

# **FINANCE & PROCEDURES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **- 23 July 2002**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **23 July 2002** when there were present:-

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)

Cllr T Livings  
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley  
Cllr Mrs E Marlow  
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr G A Mockford  
Cllr C G Seagers  
Cllr M G B Starke

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren – Chief Executive  
R J Honey – Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)  
D Deeks – Head of Financial Services  
S Fowler – Head of Administrative & Member Services  
H Drye – Corporate Policy Manager  
S Rom – Economic Development Officer  
M Martin – Committee Administrator

### **355 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 June 2002 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **356 OUTSTANDING ISSUES**

The Committee received the schedule relating to previous decisions.

#### **Matters Arising**

#### **Rayleigh Operatic & Dramatic Society (RODS) – Update on Scenery Store**

Members noted that a planning application had still not been received and expressed concern at the apparent delay. The Chief Executive agreed that a letter would be sent to RODS expressing this Council's concern at the delay in submitting a planning application and requesting that one be submitted by the end of August 2002. An update report would be brought to the next meeting of this Committee.

### **357 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR MEMBERS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services which invited Members to consider what support services they might wish to be provided with in the future.

Members noted the following:-

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- the resolutions from Council on 26 February 2002 when it had received the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- the list of support services currently available to Members.
- the results of a recently conducted Member survey on support services.
- that a further survey would be held in approximately six months time. This would enable newly elected Councillors to be able to respond on the basis of more experience.

### **Training**

At a meeting of the Standards Committee held on 17 July 2002 an outline programme of Member training had been agreed with the recommendation that the following subjects be arranged as early as possible in the programme:-

Chairmanship Skills  
Ethical Framework  
Emergency Planning  
Overview and Scrutiny

Members of that Committee had agreed with the outcome of the survey. This had indicated that the majority of Members would prefer training sessions to be held both in the afternoons and evenings and that approximately two thirds of sessions should be held at the Civic Suite, Rayleigh and one third at the Freight House, Rochford.

Members of this Committee noted that the Council had charged the Standards Committee with determining the minimum level of competency training for Members. The Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) had been tasked with producing suggestions for this and the effective monitoring of attendance at meetings and training sessions. Members observed that lack of attendance at training sessions did not indicate that a Councillor was not competent although every endeavour should be made to attend as many sessions as possible.

### **Other Services**

In considering other services which might be provided Members agreed that no further action was to be taken in respect of dedicated administrative assistants, research assistants or hire of accommodation for surgeries

### **Carer's Allowance**

Members were of the opinion that it was not reasonable to set a limit on the amount that could be claimed under such an allowance or to insist that a recognised body be used. For example, it was perceived that it would be difficult to get a registered childminder to sit with a child in the evening.

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

That the provision for Members of an additional telephone line together with the rental and/or call costs be considered as part of the report on options for electronic communications by Members.

#### **Recommended to the Independent Remuneration Panel**

- (1) That travel expenses only be provided to advisers to Committees.
- (2) That further consideration be given to the payment of a carer's allowance with particular reference to the following:-
  - (i) full reimbursement of the cost
  - (ii) no requirement to use a registered body. (HAMS)

### **358 PARISH PARTNERSHIP FUND**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which reviewed the success of the Parish Partnership Funding initiative which had been established in 2001/2002.

Members noted that as part of the 2001/2002 budget making process, Council had decided to establish a Parish Partnership Fund of £20,000 from the capital programme, with further allocations of £20,000 in the capital programme for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. The fund had been established to aid the smaller parishes in particular and had been focussed around issues relating to Crime and Disorder and especially matters relating to younger people.

Members noted that the Parish projects relating to Barling and Foulness had been implemented but that the Ashingdon project had not proceeded, due to local objection. The residual monies left over from the 2001/2002 budget had provided grant funding for Hockley Parish Council as part of the transfer of the Laburnum Grove Play space and refurbishment of that area.

The successful Parish Councils had advised that, without the District's assistance in this way, the projects could not have been undertaken. Other sources of grant funding might also be attracted supplementing the District's grant monies.

Members noted that:-

- whilst all Parishes had been contacted there had been a lack of bid submissions and it was, therefore, considered there would not be any value in repeating the exercise.
- Parishes could still write in to the Council and request funding assistance for a project they have initiated.

The options available for the District Council were noted and it was:-

**Recommended to Council**

That the remainder of the £20,000 allocation for 2001/2002 and the allocation for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 be returned to the capital programme for reconsideration as part of the 2003/2004 budget debate. (CEx)

**359 CONSULTATION WITH THE DISTRICT CHAMBERS OF TRADE AND BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATIONS**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which sought Members' views on the consultation arrangements with business representative organisations in the District.

Members noted the existing consultation arrangements which will include a formal invitation to this Committee on a twice yearly basis to discuss the National Non-Domestic Rate arrangements in the District. In addition to this and the other consultation arrangements listed in the report any Overview & Scrutiny Committee could include members of the business community as invitees when considering relevant topics.

Members were keen to ensure that members of the wider business community who might not be affiliated to organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses or the Chambers of Trade were not excluded from any consultation which the District undertakes with local businesses.

To assist Members in this process, the Head of Financial Services agreed to bring a report to the next meeting of the Committee on the Timetable for the Preparation of Estimates in connection with the budget setting process.

**Resolved**

That representatives of the business community and a sample of non-represented businesses be asked their views on how the Council should consult with them, and a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee. The consultation should include how they might be represented on the Local Strategic Partnership. (CEx)

**360 IS/ICT AND e-GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative & Member Services which updated Members on the Council's IS/ICT and e-Government strategies and proposed the programme of projects to be funded in 2002/03.

During debate it was noted that-

- the capital grant of £200,000 had been received and would be used to set up various projects. Members were pleased to note that all the items listed as

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priority projects and proposed for implementation in 2002/03 should be achieved.

- a separate report on options for electronic communication by Members would be submitted to a future meeting for detailed consideration.
- projects had been selected to ensure that if future funding ceased to be available, the on-going costs to this Council would not be excessive.
- e-government provided an alternative method by which residents of the district might communicate with the Council with the intention of improving the overall service delivery but it was necessary to ensure no sections of the community were excluded.

#### **Recommended to Council**

- (1) That the proposals in the report be agreed as the basis of the Council's IS/ICT and e-government implementation plans for 2002/03.
- (2) That a further report on options for electronic communication by Members be submitted to the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the next cycle of meetings.
- (3) That the differential pricing proposed for land charge searches received via the National Land Information Service system be approved.
- (4) That the proposals in the report be approved as the basis for the submission of the Council's IEG 2 Statement. (HAMS)

#### **361 COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: CONSULTATION PAPER**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which provided details of the second consultation which had been produced by the Audit Commission in respect of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework to be applied to local authorities. It was noted that a further consultation, specifically in respect of District Councils was anticipated. The aim of CPA is to help Councils improve their performance and deliver service improvements.

#### **Resolved**

That the Committee concurs with the officer comments included in the report and attached as an appendix to the signed copy of these Minutes and notes these will constitute this Council's response to the latest consultation produced by the Audit Commission in respect of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. (CEX)

#### **362 SINGLE CAPITAL POT – CAPITAL STRATEGY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN**

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The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) which explained the requirement to submit Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plans to the Government as part of the arrangements for capital allocations under the Single Capital Pot initiative. It also set out for Members' approval the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plans for 2002/03.

#### **Recommended to Council**

That the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan 2002 be approved and submitted for inclusion in the Single Capital Pot – Round 2. (CD(LPA))

### **363 CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) updating Members on progress against the capital programme. Members noted the Schedule of Works which had been appended to the report.

In response to Members questions, the following was noted:-

- Presentation Equipment - Council Chamber – this work had been rescheduled to September 2002 given the Contractor's work commitments.
- Cash Incentive Scheme – this exists to encourage Council tenants to move into private accommodation by providing a cash grant of around £19,000.
- Sheltered Housing Scheme Improvement - the budget is mainly funded by the Major Repairs Allowance. Members approved £125,000 from the capital programme to ensure the works were properly funded. The Lavers will be started later this year.
- Boilers – Sheltered Housing - the Head of Financial Services agreed to confirm to Members whether this work would be completed prior to the colder weather.
- Smoke Alarms – the Head of Financial Services agreed to inform Members of the current position.

### **364 CHAMBERS OF TRADE – BIDS FOR TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVES 2002/03**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which outlined the proposals made by Hockley, Rayleigh and Rochford Chambers of Trade and sought Members' views in respect of which bids should be progressed.

Members noted that an annual provision of £5000 is made in respect of initiatives which would improve the economic environment of the town centres. The funds are used to support initiatives put forward by the Chambers of Trade.

#### **Recommended to Council**

- (1) That this Committee supports all three bids in principle.

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- (2) That officers work with the Chambers to explore other funding sources that could ensure that all projects proceed.
- (3) That a further report be brought to the next meeting of this Committee so that a final recommendation can be made. (CEx)

The meeting closed at 9 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....