

# **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 18 January 2007**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee** held on **7 December 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr T G Cutmore  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr K A Gibbs  
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford  
Cllr R A Oatham  
Cllr J Thomass

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs M A Starke, M G B Starke, C G Seagers and J E Grey

## **VISITING**

Cllr C I Black and T Payne (Remuneration Panel Member)

## **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
G Woolhouse	-	Corporate Director (External Services)
Y Woodward	-	Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management
A Bugeja	-	Head of Legal Services
S Fowler	-	Head of Administrative and Member Services
J Bourne	-	Head of Community Services
T Harper	-	Senior Performance Management Officer
S Pitts	-	Community Planning Officer
J O'Brien	-	Committee Administrator

## **13 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **14 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS**

The Committee considered the Progress on Decisions Schedule.

### **(a) Evaluation of CCTV Provision (Minute 429/06)**

The Chief Executive advised that Essex County Council Highways Department had agreed to remove CCTV equipment from street furniture on behalf of and at no cost to Rochford District Council.

**(b) Planning Appeal – Retail Food Store and Associated Development at  
Former Park School, Rawreth Lane, Rayleigh (Minute 209/06)**

Officers advised that no response had been received on the written representations and there was no indication at present as to when an answer would be provided.

**15 FERNDALE ROAD SCOUT HUT – FUTURE LEASE**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Community Services which provided further information relating to the possibility of Downhall Under Fives Pre School obtaining a new lease for the land at Ferndale Open Space.

The Head of Legal Services confirmed that a covenant had been imposed between the Council and J T Byford & Sons at the time of the land being donated. The planning application would be taken through the usual procedure.

The Chairman agreed with a Member that speed was of the essence concerning consultations with J T Byford & Sons, as the pre-school group do not currently have a permanent base.

The Committee fully supported the report, recognising the valuable services that the Downhall Under Fives provided for the community, and unanimously reached their decision.

**Resolved**

That, subject to obtaining the consent of J T Byford & Sons to the use of the land for that purpose and the surrender of the lease by the Scout Association, negotiations be commenced with Downhall Under Fives Pre-School Play Group for the lease (subject to a successful planning application) to them of the land at Ferndale Open Space formerly occupied by the scout hut. (HCS)

**16 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services which contained the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' allowances for 2007/08.

Introducing the report, the Head of Administrative and Member Services advised that an additional proposal to those outlined was that there would be a continuation of £300 per annum allowance for co-optees.

Mr T Payne, presented the Remuneration Panel recommendations to the Committee and commented that:-

### **District Council Proposals**

- The Panel's aims had been to simplify the process and align allowances with those of local authorities in the Essex Districts. Increasing the basic allowance to £4,135 per annum recognised the average figure and introducing a method of calculation whereby other allowances became multiples of this basic would reduce the complex formula within the existing allowance scheme.
- In particular, the Panel felt that the role of the Leader of the Council merited an increased reward and a Deputy Leader of the Council would deserve recognition if the role were established.
- The Dependant Carer's allowance would enable Members to cover expenses only, and the recommendations were set at an appropriate rate. Only two other local authorities in the Essex Districts had not introduced a Dependant Carer's allowance, and those with such a scheme in place had a low level of take up.
- Whilst the Panel's recommendations amounted to an increase, this was only a step towards parity with other Districts in Essex.

### **Town and Parish Council Proposals**

- There appeared to be a significant difference between the allowance scheme of each Council, which made the Panel's decision process more difficult.
- The Hockley Parish Council's basic allowance increase by 30% reflected its efforts in achieving the quality status award.

The Committee considered the item of first class railway train fare under travelling expenses and agreed that standard railway train fare would be more appropriate. This proposal would be included in the final recommendation to Full Council on the report.

It was noted that Rayleigh Town Council was also working hard to achieve their quality status award.

Mr Payne thanked officers for their involvement with the Panel meetings that had taken place and was grateful to Members that had accepted their invitation to meet with the Panel during the process.

The Chairman noted the extensive work that had gone into the recommendations of the Panel and that the report was evidential of this alone.

**Recommended** to Full Council that it RESOLVES:-

That, subject to inclusion of the following items, the remuneration scheme proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2007/08 be adopted:-

- A continuation of £300 per annum allowance for co-optees.
- Standard class rail travel to be introduced under the District Council travelling expenses scheme for Members, to replace that currently of a first class allowance. (HAMS)

## **17 PERFORMANCE REPORT TO MEMBERS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management on the Performance Report to Members for quarter 3 of 2006/07.

The Senior Performance Management Officer advised that under the objective 'to develop cost comparison/value for money concepts in service development and budgeting process' an action plan would be finalised by the end of January 2007. It was also confirmed that the planning application for Cherry Orchard Country Park expansion would be made in February.

### **Resolved**

That, subject to the following comments being placed on record, the content of the report be noted:-

- Whilst the latest removal of abandoned cars indicator was very good at 100% the overall result for the year was disappointing, this was as a result of poor performance in the first quarter not being outweighed by the good performance in quarters 2 and 3 when fewer vehicles had been abandoned. Overall the figures indicate an improving trend.
- The recycling figure for the quarter ending December 2006 was 17.6% in comparison to 18% for the two months ending November 2006 as shown in the report, which reflected a typical seasonal dip. (HFAPM)

## **18 BUDGET MONITORING STATEMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management which provided Members with a monitoring report on material items of income and expenditure in the 2006/07 budget for the first three quarters of the year and an update on the new items included in the budget for 2006/07.

In presenting the report and responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- The appendix compared year to date budget against estimates.
- The cemetery income variance year to date against original percentage was not determined by a particular issue, though this could indicate the ageing population.
- The car parking attendant post is supported with customer interface training.

The Committee noted that the contracted temporary accommodation variance to year to date against original percentage was particularly good, and commended officers for their efforts in this regard. It was evident that the Council had adopted a preventative approach which was very positive.

**Resolved**

That the contents of the report on the Budget Monitoring Statement be noted. (HFAPM)

**19 CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management which provided an update on the financial progress in completing the General Fund Capital Programme for 2006/07.

Responding to questions, the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management confirmed that any interest earned where funds were not spent as planned, was put back into the general fund in line with regulations. Costs would be established for the consultancy work that was being carried out on Cherry Orchard Country Park and results provided for the Committee.

**Resolved**

That the contents of the report on the General Fund Capital Programme for 2006/07 be noted. (HFAPM)

**20 CORPORATE CONSULTATION STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which presented a new Corporate Consultation Strategy for consideration and approval by Members.

The Community Planning Officer advised that the revised corporate consultation strategy set a framework and built on the best practice already in place. The Chief Executive confirmed that this strategy would be refreshed regularly and would link to the communication strategy and the new access to services strategy with the three working together.

The Chairman observed that clarity in the report was admirable and issued thanks to officers for their efforts.

**Resolved**

That the revised corporate consultation strategy be adopted. (CE)

**21 GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which suggested a number of changes to the grant making procedures to adhere to other Council adopted policies and best practice.

In presenting the report and answering questions, the Community Planning Officer advised that:-

- Priority groups are broadly based on those established in the previous scheme.
- The application form which organisations needed to complete and from which service level agreements would be established from, would clearly state when an activity would be delivered.
- The type of groups/activities not considered for funding had been taken from a standard approach and should not cause reason for conflict. Religious groups that work for the community aside from promoting religion would be eligible for a grant.

The Chairman noted that it would be encouraging to see the voluntary sector come forward positively through the promotion and procedures outlined.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the funding process and criteria as set out in the report be amended.
- (2) That awareness of the fund be raised through the CVS network as outlined in paragraph 4.3 of the report. (CE)

**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 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

**22 57 SOUTH STREET, ROCHFORD**

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (External Services) which outlined proposals for the management of 57 South Street, Rochford, and its maintenance requirements.

Responding to questions, officers advised that the sum identified for repairs/refurbishments was an estimated minimum expenditure and the works would all need to be carried out together to bring the property into a reasonable state for continued use, as opposed to this being carried out in stages.

The Committee agreed that all possible options available for the premises should be explored and that further work be carried out and brought back to the Committee for consideration. This would be beneficial in reaching a final decision on their preferred course of action.

**Resolved**

- (1) That a decision on the preferred course of action in respect of 57 South Street, Rochford be deferred.
- (2) That a site visit be arranged for Members to 57 South Street, Rochford.
- (3) That formal consultation be carried out with Essex County Council and Rochford Parish Council.
- (4) That a report be made to the Committee on the responses to the consultation, to also contain a full assessment of other potential uses of the site and the development of youth and related community services in general. (CD(ES))

**23 STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive on vacancies, long term sickness absence and maternity absence within the Authority.

**Resolved**

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

The meeting closed at 8.55pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....