

Council – 22 February 2005

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **22 February 2005** when there were present:-

Cllr Mrs R Brown (Chairman)
Cllr P F A Webster (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr R A Amner	Cllr D Merrick
Cllr P A Capon	Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr Mrs T J Capon	Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr R G S Choppen	Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr P K Savill
Cllr K A Gibbs	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr K J Gordon	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr K H Hudson	Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr A J Humphries	Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr C A Hungate	Cllr J Thomass
Cllr Mrs L Hungate	Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr T Livings	Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr C J Lumley	Cllr Mrs C A Weston
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley	Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs L A Butcher, Mrs H L A Glynn, T E Goodwin, Mrs S A Harper and J R F Mason.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
R J Honey - Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
R Crofts - Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

71 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs J R Lumley declared a personal interest in the item on Anglia Polytechnic University – Change of Name by virtue of being employed by the University.

73 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM CHAIRMAN

The Chairman was pleased to have attended a number of events including:-

- The celebration of the receipt of a DEFRA Countryside Stewardship Grant relating to the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Park (with the Chairman of the Environmental Services Committee).
- An Air Cadet dinner.
- A UNICEF concert in aid of the Tsunami disaster appeal.
- A charity quiz night at Hawkwell in aid of the Chairman's charity, CLAPA.

74 COMMITTEE MINUTES AND REPORTS

Council received the Minutes of Committees and considered Committee Reports as follows:-

Committee	Date	Minutes No.
(1) Community Services	11 January 2005	1-7
(2) Environmental Services	12 January 2005	8-11
(3) Community Overview and Scrutiny	18 January 2005	12-17
(4) Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny	19 January 2005	18-22

(a) Contract Procedure Rules

Council considered the report of the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Contract Procedures Rules.

It was noted that the figure of £3,384,411 should be identified as the current European contracting threshold for works contracts and that the figure of £153,376 should be identified as the current European contracting threshold for supplies in the table on the first page.

Resolved

That, subject to the figure of £3,384,411 being identified as the current European contracting threshold for works contracts and the figure of £153,376 being identified as the current European contracting threshold for supplies in the table on the first page, the Contract Procedure Rules, as attached to the Committee's report, be agreed. (CD(F&ES))

Committee	Date	Minutes No.
(5) Planning Services	20 January 2005	23-25
(6) Environment Overview and Scrutiny	25 January 2005	26-28
(7) Community Services	1 February 2005	33-42
(8) Policy & Finance	8 February 2005	43-51
(9) Appeals	8 February 2005	52-53
(10) Community Overview and Scrutiny	9 February 2005	54-58

(a) Star Partnership (minute 57)

It was noted that the question of whether the Partnership could be renamed 'The Rochford District Star Partnership' would be a matter for the Partnership to consider and that any specific observations on the accuracy of Committee Minutes would need to be raised at the next meeting of the Committee in question.

Committee	Date	Minutes No.
(11) Environment Overview and Scrutiny	15 February 2005	59-63
(12) Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny	16 February 2005	64-67
(13) Planning Services	17 February 2005	68-70

(a) Schedule of Development Applications and Recommends/Items referred from Weekly List (Minute 70)

It was noted that a question relating to the inclusion of two conditions under Item 3 of Minute 70 would be a matter for the next meeting of the Planning Services Committee.

75 SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX 2005/06

Council considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on the level of Council Tax for 2005/06.

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:-

“Chairman, Members of the Public,

This is the third budget of this Conservative administration and my first as Leader of this Council.

The main headline is that the tax increase will be at 4.93%. This will be the equivalent of 14.7 pence per week for a band D rated householder. I firmly believe in keeping the rate of increase in council tax as low as possible, however, with this level of increase, there are issues of sustainability for the future that will need to be addressed.

The most crucial factor in setting our budget and the eventual level of council tax is how much Government funding we receive. I know I speak for all Members when I say I continue to be both surprised and disappointed at how poorly Rochford has been and is still being treated by Central Government despite given assurances to the contrary.

This year we have received an increase in Government funding of £203,000, or 5.8%. This may sound generous, but from it we have to fund new initiatives placed upon us such as liquor licensing, the ongoing substantial costs of implementing Comprehensive Performance Assessment and we now bear statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act for emergency planning. This is in addition to any inflationary factors.

Now this Government has threatened every authority with capping where the council tax increase is above 5%. It is worth mentioning that a 1% increase in our council tax on a Band D property equates to around 3 pence per week. The words nuts and sledgehammers come to mind!

The restriction on the level of council tax is not reflected by the increase in grant funding. If this policy of the Government continues, it will have serious consequences for the future.

Despite the increase, we are still the lowest funded Council in Essex, again. Brentwood, a very similar Council in my opinion, receives, on a like for like basis, £1.4million more in grant funding than Rochford. Not my idea of a fair settlement.

The Government has withheld £138,000 of grant that, under their own calculations, Rochford District should receive in order to protect authorities that have previously been over funded under the previous grant system.

We remain the lowest spending authority in Essex, but again, following the recent independent MORI survey, we are one of the highest achieving authorities in the county in terms of our residents' satisfaction levels.

We may have been assessed as weak in the Government's CPA inspection, but our customers judge us as superior to authorities with better assessments in terms of services we deliver.

From the information I have given, if the financial regime now in place is maintained by central government, our five-year budget strategy is not sustainable.

The system of Government funding will change, however, in 2006/7 and remain in place for three years. By the time we consider the budget for next year, we should be aware of the recommendations in respect of our housing stock and have more idea of our ability to meet the Government compulsory Gershon savings requirements. At that time we should be in a better position to determine whether or not action will be required to ensure our five-year budget is sustainable.

Despite our poor funding and low expenditure, we continue to deliver improvements to services. The refurbishment of Clements Hall was completed this year. This is a first class example of what can be achieved where there is a partnership between a forward looking local authority and a world class private sector provider like Holmes Place.

I look forward to the quality delivered on the Clements Hall project continuing as we progress with the new Sports Centre on the former Park School site, the tender returns on which will be considered by this Council shortly.

We continue to derive considerable benefit from our membership of Thames Gateway South Essex. At the end of last year, we received over £60,000 in order to provide signage in the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.

Our main achievement through the Gateway, however, has been to attract over £1million of funding to refurbish the historic Rayleigh Windmill and carry out much needed improvements to Websters Way.

Our membership of the Gateway is not only beneficial in the form of funding. With our influence we should be able to ensure the ongoing viability of Southend London Airport, which I believe is key to the economic future of our area.

I now turn to our priorities for 2005/6. These are:

- Tackling environmental issues such as graffiti, abandoned vehicles, weed removal in town centres, highway verges, etc. with more tenacity.
- Working with Thames Gateway to ensure Rochford's views are properly taken into account as housing resources are now considered on a regional basis.
- Helping businesses with recycling.

- Improving our homelessness and housing advice services and our benefits service.
- Complying with Government requirements in respect of civil contingencies and strategic policy for planning and housing.

We also need to build capacity in order to comply with our Improvement Plan following our recent CPA inspection. To this end we are submitting a bid for funding to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, with the help of the Improvement and Development Agency.

There are many other areas where, with adequate funding, we would wish to do more. This is not possible and we have had to agree not to include a number of items in our budget. These include:-

- An environmental audit for the District.
- Police Community Support Officers. Rayleigh Police will be recruiting additional Community Support Officers and we feel the Council should focus its resources on tackling related issues.
- A Parish Liaison Officer to facilitate our partnership working with our Parishes and the Town Council.

In order to finance the improvements I have mentioned, it has been necessary to review other income streams.

One issue of which we are acutely aware is the continued need for additional car parking throughout the District. We have no resources at present to even enable us to consider possible options to increase the existing provision.

Reluctantly, we are proposing to increase our car parking charges to 50p per hour. This will not only allow us to carry out the environmental improvements that I have mentioned, it will also allow us to build up a reserve in order to finance potential new car parking schemes in the future.

Even with the new scale of charge, we will still have one of the lowest tariffs in Essex. Whilst there will be an increase for most, anyone who previously parked for one hour will still pay the same.

There have been some alarmist headlines in respect of our intention to charge some blue badge holders in our car parks. May I assure residents that we will be listening very closely to their views and other interested parties on this issue as well as the proposed increase in charge before coming to any final conclusions.

Over the next three years the Government is instructing all local authorities to achieve savings of 2½% per annum following the Gershon review. For us this will be around £270,000 per annum, of which £135,000 must be cashable. It is typical that this target is being applied across the board, irrespective of an authority's starting position. We have already contracted out most of our services and are the lowest spending Council in Essex. I really do believe that it will be far harder for prudent authorities like Rochford to meet these targets than most others in the country.

With regard to our capital programme, we are looking to:

- Extend Hall Road Cemetery.
- Carry out repair works to Rochford Reservoir.
- Continue with our vision to extend the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Park so that it stretches from the B1013 in the east and meets up with Southend on Sea's Edwards Hall Country Park in the west. If we can achieve this, it will provide a fantastic facility for our residents.

With regard to our housing, we will continue to work towards making all of our homes compliant with the Government's decent homes standard.

The Rochford Housing Option Appraisal Board will be reporting to the Council in April with their view on what is the best option for future housing provision in Rochford.

Housing rents will increase in accordance with Central Government's dictate.

Chairman, I would once again thank all Members for their active participation throughout the whole of the budget exercise. I do feel that the way we conduct the preparation of the budget delivers an outcome that all Members are able to support.

Our council tax will increase for a Band D property from £155.16 a year to £162.81. I repeat this is an increase of just under 15 pence a week.

In conclusion, the total council tax for a Band D property will be:-

Essex County Council	£917.73, an increase of 2.9%
Essex Police Authority	£104.76, an increase of 5.5%
Essex Fire Authority	£57.15, an increase of 1.3%
Rochford District Council	£162.81, an increase of 4.93%.
Average Parishes/Town Council	£26.66, an increase of 2.1%

Total Band D average council tax will be £1,269.11, an increase of 3.3%.

I therefore commend this budget for Members approval”

Resolved

- (1) That the total for economic development is estimated at £90,500.
- (2) That the total for gross expenditure of the District together with the Parish precepts be £24,777,565.
- (3) That the total of income for the District Council be £15,297,800.
- (4) That the total net expenditure of the District Council together with the Parishes be £9,479,765.
- (5) That the total of the sums payable into the general fund in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates, revenue support grant, together with adjustments from the collection fund, be £3,683,314.
- (6) That the budget requirement for the year of £9,479,765 less the net income receivable of £3,683,314 which, divided by the tax base of 30,591.82 is equal to £189.48, which is the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
- (7) That the total of Parish precepts included within the above is £815,665.
- (8) That the Council Tax relating to the District Council without Parish precepts is £162.81.
- (9) That the total tax for both District and Parishes be as set out in the schedule which is attached as Appendix A to these minutes. These sums are calculated as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.
- (10) That the sums given above for Band D but now shown in the particular valuations bands A-H are set out in the schedule attached as Appendix B to these minutes.
- (11) That the precepts issued to the Council in respect of Essex County Council, Essex Fire Authority and Essex Police Authority for each valuation band A-H be as set out in the schedule attached as Appendix C to these minutes.
- (12) That the total Council Tax for the area for each valuation band A-H be as set out in Appendix D to these minutes. These are the amounts set as Council Tax for the year 2005/06. (HFS)

76 KEY POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR 2005/06

Council considered the report of the Chief Executive on key policies and actions for 2005/06.

With regard to main projects, it was noted that a report on the new Rayleigh Leisure Centre was being submitted to the March cycle of meetings.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- Whilst the proposed lift and toilet works at the Rayleigh Civic Suite was a 23-week contract, it was not expected that the existing toilets would be out of use for any significant period of time.
- The tenders associated with introducing the kerbside garden waste scheme were due to be returned by 18 March for further consideration by the Waste and Recycling Sub-Committee.
- The possibilities associated with the induction of a contact centre for the housing benefits service were under review as part of joint working/Gershon considerations.

Resolved

- (1) That the work programme for 2005/2006, as set out in Appendices A, B and C and the public notification of its content, as outlined in the report, be agreed.
- (2) That areas of work for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny process, as outlined in Appendix D of the report, be agreed.
- (3) That the programme for the monitoring of the 2005/2006 agreed budget and the development of the 2006/2007 budget framework, as outlined in Appendix E of the report, be noted.

77 REPORTS OF SUB-COMMITTEES

(1) St George's Day

Council considered the report of the St George's Day Sub-Committee.

It was noted that the actual venue for the themed coffee morning being run by the Hockley/Hawkwell WI was the Parish Rooms, the Old Fire Station, Hockley and that, given the historical importance of its building, Rochford Golf Club could be invited to be involved in celebrations.

The Chairman of the Sub-Committee wished to highlight the proposed themed charity quiz night at Hawkwell Village Hall and the value of a high level of support from all Members. The Leader of the Council observed that it was particularly pleasing to see the proposed participation of the Council's leisure contractor, Holmes Place, in arrangements and that the work of the Sub-Committee was commendable.

Resolved

- (1) That the following activities be endorsed:-
 - (a) The supply of a display pack and/or large flag to each non-profit making organisation (including the business representative organisations, churches and Town/Parish Councils) on request, subject to a maximum expenditure of £2,000. Churches and the Town/Parish Councils to be asked to fly a St George's flag.
 - (b) A school arts workshop with St George's Day theme (one day in five primary schools with, if possible, a geographical spread) at a cost of £1000.
 - (c) The engendering of support from local newspapers/radio stations.
 - (d) Asking the Salvation Army if they would be willing to provide four half hour concerts, one in each of four different parts of the District (Hockley, Rayleigh, Hullbridge and Rochford) at a cost of £100 per concert.
 - (e) Asking Rayleigh Brass if they would consider being available for a concert in 2006 and approaching Holmes Place on the possibility of the Freight House building being available in 2006.
 - (f) Contact with Canewdon Church and Ashingdon Church on the possibility of an A4 leaflet being produced by the Council to highlight their history and whether they could be open to visitors on St George's Day. A sum of £250 to be available for this purpose, comprising of a £50 contribution to each church for being open on the day with the balance being applied to the production of leaflets.
 - (g) Arrangements being made for a St George's themed Charity Quiz Night at Hawkwell Village Hall on the basis that surplus monies are donated to the Chairman's Charity. A donation of £100 to be made towards refreshments. Holmes Place to be asked to consider contributing prizes.
 - (h) Asking Holmes Place to consider introducing a St George's theme at the various leisure premises and placing a flag (supplied by the Council) in the large front window of the Clements Hall building.
 - (i) The dedication of a page in the next edition of Rochford District Matters.

- (j) The flying of flags in the usual location on Council properties and, if possible, at the Rayleigh Windmill Site.
 - (k) The highlighting of the Council's commitment to St George's Day on the front page of the website.
 - (l) Subject to the concurrence of the Chairman, the despatch of a letter to Day Centres within the District indicating that the Chairman would be happy to consider visiting any themed event that they may have.
 - (m) Advising Thames Gateway South Essex of the Council's celebration activities in the context of how they will help highlight cultural and historical aspects of the District.
- (2) That consideration be given to earmarking an appropriate sum for 2006 celebrations within next year's budget discussions.
 - (3) That authority be delegated to the Sub-Committee to finalise the arrangements associated with the above activities, subject to these being kept within the agreed budget figure (HAMS/CE)

(2) Windmill

Council considered the report of the Windmill Sub-Committee.

Responding to questions on financial aspects, the Chief Executive advised that the Council would need to make an expenditure commitment during the current financial year. A spending profile had been sent to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for approval.

Council was pleased to endorse the proposals. Specific reference was made to the publicity that would emanate from National Trust involvement.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposals for the floor usage, as outlined in Section 3 of the officer's report to the Sub-Committee, be agreed.
- (2) That the broad strategy around the opening of the various elements of the project, as outlined in Section 4 of the officer's report to the Sub-Committee, be agreed.
- (3) That the principle of a partnership arrangement with the National Trust be pursued to the overall benefit of the project, with details reported back to the Windmill Sub-Committee. (CD(F&ES))

78 ANGLIA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY - CHANGE OF NAME

Council considered the report of the Chief Executive on a letter received from Anglia Polytechnic University asking for support and assistance in connection with the University's proposal to change its name.

During discussion it was observed that the term 'Anglia' was already in use by the University of East Anglia. It was also observed that, in terms of buildings, a major part of the University was based in Chelmsford.

On a motion, moved by Councillor Mrs M J Webster and seconded by Councillor M G B Starke, it was:-

Resolved

That Anglia Polytechnic University be advised that this Council's preferred name would be "Chelmsford University". (CE)

79 ROYAL GARDEN PARTY

Council considered the report of the Chief Executive on the appointment of four representatives, including guests, to attend one of this year's Royal Garden parties to be held in July.

Resolved

That Councillors Mr and Mrs Webster and Councillor Mockford and guest be nominated as the four representatives to attend one of the Royal Garden parties to be held in July, using the Civic car and driver. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.22pm.

Chairman

Date