services that provide transport to some of the more outlying supermarkets. (CE)

Office of The Deputy Prime Minister – Consultation on Content of Best Value Performance Plans (Minute 34/04)

Following the consultation, guidance on the Best Value Performance Plans was still awaited. (CE)

CPA 2005 – The Way Ahead – A Consultative Document (Minute 79/04)

Definitive guidance was still awaited. (CE)

Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (Minute 81/04)

Following the consultation, further details on a finalised scheme were now awaited from Essex Police. (CE)

198 COUNCIL TAX IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on progress made towards implementing the Council Tax Improvement Plan, details of which were attached to the report.

The Head of Service complimented the Revenue and Benefits Manager and his team for all their hard work in this respect. A Member congratulated officers for the excellent service experienced recently when making a personal telephone enquiry to the Section.

Members agreed with the Head of Service's proposal that the Action Plan be reviewed on a six monthly basis in May and November.

In considering the risk ranking of the Action Plan, the following was noted:-

- The numbering format adopted was that of the Institute of Public Finance (IPF).
- 1.3 - The software supplier was working towards e-enabling this function.
- 3.13 – This would be moved to the latter end of the review when it was anticipated that the outcomes of impending post office closures would be known. However, it was noted that as there is such a high level of direct debit payment across the district, the number of residents affected were relatively small.
- 6.2 – The manufacturer would be addressing this but as it was not causing an immediate problem, it had been giving a “Low” ranking.
- 8.1, 8.2 and 9.2 – the reason these were ranked “Low” was because the recovery timetables were bound by external influences such as dates provided by the courts. Decisions around the sending out of reminder notices had to be judged against the number of incoming calls that would be generated in response to them. The current timescales worked well and these had therefore been ranked as low in terms of other priorities.

- 8.5 – Officers agreed to investigate whether electronic connections could be provided for officers attending the Magistrates Court.
- 10.1 – A satisfactory service currently existed which included a “no effects” fee in the contract. The Council only makes around two to three hundred referrals per year.
- 12.2 – A Member requested sight of the new write-off report format before it was reported to Committee in October.
- 15.2 – The recently appointed Senior Benefit officer had highlighted this as top ranking and would progress it as such.
- 16.4 – This was not scheduled for review until next year but Members would be kept up to date on any progress.
- 18.19 – This would apply, for example, to employees who live within the district.
- 18.22 – This was being brought in initially in the Planning division and would then be rolled out to the Revenue and Benefits and other Divisions.
- 19.2 – The Streetwise software would enable officers working out in the District to use hand held terminals via mobile telephone technology to retrieve data. However, it had to take its place with other priorities within the Corporate IT budget.
- 19.12 – This would exist for viewing purposes only. Members were reassured that this would not increase the security risk as the doors of sheltered housing schemes are monitored by closed circuit television. This would enable greater community use to be made of sheltered housing schemes.

Recommended to Council

That the revised Action Plan for Council Tax Service Improvement be agreed.
(HRHM)

199 FOURTH OPTION AUTHORITIES LOBBY

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which invited Members to consider whether they would be interested in participating in a Fourth Option lobby group.

Members supported the view that there would be merit in joining a Fourth Alternative Lobby Group and that it would be more appropriate as a forum inside the Local Government Association rather than a distinct and separate body outside it.

Members requested that this Council’s response to Selby District Council be copied to the other Essex local authorities operating under the Fourth Option arrangements.

Recommended to Council

That in principle support be given to a Fourth Option Forum, operating within the umbrella of the Local Government Association rather than outside it, with a membership confined to those Authorities operating the Fourth Option Political arrangements in the first instance. (CE)

200 REVENUE AND BENEFIT TEAM – STAFF RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management relating to a proposed solution to the problems associated with the recruitment and retention of staff in the Revenue and Benefit team.

Recommended to Council

- (1) That the revised structure as set out in Appendix 4 of the exempt report be approved.
- (2) That the grades and designations as set out in Appendix 2 of the exempt report be approved.
- (3) That the posts referred to in the exempt report be deleted from the establishment.
- (4) That the posts referred to in the exempt report be made redundant. (HRHM)

The meeting closed at 9.32 pm.

Chairman

Date