

Policy & Finance Committee – 13 September 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **13 September 2005** when there were present:-

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

Cllr C I Black
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr Mrs M J Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs J A Mockford, Mrs M A Starke, M G B Starke and J Thomass.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr Mrs L Hungate

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
R Crofts - Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
G Woolhouse - Head of Health, Housing and Community Care
A Bugeja - Head of Legal Services
J Bradley - Trainee Solicitor
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

332 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

333 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D G Stansby declared a personal interest in the item on the Essex Countywide Concessionary Travel Scheme by virtue of holding a bus pass.

Councillor C G Seagers declared a personal interest in the item on the Star Partnership Youth Football Project by virtue of being a supporter of a football club identified in the report and a personal interest in the item on Commissioning a Patient-led NHS – Formal Consultation by virtue of his daughter's employment with the Havering Primary Care Trust.

Councillors C A Hungate and Mrs L Hungate each declared a personal interest in the item on the Learning and Skills Council 'Making it Happen' Consultation Report by virtue of former/current involvement with the teaching profession respectively.

334 ESSEX COUNTYWIDE CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the Concessionary Travel Scheme out-turn for 2004/05 and on changes to the scheme as a result of a Government budget announcement in March 2005.

Responding to questions the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advised that, whilst it was hoped that Government grant monies for new proposals would be contained within the next Revenue Support Grant, the nature of the Grant meant that it could be difficult to identify.

During debate it was observed that endorsement of report recommendations would not compromise the Council's commitment to the philosophy of a Countywide Scheme. The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor C A Hungate and seconded by Mrs L Hungate, that the Local Government Association should be required to ensure that individual Councils are fully funded under the Government protocols for policy changes. It was also agreed that a press release should be issued at the appropriate time indicating that proceeding with a Countywide Scheme would involve additional costs for the District Council.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council agrees to an initial commitment to remaining in the existing Countywide Scheme.
- (2) That the final decision be taken at the January Budget Meeting.
- (3) That the Local Government Association be required to ensure that individual Councils are fully funded under the Government protocols for policy changes.
- (4) That a press release be issued at the appropriate time indicating that proceeding with a Countywide Scheme will involve additional costs for the District Council. (HRHM)

335 STAR PARTNERSHIP YOUTH FOOTBALL PROJECT

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) seeking approval to support funding of £10,000 per annum for three years for the Star Partnership Youth Football Project.

During discussion it was observed that this is a particularly commendable community project that would reflect well on all involved. Responding to questions, the Chief Executive advised on indices of deprivation as they related to the District.

Resolved

That support funding of £10,000 per annum be committed for three years from the Crime and Disorder budget within current estimates, subject to the overall project being successful in its bid submission. (CD(F&ES))

336 COMMISSIONING A PATIENT-LED NHS – INFORMAL CONSULTATION

Note: Councillor Mrs M J Webster declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of an involvement with the pastoral side of mental health issues.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care outlining proposed changes in local NHS structures and suggesting a response to an informal consultation being conducted by the Essex Strategic Health Authority.

During debate concern was expressed that the proposed change seemed to signal a move away from the previously established localism agenda. It was observed that smaller Primary Care Trusts had been introduced only four years previously and the introduction of larger bodies could be seen as a retrograde step in terms of an arrangement that is close to the patient and enables local communities to implement services. It was also observed that views about the value of retaining localism could be associated with ambulance trust proposals and that it is a pity there is not more focus on service delivery rather than re-organisation.

It was agreed that it would be appropriate for any review to include partner organisations to facilitate consideration of the possibilities for rationalisation across public bodies.

Resolved

That the Essex Strategic Health Authority be advised that this Council wishes to see the retention of a Primary Care Trust for Castle Point and Rochford (and specifically not a body that includes Southend) to ensure best fit with other local structures, particularly Local Strategic Partnerships, and to ensure effective communication with local people. This Council is concerned that the options appear to preclude the previously established localism agenda, and would suggest that any review include partner organisations to facilitate consideration of the possibilities for rationalisation across public bodies. (HHHCC)

337 LAND NORTH OF FEATHERBY WAY, ROCHFORD

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal Services on a request from Nevendon (South East) Cars to purchase a piece of land in the Council's ownership adjoining the company's car breaking yard in Purdeys Industrial Estate, Rochford.

It was noted that, should any buildings be introduced at the site in the future, they would attract business rates and that any legal agreement associated with disposal would include a covenant to ensure that the Council would receive the benefit of any unanticipated betterment at the prevailing market value.

The Committee concurred with the observation of a Member that it was possible that the site could be used to achieve access into Welton Way at some point in the future and that the land should be retained by the Council on the basis of potential future value.

Resolved

That the land north of Featherby Way, Rochford be retained in Council ownership. (HLS)

338 CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU - ROCHFORD OFFICE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal Services on a proposal by the Citizens Advice Bureau to extend the office premises at Back Lane, Rochford and an associated request relating to a new lease.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- Any representations associated with the planning application would be a matter for the Planning Services Committee to consider.
- If the Council was to consider expending its own capital there would probably be a need to review the Capital Programme, which was currently very restricted. The Citizens Advice Bureau was in a better placed position than the Council to achieve external funding for this type of project, being able to approach a number of institutions.
- Any new lease would include standard review clauses and, if terminated, assignment would not be permitted without Council consent.
- There is a direct relationship between the rental income associated with the lease and funding assistance given to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

During discussion Members agreed that it would be appropriate to ensure that any lease documentation clearly identified that ownership of the premises (including the extension) would remain with the Council throughout and at lease conclusion.

Resolved

That, subject to the grant of planning approval and a clear indication in lease documentation that ownership of the premises (including the extension) remains with the Council throughout and at lease conclusion, a new lease be granted to the Citizens Advice Bureau for a term of 21 years at a market rental and on such other terms and conditions as the Head of Legal Services considers appropriate. (HLS)

339 REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Committee considered the report the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on proposed changes to the financial regulations.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director advised that, if paid in cheques are not honoured, officers automatically insist on cash payments.

It was noted that the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) would undertake a full review of the Council's Constitution (including the Financial Regulations) following any revision to the management structure and would report on any required changes as appropriate.

Recommended to Council:-

that the changes to Financial Regulations, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed. (CD(F&ES))

340 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE INSPECTION – CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on a consultation paper from the Corporate Governance Inspectorate.

The Committee agreed some inclusions to the proposed responses under paragraphs 3.5 and 3.8, moved by Councillor C I Black and seconded by Councillor J R F Mason. The Committee also agreed an inclusion to the proposed response under paragraph 5.6, moved by Councillor C A Hungate and seconded by Councillor C I Black, together with the suggestion of a Member that the response should include observations around how the nature of the proposed inspection arrangements could be seen as typifying concerns that the Council has about retention of control and the low level of trust that the Government appears to have in local authorities.

Resolved

That the officer comments within the Committee report form the basis of this Council's response to the Audit Commission, subject to the following:-

- Inclusion of the words ‘and it should be recognised that all Councils are democratically elected’ at the end of the final line under report paragraph 3.5.
- Inclusion of the sentence ‘Citizens have the right to elect the Council’s Administration and this right should not be diminished by this process’ at the end of the officer comment under paragraph 3.8.
- Inclusion of the words ‘publicly and transparently’ after the word ‘demonstrate’ in the final line of the officer comment under paragraph 5.6.
- Inclusion of an observation that the nature of the inspection arrangements within the consultation paper can be seen as typifying concerns that the Council has about retention of local control and the low level of trust that the Government appears to have in local authorities. Constant detailed questioning of a Council’s every move can also have implications for the Council’s relationship with the electorate. (CD(F&ES))

341 LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL ‘MAKING IT HAPPEN’ CONSULTATION REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the Learning and Skills Councils broad findings of the Strategic Area Review of Essex and how they intend to respond to consultation.

It was agreed that this Council’s response should include reference to the fact that the intent of the ‘Making it Happen’ document does not seem to be matched by the reality of reduced funding for further/higher education.

Resolved

That the officer comments within the Committee report form the basis of this Council’s response to the consultation paper, subject to the inclusion of comment around the fact that the intent of the ‘Making it Happen’ document does not seem to be matched by the reality of reduced funding for further/higher education and to the incorporation of figures to highlight this.
(CE)

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.

Chairman

Date