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Minutes of the meeting of the **Corporate Resources Sub-Committee** held on **Tuesday 3 October 2000** when there were present:

Cllr C R Morgan – Chairman

Cllr R Adams  
Cllr R A Amner  
Cllr T G Cutmore  
Cllr Mrs J M Giles  
Cllr Mrs J Helson  
Cllr Mr S J Lemon

Cllr T Livings  
Cllr D A Weir  
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

### **VISITING MEMBERS**

Cllrs D R Helson and Mrs M J Webster

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P F A Webster

### **SUBSTITUTES**

Cllr J E Grey

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	Chief Executive
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
A Smith	Head of Administrative and Member Services
D Deeks	Head of Financial Services
Mrs E Chapman	Personnel Manager
G Brazendale	Committee Administrator

### **361 MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Members declared non-pecuniary interests in the items outlined below, with the reason for the interest given in brackets:-

- "Updated Strategy for Further/Higher Education in South Essex" – Minute 363 – Councillor Mrs M J Webster (governor of South East Essex Sixth Form College)
- National Non-Domestic Rating Discretionary Rate Relief – Minute 366 – Councillors T G Cutmore, Mrs J M Giles, T Livings, C R Morgan and Mrs M A Weir (involvement with local organisations to which rate relief had been granted)

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- Application for waiver of public entertainment licence fees - Lubbards Farm Rayleigh – Minute 370 – Councillor Mrs J M Giles (acquaintance with the applicant organisation)

## **362 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 26 July and 27 September 2000 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

## **363 UPDATED STRATEGY FOR EDUCATION IN SOUTH ESSEX**

The Chairman introduced and welcomed to the meeting Mr Geoff Arnott, Principal, South East Essex Sixth Form College (SEEVIC) and Professors Chris Green and Tony Powell from Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) who gave a presentation concerning proposals for providing further/higher education in South Essex.

Mr Arnott began by explaining SEEVIC's background, and the shift in emphasis over recent years from providing 'A' level courses to higher level/ vocational training, especially for mature students. The college had been in partnership with APU for eight years, and the primary aim of the two establishments was to widen participation in further and higher education in the region, which was currently below the national average in this respect. Professor Powell went on to explain that APU had established a separate campus on the SEEVIC site at Benfleet, recognising that local delivery, with ease of access and in familiar surroundings would help to encourage interest in higher education.

Professor Green emphasised APU's role as a regional university, seeking to provide locally both higher education and a wide range of vocational courses to remedy the "skills gaps" identified by employers and to allow people to change career direction by acquiring new skills. The university was seeking to strengthen links with local schools, employers and youth groups to widen awareness of the variety of further and higher education available. Foundation degrees, comprising two year courses had been developed to meet the requirements of local employers which would, it was anticipated, also serve to increase participation rates.

The Sub-Committee then raised a number of questions covering the following areas:-

- The role of the APU campus at Benfleet in reversing the net loss to the region of students wishing to progress to Higher Education
- The impact on participation in Higher Education of the need to pay course fees and the consequent financial advantages of local provision. The Benfleet campus was a visible reminder to local people that higher education was an achievable career possibility.

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- The proposed university at Southend and the possible impact upon SEEVIC. No decrease in students at the latter was anticipated as a result of any additional provision at Southend
  - The value of short introductory sessions for potential students to enhance their understanding of higher education.
  - Arrangements by SEEVIC and APU for marketing courses locally.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Sub-Committee, thanked Mr Arnott and Professors Green and Powell for their presentation, and they then left the Meeting.

### **364 MEMBERSHIP OF EAST OF ENGLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE**

The Chairman introduced and welcomed to the meeting Mr Brian Stewart, Regional Director of the East of England Local Government Conference who, at the Sub-Committee's request, had been invited to give a presentation outlining the benefits to the District Council of membership of the Conference.

Mr Stewart explained that the Conference comprised 6 County Councils, 4 Unitary Authorities and 44 District and Borough Councils throughout the Eastern Region. Its aims were to provide a "regional voice" for the area, to attract investment and funding; to act as a policy advocate and promote regional identity; to "add value", for example in European, planning and transportation issues; and to promote partnership working with a wide range of government and external organisations. From April 2001, the Conference would replace SERPLAN and SCEALA as the region's planning body.

In response to Member questions, Mr Stewart indicated that the Conference received an annual sum of £822,000 from the Member Councils, of which Rochford's contribution would be £6,788. Mr Stewart considered that regional planning/transportation issues provided the Conference's main focus from which participants could benefit.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Sub-Committee, thanked Mr Stewart for his presentation, and he then left the Meeting.

### **365 CODE OF PRACTICE ON VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY ACTION**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which invited Members' comments on a draft Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action, produced by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. A copy of the draft Code was appended to the report.

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Comments had been sought by this Council from a cross section of voluntary organisations as shown in Appendix A to the report, and Members received the following summary of the six submissions received:

- All generally support the Code of Practice.
- The sections highlighted as being particularly good were 20,21,33,38,75
- There was strong support for the recognition of volunteers and the contribution they make to society.
- The independence of the voluntary sector was important, with its ability to determine its own policy but also to act in partnership with statutory bodies and funding agencies.
- Relying on short term funding made strategic planning difficult.
- There were problems in relying on voluntary services when they exist to cover the deficiencies of statutory services. Many tasks performed by volunteers should receive remuneration. Sufficient funding should be provided for services on which the public depend.
- Younger people need to be made aware of volunteering, and the positive experiences and personal rewards that can be obtained.
- The danger of creating an environment that is too formal for volunteers. The freedom to enter and leave a commitment is important to encourage flexibility.

## **RECOMMENDED**

That this Council's response to the draft Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action incorporates the comments received from local voluntary organisations, as outlined above (HFS)

### **366 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATING DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenues and Housing Management, which reviewed the Council's Discretionary Rate Relief Policy.

Members were reminded that Sections 43,45,47 and 48, of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 provide, for three types of relief which might be granted to charitable and kindred organisations. These were:

- **Mandatory Relief**

This relief is available to all registered charities where the premises they occupy is used wholly or mainly for charitable purposes.

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- **Discretionary ‘top-up’ of Mandatory Relief**

This relief is available to those organisations that currently enjoy the Mandatory Relief and allows the Council to increase the level up to the full 100%.

Currently the Council’s policy is to award this relief to Scouts, Guides or Youth Activities; the provision of welfare in the community; and the provision of Village or Community Halls.

- **Discretionary Relief**

This type of relief is designed primarily for voluntary and other non-profit making organisations.

The Sub-Committee received details, shown in an appendix to the report, of all organisations which are currently receiving Rate Relief, together with the percentage relief granted. The total amount of relief granted in 2000/2001 was £518,917 of which the cost to the General Fund was £18,983. Members concurred with the suggestion of the Chairman that the extent of rate relief awarded should be publicised. The Sub Committee was also informed of Central Government guidance which outlined the criteria which Authorities should use when assessing applications the Rate Relief, and the “Wednesbury Principles”, established as a result of case law, which set a legal framework for consideration of requests for discretionary relief.

In summary it was noted that this Council still follows the “National Guidelines” namely Access (Para 5.4), Provision of Facilities (Para 5.5) and Other Considerations (Para 5.6) when determining applications for Discretionary Rate Relief. The current application pro forma and associated guidance notes were appended for Members’ information.

It was agreed that the Council’s criteria for consideration of rate relief should reflect the following:

- The need to take heed of the financial status of the organisation
- The requirement for the Council’s reasons in the case of refusals to be recorded, should there be a subsequent appeal through the High Court.
- Adherence to the “Wednesbury Principles”, where matters that are immaterial to any application should not be taken into account when considering cases.
- Sports clubs should be registered as a member of the Rochford Sports Council.
- Organisations should, where possible, explain in their application how they are able to support the Council’s corporate strategy.

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- Where clubs/organisations have less than 50% membership resident in the Rochford District area, the amount of relief will be reduced.

In response to Member questions, the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) advised that:

- Foundation schools would qualify for mandatory relief of 80%
- A review of outstanding applications for discretionary relief would be undertaken at the December meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee.

It was agreed that for discretionary rate relief, applicants should be assessed, among other things, upon the extent to which their organisation met the aims of the Council's Corporate Strategy. On a motion by Councillor C R Morgan and seconded by Councillor T G Cutmore, it was

### **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) That when considering applications for Mandatory Relief the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) continues to exercise his delegated authority to grant this Relief.
- (2) That when considering applications for Discretionary Rate Relief:-
  - The Financial Status of each club/organisation be scrutinised and a copy of their latest accounts be submitted to the Sub-Committee.
  - The Central Government's "National Guidelines" continue to be followed
  - That "Top-Up" Relief continue to be granted to those organisations listed earlier in this Minute.
  - That consideration be taken as to whether the organisation supports the Council's Corporate Strategy.
  - If Rate Relief is refused, the Minutes must specify the reasons for refusal.
  - The "Wednesbury Principles" of reasonableness should always be observed when considering cases.
  - That sports club in particular must be registered members of the Rochford Sports Council.
  - Where membership of clubs/organisation have less than 50% of their members living within the area their relief be reduced pro rata.
  - All Council "handouts" concerning relief be revised to reflect the above recommendations. (HRHM)

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## **367 COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITY FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative & Members Services which invited Members to determine which Committee should assume responsibility for operational IT issues.

Members were reminded that the Council's Information Technology consultants, Vantagepoint, had recommended that the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee should be given delegated power to determine all operational IT matters. Subsequently Finance and General Purposes Committee had agreed that the proposal be considered by Council in this municipal year.

Under the current scheme of delegated powers, operational IT matters could be considered by all Service Committees as well as the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee. Vantagepoint had suggested that this arrangement could result in corporate IT and other resource issues not being considered fully before decisions to proceed with IT projects were taken. To overcome this situation, Vantagepoint had recommended that, in future, Service Committees should have power to consider, but not determine, IT implications arising from the development of services. Instead a recommendation should be made to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee to ensure that the full resource implications be taken into account and that decisions would be taken with reference to the IS/IT strategy that is currently being prepared.

Vantagepoint went on to recommend that whilst strategic issues should continue to be determined by the Finance and General Purposes Committee on the recommendation of this Sub-Committee, operational IT matters should be determined by the Sub-Committee alone.

### **RECOMMENDED**

That the scheme of delegated powers to Committees and Sub-Committees be amended to provide:

- (1) That Service Committees consider, and make recommendations to Corporate Resources Sub-Committee concerning, the IT implications arising from the development of services.
- (2) That Corporate Resources Sub-Committee be delegated authority to determine all operational IT matters, and to make recommendations on issues affecting IT strategy and policy to Finance and General Purposes Committee. (HAMS)

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## **368 MEMBERS' POST**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services, which reviewed the present arrangements for the despatch of mail to Members.

The Sub-Committee was reminded that, in April this year, a system of delivering mail to Members on a Monday and Thursday each week had been introduced, supplemented by ad hoc deliveries as required. This replaced the previous arrangement of a single despatch on a Friday each week with additional deliveries as necessary. A summary of the principal reasons for introducing these changes was appended to the report. Members were informed that, since then, surveys had been carried out through the Members' Bulletin to elicit views on the suitability of, and satisfaction with, the revised arrangements.

The most recent survey had indicated that 18 Members were satisfied with the current arrangements and 5 were dissatisfied. Among the latter there was a common desire to return to one delivery each week.

The Sub-Committee agreed, following discussion, that the current arrangements should be retained, but raised a number of issues which the Head of Administrative and Member Services undertook to follow up with the Couriers and staff at the Civic Suite.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the current arrangements for a twice-weekly delivery of Members' post, on Mondays and Thursdays, be retained (HAMS)

## **369 SOUTH ESSEX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) which sought Members' views on an invitation from the South Essex Chamber of Commerce for the Council to take up membership.

A range of possible benefits were outlined in an appendix to the report, but Members agreed that these were not sufficient to warrant Membership.

### **RECOMMENDED**

That this Council should not become a member of the South Essex Chamber of Commerce (CD(F & ES))



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**370 APPLICATION FOR WAIVER OF PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT LICENCE FEES – LUBARDS FARM, RAYLEIGH**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care which invited Members to determine an application for the waiver of Public Entertainment Licence fees relating to a barn dance being organised by the Parochial Church Council of St Nicholas Church, Rawreth. The event would take place on Saturday, 28 October 2000 at Lubards Farm, Hullbridge Road, Rayleigh.

Copies of the application, the Church Council's audited accounts and further supporting information concerning the use of funds raised by a similar event in 1999, were appended to the report.

Members noted that the objective of the barn dance was to raise monies for the Church Renovation Fund, which would be used towards the installation of toilets and a water supply at the Church.

**RECOMMENDED**

That a fee waiver of 100% be granted if a Public Entertainment Licence is obtained. (HHHCC)

**371 BEST VALUE REVIEW – ASSET MANAGEMENT**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) which provided an update on the progress of the Best Value Review relating to Asset Management, and sought agreement to the involvement of a small group of Members in the Review.

It was noted that the Review Team had reached a critical point in the Best Value Review process where comparison and challenge would begin. Members' input was seen as fundamental to enable the review to move forward, reach its conclusion and to report to the next meeting of this Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee therefore agreed to nominate four Members, one from each Party, to join the Review Team over the next 2/3 weeks. The leader of the Liberal Democrats indicated that this Group's representative would be Councillor D R Helson.

**RESOLVED:**

That four Members, one from each Party, be nominated to assist in the Best Value Asset Management Reviews. (CD(LPA))

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## **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

### **Resolved**

That the public and the press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **372 SINGLE STATUS AGREEMENT & JOB EVALUATION**

The Sub-Committee considered the confidential report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services which provided current information on the progress of, and resource issues associated with, implementing the Single Status Agreement (SSA) in the Council.

Members noted that a key requirement of Part 3 of the SSA is that authorities review their pay and grading structures to ensure compliance with the principles of equal pay for work of equal value and to ensure that they are non-discriminatory.

With the benefit of a revised job evaluation scheme and software, upon which national consultations had been held, the Council would shortly be ready to commence the job evaluation process. However, there were concerns as to the capacity to undertake the work entirely from within the existing officer resource base, and thus an allocation of additional funding was requested to recruit temporary support staff to ensure that the task would be completed according to timetable.

Members considered making budgetary provision in the next financial year, given that it is estimated that the evaluation may take some nine months to complete and agreed that this be considered further by the Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee.

### **RESOLVED**

That the progress made to date be noted and the potential budgetary implications of job evaluation, including the one-off costs of undertaking the process and its longer-term implications, be considered by the Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee. (HAMS)

## **373 PART-TIME WORKERS – PRO-RATA HOLIDAY**

The Sub-Committee considered the confidential report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services relating to the implications of the new Part-Time Work Regulations for the leave entitlement of some part time staff on public/statutory holidays, and the possible protection of existing arrangements.

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**RESOLVED**

That the UNISON request be agreed and the existing conditions of service of the staff affected be protected until 30 June 2002. (HAMS)

**374 OFFICE & WINDOW CLEANING CONTRACTS**

The Sub-Committee considered the confidential report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services which invited Members to approve the extension of the current office and window cleaning contracts until 24 August 2001.

It was noted that these contracts were last let in 1997 and 1998 and expire on 3 February 2001 and 4 December 2000. Mayfield Cleaning Contractors holds both contracts, the terms of which would allow for extension on existing terms and conditions.

**RESOLVED**

That the office and window cleaning contracts with Mayfield Cleaning Contractors be extended on current terms and conditions until 24 August 2001. (HAMS)

The meeting closed at 9.02 p.m.

Chairman.....

Date.....