

Policy and Finance Committee – 9 July 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy and Finance Committee** held on **9 July 2002** when there were present:

Cllr P F A Webster (Chairman)

Cllr K A Gibbs

Cllr J E Grey

Cllr A J Humphries

Cllr C A Hungate

Cllr C C Langlands

Cllr C J Lumley

Cllr C R Morgan

Cllr J M Pullen

Cllr P K Savill

Cllr S P Smith

Cllr Mrs M A Starke

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive

R J Honey – Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)

R Crofts – Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)

S Fowler – Head of Administrative & Member Services

H Drye – Corporate Policy Manager

J Bostock – Principal Committee Administrator

307 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 June 2002 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

308 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors C J Lumley and J M Pullen each declared personal interests in the item on Proposed Environmental Centre – Feedback from Rayleigh Town Council by virtue of being Rayleigh Town Councillors.

309 GRADING APPEALS PROCEDURE (ISSUE ARISING FROM FINANCE & PROCEDURES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 JUNE 2002)

The Committee considered the report setting out the Recommendations from the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee relating to the Grading Appeals Procedure.

Resolved

- (1) That the Grading Appeals Procedure as set out in the report (a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes) be adopted.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Head of Paid Service to determine grading appeals within a maximum of 4 additional incremental points. (CD(LPA))

310 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Committee received the schedule relating to previous decisions.

Asset Management - Best Value Review (Minute 411/00)

It was noted that the cost of acquiring a basic global positioning system was understood to be between £300 to £500.

Provision of Five-a-Side Football Pitch/Basketball Area, Pools Lane Recreation Ground, Hullbridge (Minute 369/01)

The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) confirmed that he would communicate with local Ward Members on the background to the positioning of the basketball posts.

Outstanding Issues would be carried forward.

311 DRAFT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL – CONSULTATION ON DRAFT LEGISLATION

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the recently published draft Local Government Bill.

In presenting the report, the Chief Executive indicated that, in addition to Officer concerns set out in the report, there was also concern at this stage about the possibility that Government proposals may include reserve power for the Secretary of State to claw back monies associated with some of the capital provisions, such as those relating to the Right to Buy and Large Scale Housing Transfer.

During debate, a Member referred to past lobbying of Government Ministers on financial matters and to the perception that Ministers were unfamiliar with the nature of problems faced by Authorities such as Rochford.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- Whilst information was still being received on possible changes to area settlement, the options being proposed did appear to suggest the removal of the area loss adjustment for southern local authorities. Once full information is received, officers will make appropriate representations via the Town and Country Financial Issues Group and local Members of Parliament.
- In terms of domestic property revaluation and banding, the amount of tax raised globally was unlikely to change to any great extent. The Authority may need to be concerned if a situation arose whereby the value of properties within the District rose in disproportion to properties in surrounding Boroughs/Districts. If this occurred, the Council could be penalised in terms of the grant received following any resource equalisation undertaken by the Government.
- It is likely that Local Authorities will only be fully cognisant of all the freedoms/flexibility changes associated with Comprehensive Performance Assessment once they are categorised and know how they have been ranked.

Resolved

- (1) That the officer comments contained in the report, together with the concerns of the Chief Executive on the possibility that proposals may include reserve power for the Secretary of State to claw back monies associated with some of the capital provisions, be the basis of this Council's response to the proposals contained in the draft legislation.
- (2) That this Council's response be copied to the Local Government Association and both local Members of Parliament. (CE)

312 RACE RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) ACT 2000

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the statutory requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the implications for the Authority.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that the proposed racial equality scheme would involve additional monitoring of policies and staff training. The detailed resource implications would be brought forward as part of the budget considerations.

Resolved

That the Racial Equality Scheme set out in the report of the Chief Executive (a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these Minutes) be approved (CEX).

313 ASSOCIATION OF ESSEX AUTHORITIES (AEA) – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on nominations to the AEA Annual General Meeting and General Assembly.

Resolved

- (1) That this Council's representation to the AEA General Assembly comprise Councillors R A Amner, T G Cutmore, Mrs J R Lumley, C R Morgan and one nominee from the Independent Group.
- (2) That attendance at the General Assembly be an approved duty for the payment of travel expenses.
- (3) That this Council forwards the following nominees to serve on organisations on behalf of the Association:-

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Nominee</u>
Business Link Essex	Cllr R A Amner
Rural Community Council of Essex	Cllr Mrs M J Webster

314 OUTSIDE BODY REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services on whether the number of Outside Bodies should be reviewed.

Resolved

- (1) That a review of Outside Bodies be undertaken, the following criteria to be used:-
 - Has the Council given strong financial support to the Outside Body?
 - Does the Body either provide a direct service for the Council Tax payers or are the objectives of the Body closely aligned with the Council's direct interests?

- Is it essential for the Council to be involved in the policy making or management of the Outside Body?
- Can the Body be considered to be a part of the Local Government process?

- (2) That a report be brought back to a future meeting detailing the findings of the review. (HAMS)

315 PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE – FEEDBACK FROM RAYLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the latest correspondence received from Rayleigh Town Council relating to the proposed Environmental Centre.

Resolved

That a Member-level meeting be held with Rayleigh Town Council to discuss the proposed Environmental Centre, this Council to be represented by the Chairman of the Policy & Finance Committee together with Cllr C J Lumley and one nominee from each of the Labour and Independent Groups. (CE)

316 HOUSING BENEFIT, COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES, FORMER TENANT RENT ARREARS AND SUNDRY DEBTORS – WRITE-OFFS

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on various cases.

Resolved

- (1) That the items written-off under the Corporate Director's delegated authority be noted.
- (2) That the items shown in Appendix B of the Corporate Director's report (a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these Minutes) be now written-off in the accounts of the Authority. (HRHM/HFS)

317 STAFF REWARD SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) setting out possible means by which the Council could demonstrate that, as a caring employer, it appreciated long-service and recognised exceptional effort or performance of staff.

Resolved

- (1) That authority be delegated to the Head of Paid Service to make honoraria awards of up to £250.
- (2) That the Long Service scheme be amended to recognise each passing decade of service with a gift, the Chairman of the Council to present gifts at an appropriate event.
- (3) That a 100% annual attendance honoraria of £100, or additional leave, be introduced.
- (4) That arrangements be trialled for twelve months with the outcome reported back to Committee.(CD(L,P&A))

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 Paragraphs 9, 14 and 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

318 LAND AT HAMBRO HILL, RAYLEIGH

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Legal Services on an offer of land.

Members recognised that when considering offers of land for sale, there was a need to be mindful of the competing and limited resources of the Council.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) advised that it would be possible to undertake a wildlife assessment of the site.

Resolved

- (1) That the offer to purchase the two parcels of land at Hambro Hill be declined and their notation as proposed Public Open Space be re-evaluated as part of the Local Plan Review together with the strip of land between the two parcels in Council ownership. (HLS)
- (3) That a wildlife assessment be made of the site. (CD(F&ES))

319 SECURITY AT CIVIC SUITE

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services setting out security proposals for the Civic Suite, Rayleigh.

The Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) referred to a security related matter which had arisen since formulation of the report and which further highlighted the importance of addressing proposals. Information was supplied on the approximate costs which could be associated with elements of proposed installation.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- It was intended to implement all the proposals set out in the report as interim measures, with further proposals being submitted later in the year in tandem with design suggestions relating to overall usage of the Civic Suite to address disabled access factors.
- When formulating further proposals, Officers would be mindful of the possibilities for improved signage/alternative entry systems together with the views of other building users.
- The closure of toilets to the general public (i.e. non pre-arranged users of the building) would assist security aspects.

During debate, reference was made to the importance of ensuring that the design of the Civic Suite building provided Members and Officers with an environment whereby they could concentrate on furthering the administration of the District. Reference was also made to the value of being mindful of all possible security related scenarios when formulating proposals.

The Committee endorsed a motion moved by Councillor C J Lumley and seconded by Councillor C R Morgan relating to closure of the toilets to the general public.

Resolved

That, subject to closure of the Civic Suite toilets to the general public, the security arrangements outlined in the exempt report (a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these Minutes) be endorsed as interim measures, with further proposals submitted prior to year end in tandem with the design proposals relating to overall usage of the Civic Suite to address disabled access factors. (HAMS/CD(F&ES))

320 SENIOR PLANNER (LOCAL PLANS) – RECRUITMENT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Planning Services on the grading of a post.

Resolved

That the Senior Planner (Local Plans) post be re-graded to PO12 – 15 and re-titled Team Leader (Local Plans). (HPS)

321 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive on staffing matters.

Resolved

That the current level of vacancies and long-term sickness absence be noted. (CE)

The Meeting closed at 8.14 pm.

Chairman

Date