

Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 15 March 2007

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee** held on **15 March 2007** when there were present:-

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

Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr Mrs M A Starke

Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr J Thomass

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J E Grey, Mrs J A Mockford and R A Oatham.

VISITING

Cllr J Cottis

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 Fowler	-	Head of Administrative & Member Services
J Pritchard	-	Housing Manager
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

ALSO PRESENT

K Hennessy - Sungard Vivista Area Manager

76 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

77 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Progress on Decisions Schedule.

(a) The Future Development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park (Minute 299/06)

It was noted that the submission of the planning application to extend the park was awaiting agreement around the highways aspects of the proposal between the Council's Highway Consultants and the County Council's

Highway Engineers. Once that was confirmed the application, together with supporting documentation, would be submitted.

(b) Land Adjoining 130 High Street, Great Wakering (Minute 302/06)

It was noted that the Council has a duty to the public purse not to dispose of land/property at less than market value. Whilst it may be possible to appoint an independent arbiter, there would be little merit in such an approach when there are significant differences between valuations.

(c) Evaluation of CCTV Provision (Minute 429/06)

It was noted that the removal of two analogue cameras from Great Wakering appeared to have had no influence on Police statistics relating to reported crime in the area.

(d) Planning Appeal – Retail Food Store and Associated Development at Former Park School, Rawreth Lane, Rayleigh (Minute 209/06)

It was noted that the principal resource implications in connection with this appeal were the officer and Member submissions in respect of the Council's case. Officers would advise Members as to any build programme received in connection with the site.

(e) Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Sites (Minute 375/06)

It was confirmed that officers intended to submit their regular update report to Members prior to the summer recess.

78 SUNGARD VIVISTA UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services that introduced the six-monthly progress report from the IT Contractor, Sungard Vivista (SGV).

Kay Hennessy, SGV Area Manager, who was in attendance to present the progress report, was welcomed to the meeting.

Responding to questions, the Head of Administrative and Member Services and the Chief Executive advised that:-

- Rochford is amongst some 200 local authorities using Pickwick elections software. At the current time, there is specific concern that untested signature matching software designed by Pickwick to meet the requirements of the 2006 Electoral Administration Act was not due to be available to local authorities until 2 April 2007. Concern had been raised at a high level at a recent Association of Electoral Administrators' Conference and the Council's Chief Executive, in his role as Returning Officer, had written to the software supplier regarding this issue. There was an associated concern around the practicalities

of implementing aspects of the latest electoral legislation, which did not appear to be appropriately robust or risk averse.

- It was intended that proposals for a revised IT Strategy would be submitted to the first appropriate meeting in the new Municipal Year. Whilst the question of provision of IT facilities for Members would be included, such provision would need to be the subject of prioritisation in the context of other projects.
- Whilst the Government's stated intention had been that online voting facilities would be in place by the next General Election, the indications from pilot schemes is that this would be unlikely.
- It was accepted that the response rate of 5% to the customer satisfaction survey of District Council staff was disappointing and officers would endeavour to ensure that the response rate to future surveys was higher.

Responding to a question the SGV Area Manager advised that the decision to procure a new anti-virus package was associated with the cumbersome, slow and resource intensive nature of the previous package. There had been no virus on the Council's systems.

Reference was made to how pleasing it was to see that previous concerns about the turnover of SGV staff had been addressed and that there was now a continuity of staffing and service. It was also good to see that SGV had completed the removal of all the remaining Windows 98 machines and intended to have upgraded all the Windows 2000 machines by September 2007. It was noted that this activity was all part of contractual arrangements.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the Sungard Vivista progress report in relation to the IT contract be noted.
- (2) That a further update report be received in six months time. (HAMS)

79 INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY USER POLICY

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services seeking approval to a revised Information Communication Technology User Policy.

Responding to questions, the Head of Administrative and Member Services advised that:-

- The policy could be amended to provide that peripheral devices/media can be used if they have first been checked by the Council.
- The policy would extend to any user of the Council's systems, including external auditors, inspectors, consultants and Members.

- Emails from the public to Members relating to their Councillor role would not fall into the 'political lobbying' category.

Resolved

- (1) That, subject to replacement of the wording of paragraphs 7.5 and 7.6 with wording that prohibits the connecting of peripheral devices to the Council system or using media on the system that do not belong to Rochford District Council unless the devices/media has first been checked by the Council, the ICT user policy, as attached at Appendix 1 of the report, be adopted.
- (2) That the policy be reviewed every two years. (HAMS)

80 VISUAL IDENTITY

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services which proposed the adoption of a revised corporate Visual Identity to raise the profile of the Council and to provide consistency in the way that the Council communicates with residents, partner organisations and anyone seeking information about the area.

Members concurred with the observation of the Chairman that, from a resource perspective, it was pleasing to see that proposals had been developed by Council staff with no cost incurred for the use of external consultancy. Reference was made to how the intended use of colours would minimise costs and to the value of the intention to phase in new designs over a period of time to avoid incurring additional costs. It was observed that, by its nature, a leaf design implies an element of permanence.

Specific reference was made to Councillor ID badges. It was observed that it could be appropriate for these to be as durable/robust as possible. It was also observed that some organisations produce cards with a scanning capability for the purpose of gaining entry to buildings. It was noted that the recently approved budget included provision for the introduction of such a system of door entry.

Resolved

That the proposed Visual Identity, as set out at Appendix 1 of the report, be adopted. (HAMS)

81 DUTCH COTTAGE, CROWN HILL, RAYLEIGH

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal Services on arrangements for the management of the Dutch Cottage and options for safeguarding its future following consultation with the Town Council, Civic Society, National Trust and Dutch Cottage Management Committee.

In presenting the report the Corporate Director (Internal Services) referred to a letter received from the Clerk of Rayleigh Town Council on 14 March 2007

Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 15 March 2007

setting out the Town Council's case and containing a 162 person petition. This had been furnished to Members of the Committee via the Member drop.

During discussion the Chairman referred to a recent meeting at which the Town Council's enthusiasm had been clear. It was observed that it is important to recognise that arrangements associated with the Dutch Cottage are entirely separate to those associated with the transfer of the Council's housing stock to a housing association.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised that questions around matters such as arrangements for rent collection could be put to the Dutch Cottage Management Committee.

Members concurred with the observation of the Chairman that, should current arrangements be retained, it would be appropriate to invite Rayleigh Town Council to take a seat on the Dutch Cottage Management Committee.

On a motion, moved by Councillor K A Gibbs and seconded by Councillor S G Seagers, it was:-

Resolved

That ownership and custodian trustee arrangements for the Dutch Cottage, Crown Hill, Rayleigh remain with the District Council, Rayleigh Town Council to be invited to take a seat on the Dutch Cottage Management Committee.
(HLS)

82 GERSHON EFFICIENCY SAVINGS – 2007/08

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management, on the submission of a statement to Government on achieving the savings required under the Gershon Initiative.

It was noted that there would be a future report on savings achieved during 2006/07 following the closure of the accounts and savings were expected from the new procurement arrangements for buying IT equipment. It was also noted that the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management had only just received revised guidance on efficiencies from the Government and this may necessitate changes to the submission which would be agreed with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive.

Responding to questions, the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management advised that:-

- The identification of cashable savings associated with the recycling service had no implications for Council policy whereby the recycling service sees the direct benefit of any savings.
- Savings do not necessarily have to be identified within the auspices of the Gershon initiative.

- Information had been contributed to the Local Government Association for its submission to Government regarding future Government funding and the concerns about potential significant increases in future targets. Information had also been supplied to the Society of District Treasurers which was lobbying on the same matter. As previously identified, Rochford District Council was at a disadvantage when compared to a number of authorities that are able to outsource their key services and include the savings in their Gershon submission by virtue of having already outsourced a number of services at an early stage.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposals set out under Part 3 of the report be included in the Annual Efficiency Statement for 2007/08.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree any changes to the Statement and sign off the submission.
- (3) That there be an associated press release and article in the Council's newspaper, Rochford District Matters. (HFAPM)

83 BYELAW TO REGULATE BALL GAMES WITHIN SOUTHEND ROAD CAR PARK, HOCKLEY

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the introduction of a Byelaw to regulate ball games in the Southend Road Car Park, Hockley.

It was noted that, where the report referred to Council car parks, this should have been specifically to the Southend Road Car Park, Hockley.

During discussion it was observed that it was of particular concern that disturbance and nuisance associated with ball games at this location was occurring in the middle of the night.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Internal Services) advised that:-

- It would be possible in the future to consider adding additional areas to the byelaw schedule if evidence for so doing is available. Proposals had been developed on the basis of advice from the Police that there is no existing statutory provision to address the problem. If there is such provision it would not be possible to introduce a byelaw.
- Specific detail on the fine associated with level 2 on the standard scale could be provided.

It was noted that opinions can vary on the fine levels that are appropriate to act as a deterrent and that the information gathering that the Police would

Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 15 March 2007

undertake in association with enforcing such a byelaw could prove of value to the various agencies seeking to target and address anti-social behaviour.

Recommended to Council:-

- (1) That this Authority proceed with the statutory process for the introduction of the proposed District of Rochford (Byelaw for Good Rule and Government) as attached to the report and that the Head of Legal Services be authorised to effect such amendments thereto as may be necessary, and any amendment to the model form of byelaws.
- (2) That, subject to no objections being received to the Notice of Intention to apply for confirmation of the proposed byelaw, confirmation of the proposed byelaw be sought from the Secretary of State. (CD(ES))

84 57 SOUTH STREET, ROCHFORD

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the future use of 57 South Street, Rochford.

Members agreed that, in terms of location, this was a property of some prominence and that, notwithstanding the need to retain value, there would be merit in introducing a restrictive covenant relating to appropriate development of the building.

Resolved

- (1) That, subject to the introduction of a restrictive covenant relating to appropriate development of the building, the Council dispose of 57 South Street, Rochford at the most advantageous price following expiry of the current lease to Essex County Council in July 2007.
- (2) That, subject to (1) above, a design brief be prepared and outline planning consent for residential development sought. (CD(ES))

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

Chairman

Date

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