

# **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 20 January 2004**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **20 January 2004** when there were present:-

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

Cllr P A Capon  
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn  
Cllr Mrs S A Harper

Cllr T Livings  
Cllr C R Morgan

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs J R Lumley

## **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	Chief Executive
J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
S Clarkson	Head of Revenue and Housing Management
S Fowler	Head of Administrative & Member Services
M Martin	Committee Administrator

## **30 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4 December 2003 and 9 December 2003 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **31 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INSTALLATION IN FREIGHT HOUSE CAR PARK, ROCHFORD**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management, which invited Members to consider the siting of a Telecommunications Mast in the Freight House Car Park.

During Member discussion the following was noted:-

- no responses had been received from any of the residents in West Street who had been consulted on the proposals.
- Orange intended to place 5 of the smaller type of mast within the Rochford Town area rather than one large one.
- It was likely that the company would need to submit a “deemed consent” application rather than a full planning application.
- Refusal could only be made on the grounds of the siting or appearance of the mast.

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Members were pleased that the smaller type of mast was being considered with correspondingly lower emissions and indicated that, as the intention was to conceal this within a lamp standard, it would make sense to ensure that it was kept lit.

The Head of Service agreed to let Members know which existing Orange installation these smaller ones were intended to replace.

### **Recommended to the Policy & Finance Committee**

- (1) That consideration be given to leasing a small parcel of land in Freight House car park for the installation of telecommunications equipment.
- (2) That the mast be concealed within a fully operational lamp standard.

## **32 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Head of Financial Services on treasury management for the year 2002/2003.

Members noted that loans from the Public Works Loans Board offered more advantageous rates of interest. The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) agreed to let Members know what rates of interest were payable on the loans.

The majority of the Debt interest relates to the Housing Revenue Account and attracts Government subsidy.

## **33 ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) which suggested a framework of policies and guidelines for the successful implementation of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) 2000 coming into force on 1 January 2005.

Members noted that:-

- Implementation of this Act would form a key element of forthcoming work for this Committee
- The human resource implications, which were significant, would be the subject of further reports to this Committee.
- Initially, it was necessary to establish the high level policies and put in place the technology needed to drive them.
- Any requests received in writing by any member of staff from anywhere in the world for information must be treated as a request under the FOI Act. Provided the information is held by the Council, it would have 20 days in which to provide it. Therefore extensive training throughout the

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organisation was an essential element of the implementation programme.

- This Council had responded with interest to a suggestion from the County Council that a network of local authorities be set up to address common issues.
- The phased implementation of electronic document management would commence with planning and building control.
- The Council's IEG 3 statement had been submitted and qualified for funding.
- The preferred Comino electronic system would be affordable within grant funding limits.
- The pilot phase including computer hardware would be the most expensive at approximately £50,000, with an annual maintenance fee in the region of £20,000.
- Savings would be made in the medium term as a result of staff efficiencies.
- The initial task would be to reduce the amount of duplicate and unnecessary paper records currently held.
- Information contained on microfiche, which needed to be retained, could be converted to another form for storage purposes.
- The FOI Act affected all public bodies including Parish Councils.

Concern was expressed as to the extent of confidential information that would be made available and problems that might arise with regard to data sharing. Members were advised that there are exemptions under the Act. For example, personal information such as staff records and council tax information would be covered by exemption and remain subject to the Data Protection Act legislation.

Members felt that training on the complexities of the Act, prior to it coming into force, was essential for both officers and Members.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the following guidelines be endorsed:
  - Model Competencies Framework
  - Record Disposal Guidelines
- (2) That further reports on the human resources implications of records management and active records procedures be considered by the Committee.
- (3) That training for Members be made available around the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act. (CD(LPA))

### **Recommended to the Policy & Finance Committee**

- (1) That the following policies and guidelines be adopted:

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- Data Protection Policy
- Records Management Policy Statement
- Electronic Record Management Policy
- Information Technology Code of Practice
- Essex Trust Charter

- (2) That the Government Office of Commerce GCat procedure be used to acquired the Comino Universal Government corporate document management and workflow system.

### **34 OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER – CONSULTATION ON CONTENT OF BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLANS**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which detailed the proposals put forward by Government for changes to the content of performance plans to be produced by local authorities in 2004 and subsequent years.

#### **Resolved**

That the comments appended to the report be forwarded as this Council's response to the consultation, with a copy sent to the Local Government Association. (CE)

The meeting closed at 9.14 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....