

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 13 May 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **13 May 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)
Cllr J Thomass (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr Mrs S A Harper
Cllr T Livings

Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr C R Morgan

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr C I Black

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P A Capon and Mrs H L A Glynn.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
R J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
D Deeks	Head of Financial Services
S Logan	Revenue & Benefits Manager
M Martin	Committee Administrator

241 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman welcomed Members to the final meeting of this municipal year.

242 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr T G Cutmore declared a personal interest in item 7 by virtue of being employed by a bank.

243 HOUSING BENEFIT SURVEY – FINAL RESULTS

The Committee received the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management and noted with pleasure the full results of the biennial Housing Benefit Customer Survey.

Members were advised that:-

- the simplification of the benefits claim form would result in the number of pages halving. Whilst certain statutory questions had to be applied, Local Authorities were able to tailor the form to suit the needs of the claimants.
- The benefit claim form was accredited by the Plain English Campaign.
- Officers were available to help with the completion of forms where necessary.

Members wished to stress that, whilst they welcomed the increases in on-line services, these would never take the place of the opportunity for residents to make face-to-face contact with the Council. However, the use of such services would enable human resources to be deployed where they were most needed.

Resolved

That a press release be issued indicating the excellent results that had been achieved through the Housing Benefit survey and complementing staff on their efficiency. (HRHM)

244 ESSEX NET SAVERS CREDIT UNION

Note: Cllr C R Morgan declared a personal interest by virtue of being a shareholder of a commercial bank.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services, which invited Members to consider the possibility of establishing a Credit Union within Rochford District.

Members noted that the current policy of the Council would normally be to direct residents towards main stream banking. They can then deal with payment by cheques, access other banking and apply for loans. A credit union would have some advantage of providing credit for small sums of money, which was more difficult to find in the commercial market.

Members were advised that the Credit Union Development Agency's business plan indicated that a substantial turnover would be required to produce sufficient revenue to make the project self-financing. Public funding would be required for the first three years.

Members were in general agreement that the Council was likely to be the main funding provider and this was not currently part of the Council's corporate plan, the proposal should not, at this stage, be supported.

Cllr Morgan wished it to be recorded that he did not share this view.

Recommended to the Policy and Finance Committee

That this Council does not, at this stage, support the setting up of a local community branch of the Essex Savers Net Credit Union. (HFS)

245 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CO-ORDINATOR

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on specific Home Office funding available to employ an Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator in the District for a period of two years.

Members were advised that:-

- if appointed, the Co-ordinator would work closely with Rayleigh Police Division and the Co-ordinator appointed for Castle Point Borough Council.
- the County Council had indicated that a sum of £20,000 was being allocated to each Crime and Disorder Partnership for further initiatives in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour that would be used as a 'working fund' by the postholder.
- the position would be a fixed term contract of two years, during which the effectiveness of the position could be evaluated.

Members were grateful for the provision of funding which would enable this new position to be created and expressed the hope that this would start to alleviate the fear of reprisal that often prevented residents from reporting incidents of anti-social behaviour to the Police.

Members were reassured that the process around anti-social behaviour would be monitored. The Co-ordinator would consider all aspects of anti-social behaviour regardless of the age of the perpetrator. Members were pleased to note that this should facilitate linkages and contacts with the local Police division, whilst the Council would retain the overall management responsibility and control of the individual.

Recommended to Council

That the District Council employs an Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator for two years at 22.5 hours per week using the Home Office funding granted for the financial years 2004/05 and 2005/06. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.31 pm.

Chairman

Date