

Policy & Finance Committee – 5 February 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **5 February 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr P F A Webster (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs M A Starke (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr J E Grey
Cllr A J Humphries
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr P K Savill
Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr S P Smith
Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr D A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr K H Hudson.

SUBSTITUTE

Cllr M G B 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
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

61 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

62 ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the report of the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee on matters referred from recent meetings.

(1) Telecommunications Installation in Castle Road Car Park, Rayleigh

The Committee concurred with the view of the Chairman that, given the outcome of further discussions involving the Head of Planning Services and the principal objector, no further action should be taken on this matter.

Resolved

That no action be taken with regard to the leasing of a small parcel of land in the Castle Road Car Park, Rayleigh for the installation of telecommunications equipment. (HRHM)

(2) Telecommunications Installation in Freight House Car Park, Rochford

Note: Councillor J R Lumley declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of involvement in discussions relating to the mobile phone mast in London Road, Rayleigh.

During debate a Member queried whether the same approach should be taken to this application as had been taken to the Castle Road Car Park site and whether it would be appropriate for a Councillor to vote on a Committee which takes decisions about land release and also to serve on the Planning Services Committee when it determines planning aspects.

Against approval of the application, reference was made to the leisure usage associated with the Freight House site and to the inconclusive nature of research around microwaves and health. In favour of the application, it was observed that the principle of mast siting had been established and that proposals were relatively unobtrusive. It was possible that any reduction in the number of current sites could lead telecommunication companies to consider increasing the level of radio frequencies at sites that are available.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- In considering whether an interest should be declared on a matter such as mast siting, a Councillor has to determine whether a decision upon it might reasonably be regarded as affecting to a greater extent than another council tax payer, rate payer or inhabitant of the authority's area, the well being or financial position of himself, a relative or a friend.
- The proposal was likely to be the subject of deemed consent under the planning regulations and not come before the Planning Services Committee. In planning terms, the main grounds for considering such structures focussed on siting or appearance. The structure proposed, designed as a lamp post, would be unlikely to be seen as visually obtrusive.

Resolved

- (1) That a small parcel of land in the Freight House Car Park, Rochford be leased for the installation of telecommunications equipment on the terms outlined in the report.

- (2) That the equipment be concealed within a fully operational lamp standard. (HRHM)

(3) Access to Information in Local Government

Resolved

- (1) That the following policies and guidelines be adopted:-
- Data Protection Policy
 - Records Management Policy Statement
 - Electronic Record Management Policy
 - Information Technology Code of Practice
 - Essex Trust Charter
- (2) That the Government Office of Commerce GCat procedure be used to acquire the Comino Universal Government Corporate Document Management and Workflow System. (CD(LP&A))

63 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

Note: Councillor C G Seagers declared a personal interest in the item on Police Community Support Officers (Minute 435/03) by virtue of being a Member of Great Wakering Parish Council which had given consideration to scheme support.

The Committee received the schedule relating to progress on decisions.

Hockley Community Centre (Minute 330/03)

It was noted that the Member meeting with representatives of Hockley Parish Council had been provisionally scheduled for 19 February 2004.

Housing Benefit Performance Standards (Minute 332/03)

The Chief Executive confirmed that the final report from the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate had been received earlier in the day. The Inspectorate's conclusions would be included in a letter on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process in the next Member drop.

Development of Council Owned Land (Minute 600 (17)/03))

It was noted that Council representatives had met senior representatives of Essex County Council's Supporting People Commissioning Body earlier in the day. The meeting had established that concerns remained around the time pressures for achieving the Hardwick House site and the funding mechanism/levels funding for schemes in general. An outcome from the meeting was that Council representatives would be consulting Swan Housing on possibilities for revising their proposals.

The Chief Executive confirmed that, given the latest concerns, contact would be made with Mark Francois, MP, who had been supportive of the need for Supporting People funding to be timely, effective and adequate.

64 CONSULTATION ON ELECTED REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) which suggested a response to two consultation papers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the provisions and rules which should govern local referendums.

During debate Members felt that it would be appropriate to include observations around the scope for potential voter confusion in paperwork associated with combined referendums and the importance of total secrecy with regard to any arrangements for the processing of electronic votes before the close of poll.

The Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) confirmed that a Member could be provided with details of the proposed spending limits for designated organisations and political parties.

Resolved

That, subject to the inclusion of the following observations, this Council's response to the two consultation papers be as suggested in the pro-forma attached to the report :-

- It can be recognised that, in terms of understanding the paperwork associated with combined referendums, there is scope for voter confusion.
- Total secrecy must be associated with any arrangements for the processing of electronic votes before the close of poll. (CD(LP&A))

65 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC – TIME LIMITATION

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the introduction of a time limitation with regard to the length of questions from the public at meetings of Council.

Members concurred with the observation of the Chairman that experience pointed to there being no need to consider the introduction of an overall time limit for public question time.

Recommended to Council:-

That the procedure rule relating to questions by the public be changed to provide for a time limit of up to three minutes for each question and one

minute for each supplemental question, the following wording to be added to Council Procedure Rule 10.1:-

“The maximum time limit for asking each question is 3 minutes. The maximum time limit for a supplemental question is 1 minute.”

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 paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

66 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive on the current position regarding vacancies and long term sickness absence within the Authority.

With regard to vacancies it was noted that, since report compilation, a number of offers had been made/interviews arranged.

Resolved

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

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.

Chairman

Date