

BUDGET STRATEGY - CONSULTATION WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The council is required to consult with the business community regarding the forthcoming Council Tax for 2005/06.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Members will be aware that the announcements from the Government regarding the financial support for the council have been delayed until early in December. Therefore the usual advance information to Members and the Business community has not been possible. The Business Community have been requested to undertake a similar process that Members of the Council have undertaken and that is to look at their priorities for the Council.

3 PRIORITIES

- 3.1 Appendix A to this report lists the priorities of the Council. In order to focus the discussion the Business Community have been requested to identify the top ten items which they would support.
- 3.2 In addition, they have been requested to identify a small number of items that they view as a priority which are not shown on Appendix A.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council must decide on its priorities that can be included within the Budget Strategy. This Strategy is dependant on the level of Government Support and the permissible level of Council Tax.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In considering priorities the Council has to be guided by its statutory requirements.

6 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The services of the Council cover all Parishes.

7 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) To consider the views of the Business community.
- (2) To include those views in the report to Council when the priorities and budgets for the Council are determined.

Dave Deeks

Head of Financial Services

Background Papers:-

None

For further information please contact Dave Deeks on:-

Tel:- 01702 318029

E-Mail:- dave.deeks@rochford.gov.uk

APPENDIX A

PRIORITIES OF THE COUNCIL

The key priorities for this year are listed in the Performance Plan 2004, together with our key priorities for the next five years and beyond (Chapter 6).

Those for this year include:

1. Completion of Clements Hall refurbishment
2. Progress a leisure centre on the former Park School site (on track to commence early 2005)
3. Progress the Housing Option Appraisal process (now well advanced and gathering a momentum of its own!)
4. Upgrade our existing offices through the provision of a new reception area at Rochford (close to completion) and new lift and toilet at Rayleigh (tender documentation about to go out)
5. Decide on longer term accommodation needs (currently looking through the valuations received to see what makes financial sense before report into Members)
6. Improve disabled access to sports grounds and pavilions (works underway)
7. Complete the refurbishment of the remaining four toilets (works underway)
8. Agree a CPA Improvement Plan (Extraordinary Council - 30 November)
9. Roll out kerbside recycling (done)
10. Implement on-street car parking enforcement (done)
11. Deliver a range of County Council Public Service Targets (underway – monitored through the Quarterly Performance reports)

Those covering the five year period and beyond include:

1. Cherry Orchard Country Park – its continuing development – land acquisition completed by March 2008
2. Completing various affordable housing schemes e.g. Hardwick House, Reads Nursery site, etc – completions through 2005 and 2006
3. Upgrading Rayleigh Windmill and environs – secure funding by October 2005; completion 2006 – funding via Thames Gateway
4. Implementing the result of the Housing Stock Appraisal process – commence work on chosen path April 2006; completion April 2008
5. Reviewing our organisational structure – by April 2005. Full implementation by April 2008
6. Meeting “e govt” targets in terms of delivery – by December 2005 and April 2006
7. Reviewing/retendering waste collection, grounds maintenance and street cleansing contracts – completed by March 2007 to allow new contract to start by April 2008
8. Progressing the Local Development Framework (the replacement Local Plan) – to be in place by December 2008
9. Progressing performance on statutory indicators – 5% increase per year on those in top two quartiles

Priorities to consider

There are also a number of other initiatives, projects and service developments identified, which subject to resources being available, can be considered within the Council's budget strategy.

Heading	It is a Priority	It is not a Priority	Costs
1. Accelerate the work on the preparation of the new Local Development Framework for the long term planning guidance of the District – currently planned to be in place by end of 2008			Could cost up to £100k per year.
2. Progress cemetery expansion at Rochford			Included in Local Plan. Likely capital costs of almost £500k
3. Extension of Parking Decriminalisation to consider residents parking schemes			Consider current scheme should be given time to settle in first
4. Further develop graffiti policies and procedures for rapid removal			Initial cost estimate of £10k pa to progress this initiative depending on extent of the problem
5. Continue and expand the scope of chewing gum removal initiative to cover all town centres			Minimum cost estimate of £10k. However, this would not cover all town centres in a comprehensive way.
6. Further resource the procedures to secure more rapid removal of abandoned vehicles			Initial cost estimate of £15k pa
7. New arrangements for weed removal in Town Centres			Initial cost estimate between £10-15K pa
8. Additional off street car parking			Costs could be £1m plus with land acquisition

Heading	It is a Priority	It is not a Priority	Costs
9. Green Business Initiatives			£5k cost estimate
10. Introduce an independent environmental cleanliness/audit assessment every 2 years			Estimate at £20k per inspection
11. Further development of arrangements for the removal of fly tipping on both public and private land			Estimate of £25k pa
12. Implications of High Hedges legislation			Officer costs only
13. Highways Verges – increased maintenance and cutting			Estimate of £50k pa
14. Flood Management – additional measures			Support between £10k and £20k
15. Additional duties for on street patrol officers regarding environmental issues			Up to £16K pa
16. New requirements under the Civil Contingencies Act			Estimate at between £20-25K pa
17. Improve “badging” of the District at all main access points with new “gateway” signs			Additional £30k one off
18. The County Waste Consortium Progression			One off fee of £9k

Heading	It is a Priority	It is not a Priority	Costs
19. Secure improvements in Homelessness service over a sustained 3 year period			Additional £20k per annum
20. Housing Coordinator for Thames Gateway area – joint post by all South Essex Authorities			Potential contribution of £10K
21. Policies to bring empty homes back into use			Costings dependent on proposals envisaged
22. Development of Housing Advisory service			Estimate at between £30-40k pa
23. Further expansion of the school holiday initiatives			£10k pa estimate
24. Develop Youth policies and services			No estimate provision – dependent on what is envisaged
25. Tourism activities			No estimate provision – dependent on what is envisaged. Dependent on outcome of Tourism study
26. Funding Support for Policy Community Support Officers			Cost estimate in the region of £30k pa for 4 officers
27. Develop local access facilities at selected Parish Councils via dedicated PCs/web for public access			£20k to commence trial

Heading	It is a Priority	It is not a Priority	Costs
28. Develop a new mediation service that includes all customer services			£20k pa estimate
29. Examine the scope for partnership working in connection with high costs, high customer contact services such as Housing Benefits and Council tax			Probably requirement for external facilitation and support £50k (one off)
30. Consider the options for a Parish Liaison Officer			Estimate at £25k pa
31. Expand Member training and develop programme to build up member capacity			Key CPA requirement. Additional £10k pa
32. Develop Council's vision and review and rationalise Council's existing strategic base			Up to £60 k as a one off
33. Further Service Improvements to the Benefits Service			£25k estimated provision