

Finance & General Purposes Committee - 14 February 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & General Purposes Committee** held on 14 February 2002 when there were present:

Cllr D R Helson (Chairman)
Cllr A Hosking (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr R F R Adams
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr D F Flack
Cllr J E Grey
Cllr Mrs J Helson
Cllr V H Leach
Cllr T Livings
Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr G A Mockford

Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr P J Morgan
Cllr S P Smith
Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr R E Vingoe
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr D A Weir
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr G Fox

SUBSTITUTE

Councillor P D Stebbing

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
J Honey	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
A Wyatt	Committee Administrator

56 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs T G Cutmore, J R F Mason and P J Morgan declared pecuniary interests in the item "Aggregate Credit Limit and Treasury Management" by virtue of being employed by one of the financial institutions quoted in the approved lending list.

Cllrs D R Helson and J E Grey declared pecuniary interests in the same item, by virtue of pensions received from one of the financial institutions named in the approved lending list. Cllr R E Vingoe declared an interest in the same item, by virtue of holding shares with one of the financial institutions also mentioned in the approved lending list.

57 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2001, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

58 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Committee received the Schedule relating to decisions.

Implementation of the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 (Minute 253/01)

A Member questioned why the implementation of the above Act had taken so long, given the original Minute had been passed in July of the previous year. It was agreed that all Members would receive an update on this particular project in due course.

Joint Member Meeting with Essex County Council to discuss areas of mutual interest (Minute 363(2)/01)

Members were advised of the recent meeting with Essex County Council. It was noted that County Councillor Mrs Twitchen had agreed to meet Rochford and Castle Point Members to discuss the way forward given Southend on Sea Borough Council's decision to continue with the £3.00 charge for waste disposal for non residents at their Civic Amenity sites.

E-Government Strategy (Update) (Minute 445(1)/01)

Members were advised that the grant in respect of E-Government would be around £200,000, although an announcement was not due from Central Government until 27 March 2002.

Rochford Town Sports and Social Club – Application for new lease on the pavilion at Rochford Recreation Ground, Rochford (Minute 447/01)

Members were advised that, to date, no business plan had been received from Rochford Town Sports and Social Club with respect to the above application.

Results of the survey on Car Park Lighting (Minute 89/01)

Members were pleased to note the positive reaction from the public with regard to the improved lighting within the car parks throughout the District.

Chambers of Trade – Bids for Town Centre Initiatives (Minute 268(9)/1)

The Committee noted that Rayleigh Chamber of Trade had now been allocated its grant for Town Centre Initiatives. It was further noted that monies made available for Rochford and Hockley were likely to be released in tandem with the Town Centre Enhancement Schemes due to be undertaken in the two town centres.

59 SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Committee received the Minutes of the following Sub-Committees and considered the recommendations contained therein:-

(1) Partnership Sub-Committee – 24 January 2002

Minute 120 – Quality Town and Parish Council – Consultation Paper

Resolved

That the views of the Quality Town and Parish Councils Working Group, together with the additional comments in the Minutes of the Partnership Sub-Committee, form the District Council's response to the Consultation Document. (CEX)

(2) Structural and Procedural Review Sub Committee – 29 January 2002

Minute 92 – Standards Committee – Recruitment of Independent and Parish Representatives.

(i) Independent Members

Resolved

- (1) That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to appoint 2 independent members to the Standards Committee via public advertisement, the appointments to be made on a four year basis to tie in with the District Council's Electoral cycle.
- (2) That paragraph (ii) of the Person Specification be revised to indicate that applicants will need to live in the District and have a good knowledge of its communities. (CEX)

(ii) Parish Members

Resolved

- (1) That the District Council convene and chair a meeting of all Parish Councils to determine a suitable Parish/Town Council nomination to the Standards Committee. Councils to be asked to forward suitable candidates for consideration in advance of the meeting. Each Parish to be afforded a single vote with the successful candidate being appointed as the Parish/Town Council's representative.
- (2) That, given the differing election cycles of the various Town/Parish Councils, the appointment be on a yearly basis running in tandem with the municipal year. (CEX)

(iii) Model Code of Conduct – Advertisement

Resolved

That Officers liaise with the Town/Parish Councils with a view to sharing of the costs associated with the press advertisement relating to the new Code of Conduct. (CD(LP&A))

Minute 93 – Public Access to Working Groups

Resolved

That, subject to the adjustment of Paragraph 12 of Working Group Protocol to read as follows, the existing Working Group Protocol be confirmed:-

“Representatives of the media, other organisations and members of the public will not be admitted to meetings of Working Groups, save where invited to attend by a majority of those District Council Members of the Group that may be present at the meeting concerned”. (HAMS)

(3) Appointments Sub-Committee – 5 February 2002

(4) Corporate Resources Sub-Committee – 6 February 2002

Minute 443 – Minutes

(i) Rayleigh Town Centre – Outstanding Issues

Resolved

- (1) That a copy of the last snagging list be forwarded to the County's Area Manager (Highways) and the Portfolio Holder.
- (2) That an update on Outstanding Issues be provided to the first meeting of the Environment Policy Committee.
- (3) That thereafter, twice yearly updates be provided to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (HPS)

(2) Consultation Process with Chambers of Trade

Resolved

- (1) That the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the structure for consultation with the Chambers of Trade on all relevant issues.
- (2) That the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee conducts meetings with the Chambers of Trade twice yearly, with the next meeting in September or October 2002.

Minute 444 – Members' Allowances – Report of the Remuneration Panel

During consideration of this Minute, Members continued the debate relating to the sum included in the Budget for 2002/2003 for Members travelling allowance and also the issue of discretionary payments.

Noting that this matter was due to be discussed at Council on 26 February 2002, on a motion put by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr Mrs J Helson, and subsequently amended by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr P J Morgan, it was

Resolved

- (1) That the estimate figure of £71,700 be included in the Budget for 2002/2003 for Members' Allowances.
- (2) That the existing method of payment for travelling expenses be retained.

- (3) That the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) meet with Group Leaders and the Independent Member with a view to achieving consensus on a method of administering discretionary payments.
- (4) That this item be referred to the meeting of Council on 26 February 2002 for detailed consideration. (CD(F&ES))

NOTE: Cllr J R F Mason wished it recorded that he cast his vote against resolution (1) above.

Minute 445 – Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services

Resolved

That detailed examination of the Government White Paper be referred to the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (CEX)

Minute 446 - Market Car Park – Rayleigh Operatic and Dramatic Society (RODS) Scenery Store

Resolved

That this Council gives notice that the scenery store in the Market Car Park, Rayleigh is vacated by the Rayleigh Operatic and Dramatic Society with effect from 1 May 2002, unless firm plans are presented for alternative premises. (CD(F&ES))

Minute 447 – Proposed Environmental Centre – Feedback from Rayleigh Town Council

During consideration of this Minute, Members were disappointed to note that it would not be possible to take back the lease from Rayleigh Town Council for the land adjoining 21 London Hill before the 5 year lease period was concluded.

Noting this, it was considered prudent for a Member level meeting with Rayleigh Town Council to be arranged in order to discuss further the issue of providing the Environment Centre at the site.

Resolved

That a formal Member Level meeting with Rayleigh Town Council be arranged in an attempt to secure agreement as to the time frame within which the Town Council will make a decision concerning the implementation of its approved proposals for land adjoining 21 London Hill and the way forward in terms of transfer back, should a decision be taken not to proceed. (CEX)

Minute 448 – Asset Management Best Value Review

Resolved

- (1) That the Asset Management Plan be endorsed and developed in line with the suggestions of the Government Office for the East of England for submission in the single capital pot – Round Two
- (2) That further consideration be given to the position of Corporate Property Officer following the letting of the Leisure Contract and submission of the Single Capital Pot Round Two bid.
(CD(LP&A))

Minute 449 – Laburnam Grove Play Space

Resolved

- (1) That if Hockley Parish Council wish to acquire ownership of the site, the lease will need to be signed by 31 March 2002 or the District Council will not be able to assist with their requests,
- (2) That if Hockley Parish Council does not wish to take ownership of the site, the District Council will again review the use of this area.

Minute 450 – Land at Francis Walk, Rayleigh

Resolved

That the strip of land in Francis Walk be sold at market value to be determined by an independent valuer and including the Council's legal costs. (HRHM)

Minute 451 – Equity Share Property – 30 Woodstock Crescent, Hockley

Resolved

That the 25% Equity Share in 30 Woodstock Crescent, Hockley, be repurchased at valuation.

Minute 452 – Local Government Pension Scheme

Resolved

- (1) That Postholder 37205, Principal Engineer, be offered early retirement on the basis of efficiency of the service, with full added years in accordance with existing policy.
- (2) That the vacant post be advertised in due course.

- (3) That the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the Council's policy on early retirement. (CD(F&ES))

60 CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which detailed progress against the capital programme. In reviewing the capital programme update schedule, the following was raised:-

50-54 West Street, Rochford

It was noted that it was the intention for the report on this matter to be brought before Members by the end of March 2002.

Pedestrian Crossings

It was noted that money had been allocated for improved crossing facilities at Love Lane School, Rayleigh.

Downhall Road Junction

It was noted that this scheme was due to be completed within the 2001/2002 financial year.

Resurface Approach Car Park

It was noted that the car park works were due to be completed within costs – officers were not aware of any delays to these works which would indicate the contrary.

Resolved

That the report be noted and that completed items be deleted from the monitoring statement.

61 BEST VALUE – PROGRAMME OF SERVICE REVIEWS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which outlined a revised programme of Best Value Reviews for Members' consideration and comment.

Resolved

That the programme of service reviews as set out in paragraph 3 of the report be agreed. (CE)

62 AGGREGATE CREDIT LIMIT AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT

NOTE: Councillors D R Helson, Mrs J Helson, T G Cutmore, J R F Mason and P J Morgan left the Chamber for this item.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which set out proposals for the aggregate credit limit and treasury management policies.

Resolved

- (1) That the aggregate credit limit for 2002/2003 be £18 Million and that the temporary borrowing limit be £6 Million and that the limit for variable rate loans is £2 Million.
- (2) That the existing policies regarding treasury management continue for 2002/2003 until a further report is submitted outlining the changes required as a result of the updated CIPFA Code of Practice. (HFS)

63 COUNCIL TAX – CONSULTATION PAPER ON PROPOSED CHANGES FOR SECOND HOMES AND LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenues & Housing Management which sought the views of this Council on a consultation paper relating to the proposed Council Tax changes for second homes and long-term empty homes.

Noting the background and main proposals of the scheme, Members concurred with officers' recommendations as outlined in paragraphs 9.1, 9.2 and 9.4 in the report, and on a motion put by Councillor P D Stebbing and seconded by Councillor P F A Webster it was:-

Resolved

That the following be sent to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions as this Authority's response to the Government's consultation on removing the 50% discount on Council Tax for second homes and long-term empty properties.

- With regard to the long-term empty properties, it is felt that to help bring these properties back into use, as has been the case, in some instances, with the one year limitation on exempt Class A, there is a strong case for the six-month exemption period to remain and that any properties that are left empty for more than twelve months should pay the full Council Tax charge. That is to say

empty 0 – 6 months = exempt
empty 6 – 12 months = 50% charge
empty 12 months plus = 100% charge.

- This Authority also wishes it to be known that it considers that no discretionary powers should be afforded to local authorities within England to create their own additional exemptions and discounts as this may lead to anomalies and diverse categories with narrow qualifying criteria amongst different Councils.
- Finally, this Authority is of the opinion that any additional proceeds that are received from additional charging of second or empty homes should be retained locally with Councils free to spend the proceeds as they wish. (HRHM)

64 REVISIONS TO THE VILLAGE SHOP RATE RELIEF SCHEME AND APPROVAL OF RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST FOR 2002/2003 (Minute 141/99)

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenues & Housing Management which advised Members of an extension to the Rural Rate Relief Scheme particularly relating to Sole Petrol Filling Stations, Sole Public Houses and any Food Store within a Rural Settlement.

Resolved

- (1) That the revised Rural Settlement List, as detailed in paragraph 3.5 of the report, be approved for the financial year 2002/2003.
- (2) That the other revisions to the Village Shop Relief Scheme be noted.
- (3) That the revisions be drawn to the attention of the Parish Clerks.

65 REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) which sought Members' views on the proposed sites for Polling Stations in the District, in the light of the changes to Ward Boundaries resulting from the Local Government Commission's proposals for the District.

Noting the differences between polling places and polling stations, Members were mindful of the difficulties in achieving polling stations for the new Rayleigh Central Ward and it was:-

Resolved

That the District Council designates each Polling District as a Polling Place with the exception of Rayleigh Central Ward which, in the special circumstances involved, should include Whitehouse, Lodge, and Central Wards as the designated polling place. (CD(LPA))

66 CIVIC AND PUBLIC RELATIONS BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which outlined the final conclusions of the Best Value Review into the Civic and Public Relations service and presented an Action Plan for improvement.

In agreeing the proposed Action Plan Members raised the following points:-

- It was considered that the Chairman's Year should not be too heavily prescriptive and that a degree of flexibility should be maintained for individual Chairmen to show a degree of innovation and thought, to arrange different events from previous years.
- Members were unanimous in considering that the Tenants Newsletter should not be amalgamated with Rochford District Matters. Furthermore, it was the Committee's view that Rochford District Matters should raise its profile and professional look to the same level as that of the Tenants Newsletter.
- It was considered that the possibility of further developing the Citizenship Debates with Schools should be investigated in order to enable increased participation in this event.
- It was considered that the Chairman could present grant cheques to outside bodies at specific events in order for the Council to gain increased publicity for its activities and actions.

Resolved

- (1) That the action plan outlined in Appendix 1 to the report (a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes) be agreed.
- (2) That the bullet points outlined above be also agreed. (CE)

67 PARISH PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which brought Members' attention to a bid received from Foulness Parish Council under the Parish Partnership Initiative for improvements to the play area on Foulness.

Resolved

- (1) That the grant application from Foulness Parish Council for a 50% grant contribution of £3,543 towards the upgrade of the Parish play area be approved.
- (2) That this project should recognise the support given by the District Council in any literature, signage and publicity produced as a result.
- (3) That the design of any equipment provided through such grant be agreed by this Authority.
- (4) That any equipment provided through such grant aid should not be removed without the prior approval of the District Council.
- (5) That Foulness Parish Council be made aware that the District Council accepts no responsibility for any further capital or revenue costs associated with the project.
- (6) That any insurance associated with the project be the responsibility of the Foulness Parish Council. (CEx)

68 HOUSING BENEFIT COUNCIL TAX BUSINESS RATES FORMER TENANT ARREARS AND SUNDRY DEBTORS – WRITE-OFFS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenues & Housing Management which set out cases written off under delegated authority and proposed the writing-off of certain cases.

Resolved

- (1) That items written-off under the Corporate Director's delegated authority be noted.
- (2) That items shown in Appendix B to the report (a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes) be now written-off in the accounts of the Authority. (HRHM) (HFS)

Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in paragraph 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

69 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATING APPLICATION FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF (Minute 372/01)

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenues & Housing Management, which referred to an application for Discretionary Rate Relief in accordance with Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Resolved

That 50% Discretionary Rate Relief be granted to the South Essex Foster Care Associates Limited with effect from 1 April 2001. (HRHM)

The Meeting closed at 9.20pm.

Chairman

Date