

Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 8 June 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee** held on **8 June 2006** when there were present:-

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

Cllr J E Grey
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr R A Oatham

Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr J Thomass

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
R J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Internal Services)
G Woolhouse	-	Corporate Director (External Services)
Y Woodward	-	Head of Finance, Audit & Performance Management
S Logan	-	Revenue & Benefits Manager
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

184 REPORT FROM FORMER FINANCE & PROCEDURES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report from the former Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee relating to areas for focus arising out of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment progress report and key projects/ service developments to be monitored in 2006/07.

Responding to questions on key projects/service developments, the Chief Executive advised that negotiations relating to acquiring additional land at Rochford Cemetery were reaching a conclusion. Progress on all the 2006/07 projects would be reported quarterly using the established “traffic light” system.

Resolved

- (1) That the following areas for focus arising out of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Progress Report be endorsed:-
 - Production of a Corporate Plan.
 - Review and upgrade of the Performance Management System, with greater transparency and linkages between the various elements.
 - Development of cost comparison/value for money concepts in service development and the budgeting process.
 - The Member decision-making process around planning.

(2) That the following key projects/service developments be monitored in 2006/07 as part of the revised Performance Management system:-

- Recycling
- Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park
- Lighting in Alleyways
- Clean, Green and Safe Environment Activities
- Gardening/Handyman Service
- Benefits/Council Tax
- Rochford Cemetery. (CE)

185 ROCHFORD LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – THE WAY FORWARD

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the way forward for the Rochford Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

During discussion it was noted that:-

- Although some partners had been subject to re-organisation, their successor bodies had committed to full involvement within the partnership.
- The effectiveness of partnership working through the LSP would be one measure likely to be assessed via the revised Comprehensive Performance Assessment process for Districts. In addition, the Government saw strategic partnerships as a means of delivery of the Local Area Agreement process.
- Whilst there are a number of structures dealing with subjects such as waste, there is no reason why environmental and other issues cannot be raised with partners through the Local Strategic Partnership Forum.

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

Resolved

- (1) That the revised structure, membership and terms of reference for the Local Strategic Partnership Executive Board, as set out in Appendices 2, 3, and 4 of the Committee report, be agreed.
- (2) That the Chief Executive write to all existing Rochford Local Strategic Partnership members thanking them for their contribution and outlining the way forward.

- (3) That the Chief Executive make the appropriate arrangements to ensure the Local Strategic Partnership Executive Board structure is operational prior to the summer recess, along with taking the appropriate steps to encourage two new local partnerships around Economic Regeneration and Community Involvement, with the composition of groups being as set out in Appendix 2 of the Committee report. (CE)

186 PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT 2006/07

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning & Transportation, which provided details of the planning delivery grant for 2006/07 and outlined the key areas where the grant could best be targeted in Rochford to enhance the planning service.

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- The suggested breakdown of grant should be seen as approximate. If amounts were too prescribed at this stage the ability to make most effective use of the overall grant would be reduced.
- In terms of staffing, the approach would be one of avoiding taking on additional permanent staffing obligations with consequent budgetary implications.
- A half-year report on the position with regard to expenditure under each heading could be submitted to the Planning, Policy & Transportation Committee.

Resolved

That the broad programme of initiatives and approximate grant breakdown, as outlined in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 of the Committee report, be approved. A half-year report on the position with regard to expenditure under each heading to be submitted to the Planning Policy & Transportation Committee. (HPT)

187 REVENUE & BENEFITS – HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENT RECOVERY REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the findings of the Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Review.

Members concurred with the suggestion of the Housing Benefit and Revenue Manager that it would be appropriate to include the term “and not economically viable to pursue” in the first line of report recommendation (1). It was noted that Experian was used as part of the arrangements for tracing debtors. The Committee also noted the type of commission figure associated with current discussions with bailiffs and that bailiffs advise that they should be able to collect approximately a third of debt that local authorities cannot.

Officers were mindful of the importance of ensuring that debtors are aware that debt tracing is taken seriously by the Council.

Resolved

- (1) That debts that are more than two years old that cannot be traced and are not economically viable to pursue be written off, provided that, if the debtor's address becomes available within the 6-year statutory limit, the debt will be raised again.
- (2) That the appointed bailiff be authorised to seek recovery of debts where the Council has exhausted other methods, such work to be on a commission only basis. (CD(ES))

188 THE HOUSING BENEFIT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The Committee considered the six-monthly update report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on housing benefit performance standards.

Resolved

That the self-assessment score of 3 (Good) be endorsed. (CD(ES))

189 APPOINTMENT TO REMAINING VACANCIES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services on the appointment of representatives to the remaining vacancies on outside bodies for the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

Resolved

That appointments be made as follows:-

Outside Body	Appointee/s
South Essex Environmental Protection Advisory Group	Cllr D G Stansby
57 South Street Management Committee	Cllr Mrs L A Butcher Cllr J P Cottis (HAMS)

190 ROCHFORD DISTRICT & HALTERN TWINNING ASSOCIATION – MEMBERSHIP INVITATION

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on an invitation to join the Rochford District & Haltern Twinning Association.

It was noted that, should the Authority not take up the offer of membership, this would not preclude further connection with the Association as appropriate or prevent individual Members from joining.

On a motion, moved by Councillor J E Grey and seconded by Councillor C A Hungate, it was:-

Resolved

That the invitation for the Council to join the Rochford District & Haltern Twinning Association be declined. (CD(ES))

191 CROUCH HARBOUR AUTHORITY – FUNDING SUPPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit & Performance Management on funding support for the Crouch Harbour authority.

During discussion Members agreed that, from the perspective of partnership working, it would seem appropriate to expect the three District/Borough Councils to have equal involvement. The fact that cessation of activity by the Harbour Authority would mean that its role would fall to Councils emphasised the need to act.

It was recognised that it would be appropriate for any Member involved in meetings on the way forward to be fully briefed on all the issues in advance.

Councillor C G Seagers, the Council's appointee to the Harbour Authority, provided some clarification on the nature of the fee income received by the body and the nature of its relationship with marinas. It was noted that the Treasurer of the Harbour Authority was reviewing the possibilities for reducing costs. It was understood that there had been some discussion on the introduction of a full-time officer, but this would need to be clarified as part of future meetings.

Resolved

- (1) That there be communication with Maldon and Chelmsford Councils with a view to obtaining further support for the Crouch Harbour Authority together with standardised financial support.
- (2) That a meeting be requested with Lord Hanningfield to identify the future policy and commitment of Essex County Council to the Crouch Harbour Authority. This Council to be represented by the Leader of the Council, the Council's representative on the Crouch Harbour Authority and at least one of the Local County Councillors. (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 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

192 REVENUE & BENEFIT – TRAINING, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SERVICE ENHANCEMENT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on making a post permanent.

Members were pleased to note that the additional costs associated with the proposal could be met from funding to be received from Chelmsford and Maldon Councils. The post holder would be working equally for all three authorities.

Resolved

That post 33210 be made permanent, the cost to be met by deletion of post 33525 and contributions from Chelmsford and Maldon Councils. (CD(ES))

193 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S APPRAISAL

The Committee received the exempt note of the Chief Executives appraisal.

It was noted that, under the new Committee structure, the Member group undertaking the Chief Executive's appraisal would comprise Group Leaders, the Chairman of the Policy, Finance and Strategic Performance Committee and the Chairman of the Review Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Chairman

Date