

Council – 24 April 2001

Minutes of the meeting of **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held on **Thursday 12 April 2001** when there were present:

Cllr G Fox – Chairman

Cllr R Adams
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn
Cllr J E Grey
Cllr D R Helson
Cllr Mrs J Helson
Cllr V H Leach
Cllr Mrs S J Lemon

Cllr T Livings
Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr P J Morgan
Cllr S P Smith
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr D A Weir
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M G B Starke and Cllr R E Vingoe.

An apology for absence was also received from Cllr D F Flack. However, Cllr Flack arrived at the meeting after the attendance of his substitute and in accordance with Standing Orders 12 (11)(b) and 12 (13)(d), Cllr Flack remained present as a visiting Member.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllrs R S Allen, Mrs R Brown, and P D Stebbing.

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr D F Flack

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
A Smith	-	Head of Administrative and Member Services

149 MINUTES

- (1) The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 February 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to

**Minute No. 70 (4) (Corporate Resources Sub-Committee
Minute No. 387)**

The wording of the resolution being amended to read

"That the Chambers of Trade be advised that any residual bids must have been received by the end of June 2001 (i.e. three months from the commencement of the new financial year). (CD(F&ES))"

Minute No. 74 Benefit, Council Tax, Business Rates, Former Tenant Arrears and Sundry Debtors – Write Offs

The wording to the preamble to be amended at paragraph 2 by the deletion of the existing wording and the addition of

"It was noted that the sundry debtors and benefits cases set out in Appendix B of the report had already been written off."

The wording of clause (2) of the resolution to be amended by the deletion of the existing wording and the addition of

"That the items shown in Appendix B of the report (attached to the signed copy of these minutes), excluding sundry debtors and benefits be now written off in the accounts of the Authority. (HRHM/HFS)"

- (2) The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 March 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

150 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Committee noted the progress made with the following decisions previously taken by the Committee

- (1) Sale of Land at Mill Hall, Rayleigh (Minute No. 70(4)/01)

Matters Progressing. (HLS)

- (2) Installation of CCTV at Mill Hall, Rayleigh (Minute No. 70(4)/01)

Costs ascertained. Quotation received week commencing 2 April.

In response to a question, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) reported that the specification provided by the potential contractor was presently with Essex Police to ensure that the equipment proposed would provide pictures of suitable quality for Police use. The Corporate Director undertook to establish the anticipated delivery date for the CCTV cameras and to provide

Members with details of this in a future edition of the Members' Bulletin. (CD(F&ES))

- (3) Websters Way Car Park Proposals – Additional Consultations (Minute 88/01)

Arrangements in progress for the appointment of external consultant to advise the Council on development options. (HPS)

151 REPORT OF URGENT ACTION: EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND – BUSINESS THEMES AND CHAMPIONS PROJECT

The Committee noted the urgent action taken by the Chief Executive in agreeing this Council's involvement in a bid for funds from the European Social Fund for a business support project. (CEX)

152 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

The Committee received the Minutes of the following Sub-Committees and considered their recommendations.

- (1) **Contracts Sub-Committee 16 March 2001**

Minute No. 102 The Leisure Contract – The Way Forward

Resolved

That the Information Memorandum Document, as set out in the exempt appendix to the signed copy of the Minutes of the Sub-Committee, be approved. (CD(F&ES))

- (2) **Corporate Resources Sub-Committee 3 April 2001**

- (a) **Minute No. 400 Information Systems and Information Technology Strategy**

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the IT Client Manager (Mrs T Brent) would be leaving the Council's employment on 15 April 2001 to join Securicor Information Systems as their site manager for the Council.

RECOMMENDED

To note the IS/IT Strategy, incorporating the Council's implementing electronic government statement and attached at the signed copy to these Minutes, and to agree that it form the basis for a bid for Central Government funding for the introduction of electronic service delivery. (HAMS)

- (b) **Minute No. 401 Grants and Community Support**

Resolved

- (A) to award a grant of £750 to Relate – South Essex.
- (B) to grant 20% discretionary NNDR rate relief to
 - Hockley and Hawkwell Old Peoples Welfare Committee
 - Hullbridge Senior Citizens Welfare Council
 - Rayleigh Age Concern
 - Rochford and District Old Peoples Welfare (HFS)

(c) Minute No. 402 Application for Waiver of Public Entertainment Licence Fees – Hullbridge Village Fayre

Resolved

To waive 100% of the application fee due for a public entertainment licence, if granted, for the Hullbridge Village Fayre. (HHCC)

(d) Minute No. 403 Application for Waiver of Public Entertainment Licence Fees – Barn Dance, New Hall Farm, Lambourne Road, Canewdon

Resolved

To waive 80% of the application fee due for a public entertainment licence, if granted, for the Barn Dance planned to take place on 8 June 2001 at New Hall Farm, Canewdon – this waiver also to apply in the event of it proving necessary to hold the barn dance on an alternative date as a result of any restrictions that might apply arising from the present foot and mouth outbreak. (HHCC)

(e) Minute No. 404 Youth Training (Foundation Modern Apprenticeship)

Resolved

- (A) To increase the youth training budget in 2001/02 to £21,855 to enable up to 3 paid trainees to be employed.
- (B) To widen the Council's youth training scheme to offer short term placements for people with disabilities and women returning to work after a period of absence from the work place. (CD(LPA))

(f) **Minute No. 405 Harassment at Work Policy and Staff Guidance**

Resolved

To adopt the Harassment at Work Policy and Staff Guidance on Harassment as attached at the appendix to the signed copy of the minutes of the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee. (CD(LPA))

(g) **Minute No. 406 Small Business Rate Relief – Foot and Mouth Disease**

Resolved

To make the strongest possible representations to the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions, with copies to the Local Government Association and the local Members of Parliament, seeking the inclusion of Rochford District Council to the list of authorities in the Eastern Region covered by the rural aid package. (CEX)

(h) **Minute No. 408 Land at Golden Cross Parade, Ashington**

During discussion of this item, the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) was asked to circulate details to all Members on why the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee had power to determine this item.

Following further debate, it was

Resolved

To request the owner of this area of land at Golden Cross Parade to erect a barrier adjacent to the public footpath as a means of preventing vehicles from backing onto the footpath.

(3) **Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee 4 April 2001**

(a) **Minute No. 134 Capital Programme**

Resolved

(A) That each Group on the Council be asked to give consideration to the possibilities associated with the potential capital receipt reported to the Sub-Committee and to formulate proposals for submission to Officers.

(C) That all proposals be submitted to Officers prior to 8 May so that a composite report addressing the

possibilities could eventually be submitted to the meeting of the Full Council scheduled for 24 July 2001. (CEX)

(b) Minute No. 135 Mill Hall Stage Lighting

Resolved

That the specification for the new Leisure Contract include a requirement that the contractor take responsibility for bringing the lighting up to modern standards, tenderers to be requested to highlight their estimated costs as part of the tendering exercise to facilitate a decision on whether or not upgrading should be agreed. (CD(F&ES))

153 NOTICE OF MOTION – QUEEN’S GOLDEN JUBILEE IN 2002

The Committee received a report from the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the following Motion referred by Council on 27 February 2001.

“Council instructs Officers to consider and report back on possible initiatives to celebrate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee 2002.”

It was noted that Officers were presently ascertaining how other Essex local authorities were proposing to commemorate the Jubilee and also seeking details of any Government guidance. A further report would be submitted to the next scheduled meeting of this Committee.

154 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the business at Minute No. 155 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

155 IT NETWORK RECABLING

Further to Minute 422/00, the Committee considered an exempt report by the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the proposed voice and data network recabling of the Council’s offices at South Street, Rochford and at the Civic Suite, Rayleigh.

Mr M Brooks, Mr P Nicholas and Mr P Wilde from Securicor Information Systems (SIS) also attended the meeting for this item.

It was noted that SIS had prepared a specification for the recabling of the offices in accordance with the requirements previously requested by the Committee and taking account of both current network usage and that anticipated under the Council's IS/IT Strategy. The Committee further noted the benefits that would accrue to the Council in placing a single contract for the project with SIS who would then assume responsibility for project managing the installation of the network, warranty its future operation, and accept liability for any delays that might arise in completion of the project.

The Committee then considered the specification and the tenders received by SIS from potential sub-contractors for installation of the cabling; the hardware that would be supplied by SIS under the Council's existing open book procurement agreement with the Company; and the relocation and business continuity implications of the project. The Committee also noted the preference of SIS to sub-contract the recabling work to Fastnet who whilst not being the cheapest tenderer had a superior understanding of the technical requirements of the project; health and safety requirements; and the importance of business continuity.

The Committee recognised that the total cost of the project as now proposed could be funded from the £6,000 provision in the 2000/01 estimates for cabling consultancy and the £175,000 provision for cabling works in the 2001/02 capital programme. On the costs presented, the balance of £3,000 remaining within the Capital Programme could be retained as a contingency for any unforeseen issues arising during the expected 6 month project. In recognising that this contingency was below the industry standard of 10 – 15% of contract value for projects of this nature, it was acknowledged that a further report could be brought before this Committee in the event that this should prove necessary.

Resolved

- (1) To agree that a new structured voice and data network be installed at the Council's offices at Rochford and Rayleigh at the estimated cost of £178,100.
- (2) To agree that SIS be contracted to undertake this installation at £169,600 engaging Fastnet as principal wiring contractor and with work commencing on 7 May 2001 for a maximum period of 6 months. (HAMS)

The meeting was re-opened to the public at this point.

156 REVIEW OF DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the final recommendations from the Local

Government Commission for changes to the District Council's electoral arrangements.

During debate, the Committee recognised that the Commission's recommendations had still not addressed the issue of when the consequential changes arising from the review for Town and Parish Councils would be implemented. The Committee was therefore minded to seek the views of Town and Parish Councils on whether the District Council should further lobby for the deferment of changes to parish electoral arrangements until the first ordinary elections of those Councils in or after May 2002.

In response to a suggestion, the Chief Executive agreed that the costs of the District Council's involvement in the review would be included in the next edition of the best value performance plan as a figure arising from a legislative requirement.

Resolved

- (1) To inform the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions that the Council now accepts the final recommendations of the Local Government Commission for the District of Richford.
- (2) To ask the Partnership Sub-Committee meeting on 19 April 2001 whether Town and Parish Councils would wish the District Council to continue to lobby on their behalf for the date of implementation of consequential changes to parish electoral arrangements being deferred to the first ordinary elections of each Council in or after May 2002. (HAMS)

157 CAPITAL SCHEMES – PROGRESS REPORT

Further to Minute No 82(2)/01 The Committee considered a report by the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on the progress of a number of capital schemes that were presently underway.

During debate, the following issues were raised:

Rochford Town Centre – The Rochford Town Centre Working Group should consider a fall back scheme in the event of the preferred works in the Town Centre not receiving public support.

CCTV in Shopping Parades – The Committee noted that tenders had now been received for the schemes at Golden Cross Parade, Ashingdon; High Street, Great Wakering; London Road, Rayleigh; and Rochford Garden Way, Rochford and that implementation of the schemes was due to take place in 8 weeks from the date of this meeting.

Downhall Road/London Road Junction - The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) undertook to establish when the County Council would be in a position to bring forward a proposed scheme for this junction and, if necessary, arrange for an additional meeting of the Transportation and Environmental Services Committee to be convened to consider the scheme.

35-39 West Street – In response to a question, the Chief Executive confirmed that every effort was being made to conclude the compulsory purchase and subsequent transfer of this property to Southend Building Preservation Trust. Any proposals then put forward for the future of the building would most likely involve a requirement for planning consent to be obtained which would be a matter for this Council to consider.

Tennis Courts at Fairview Playing Field – In response to a question, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) undertook to look into whether there was any intention or need for the two tennis courts that had not been resurfaced to be sealed.

In recognising the value of receiving reports similar to this on a quarterly basis, the Committee expressed the view that it would be helpful if details of when projects were first agreed could be included in those future reports.

Resolved

To note the contents of the report and that further reports on the progress of capital schemes would be brought to the Committee on a quarterly basis commencing with the meeting scheduled for 12 July 2001.

158 CAPITAL FUND FOR PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL PROJECTS

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive on the proposed establishment of a grant scheme for town and parish councils and the criteria by which bids for grant could be determined.

Resolved

To agree the proposed grant scheme as set out in the Chief Executive's report, and now attached to the signed copy of these minutes, save for

agreement in principle to £20,000 being added to the fund in each of the financial years 2001/02, 2002/03 and 2003/04 subject to a review being undertaken at the end of the first year of the achievements and value of the grants made.

the deletion of the requirement for town and parish councils to demonstrate that additional sources of funding were available for the projects they were bidding for.

the addition of a criteria giving preference to applications from smaller parish councils that had not already received substantial funding from the District Council.

159 ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL – THE GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive outlining a suggested response to the consultation paper issued by Essex County Council on the governance and management of partnerships.

Resolved

That the comments set out in the Chief Executive's report as now attached to the signed copy of these minutes be approved as the basis for this Council's response to Essex County Council.

160 DOCUMENT PRODUCTION – BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the final recommendations of the officer best value team looking at document production within the Council.

The Committee acknowledged that the further use of communications technology was a preferred solution to improve speed of communication with Members and the public and to reduce the amount of paper used within the Council. However, the Committee was mindful that traditional means of communication should continue to be available to all those who wished to communicate with the Council on this basis.

Resolved

To note the actions already implemented by the review group and agree the proposals for the future provision and management of document production as set out at the Appendix to these minutes. (HAMS)

161 CIVIC & PUBLIC RELATIONS BEST VALUE REVIEW – INTERIM REPORT

The Committee considered an interim report by the Head of Planning Services on the best value review of civic and public relations.

Resolved

- (1) to add noticeboards; the use of the mobile exhibition unit; and the provision of information in the Council's receptions to the areas to be looked at as part of the civic and public relations review.
- (2) to establish a Member, Civic and Public Relations Best Value Working Group to discuss the findings of the best value review,

the Group to comprise one representative from each of the political groups on the Council and to report to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee.

- (3) to appoint Cllr P F A Webster as the Conservative Group representative on the new Working Group with each other Group to submit the name of their nominated Member to the Chief Executive. (HPS/HAMS)

162 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATING DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on two applications for discretionary business rate relief made in accordance with Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Resolved

To grant discretionary rate relief as follows:

Hamelin Trust 20% (top up) rate relief from 11 October 1999

1st Hawkwell Scout Group 20% (top up) rate relief from 1 October 1999

(HRHM)

163 BENEFIT, COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES, FORMER TENANT ARREARS AND SUNDRY DEBTORS – WRITE OFFS

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on the write off of certain debts owed to the Council.

Resolved

- (1) To note the items written off under the Corporate Director's delegated authority as set out in Appendix A to the Corporate Director's report and now attached at the signed copy to these minutes.
- (2) To write off the NNDR and Benefits debts as set out in Appendix B to the Corporate Director's report and now attached at the signed copy to these minutes. (CD(F&ES))

164 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 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

165 AUDIO VISUAL EQUIPMENT – TENDERS

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on the results of tenders received for the installation of new audiovisual equipment within the Council Chamber.

The Committee was informed that the two best tenders received were from COMDIS and Soundtrack. However, if Members were minded to proceed with all elements of the project, up to an additional £7,400 would need to be added to the existing provision of £53,000 within the capital programme for 2001/02. Whilst cognisant of the costs involved, Members recognised that the new system needed to meet both present and future needs for several years to come and it was vital that the most appropriate equipment was purchased.

The Committee also recognised that some part of the costs might be recovered through charges to other groups making use of the equipment.

After noting the specification of the proposed equipment, Members agreed that the Head of Administrative and Member Services and the Head of Planning Services should undertake site visits in order to ascertain the suitability of the equipment to meet this Council's requirements. Subject to further officer consideration being given to the provision of cathode ray monitors as opposed to flat screen monitors

Resolved

- (1) To approve an additional provision of £7,400 within the capital programme for 2001/02 for the installation of audiovisual equipment in the Council Chamber.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) to negotiate with both COMDIS and Soundtrack and to accept the most advantageous tender to the Authority.
- (3) To ask the Head of Administrative and Member Services to report back to a future meeting of this Committee on a possible charge that might be levied by the Council on other users of the new audiovisual equipment. (HAMS)

166 BELLINGHAM LANE/MILL HALL PROJECT

The Committee considered the exempt report by the Chief Executive on the outcome of his investigation into the management of the Bellingham Lane/Mill Hall car park project.

- (1) During debate, Members expressed some disappointment that the Chief Executive's report did not fully address the issues that they felt had arisen from this contract. Accordingly, it was

Resolved

To refer the matter to the Member Contract Review Working Group to overlay the issues already identified by the Working Group - the Group to report back to a future meeting of this Committee. (CEx)

- (2) Reference was then made to the proposed installation of railings alongside the pathway to Rayleigh Mill. The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) undertook to inform Members of the anticipated completion date for this part of the project. (CD(F&ES))

The Meeting closed at 10.10pm.

Chairman _____

Dated _____

DOCUMENT PRODUCTION UNIT - BEST VALUE REVIEW

Photocopying

To improve quality

- (1) All print room photocopiers be connected to the Council's IT network in order to avoid paper originals (Timescale by April 2002)
- (2) A new system of print ordering be introduced to ensure that user requirements are made clear when work is first submitted. (Timescale by May 2001)
- (3) Users be encouraged to submit work to the print room earlier to avoid rushed jobs that often lead to a reduction in quality. (Timescale immediate)
- (4) Discussions take place with the Council's photocopier maintenance contractor with the aim of improving the quality of output and service frequency. The opportunity to upgrade the copiers when it is financially advantageous to do so should continue to be assessed. (Timescale ongoing)
- (5) Where the required quality cannot be achieved in-house, consideration to be given to copies being produced externally and/or offset being used. (Timescale ongoing)

To improve turnaround

The present vacancy for a print assistant to be filled on a job share basis (1.1fte) to provide flexibility for peak workloads and cover for absences, the cost to be met from within existing staffing budgets.

To reduce costs

- (1) Staff to be instructed on a regular basis to make use of the central print room rather than the standalone copiers. (Timescale immediate)
- (2) Work to be placed to external offset printing where this is cheaper than photocopying. (Timescale immediate)

To improve management of the service

- (1) Regular user satisfaction surveys be undertaken every 3 months. (Timescale ongoing)

Council – 24 April 2001

- (2) Throughput within the central print room be monitored to enable future planning of the service in line with usage. (Timescale immediate)
- (3) Responsibility for standalone photocopiers be transferred from central services to the central print room to ensure a more unified approach to the provision of photocopying. (Timescale immediate)

Reduction in Paper

- (1) That with effect from the new municipal year, members be asked to consider again on an individual basis whether they wish to receive copies of all agenda and reports – copies of agenda only to be offered as an option. (Timescale May 2001)
- (2) Full committee paperwork to be despatched only to Members of a Committee, Sub-Committee or Working Group (and their substitutes) or on request. (Timescale May 2001)
- (3) That appendices to reports be avoided wherever possible with sufficient copies of lengthy attached documents instead being placed in the Members lounge at Rochford and at Rayleigh or supplied to members only on request. (Timescale May 2001)
- (4) That the current policy that reports be a maximum of 2 sides of A4 in length be enforced wherever possible. (Timescale immediate)
- (5) That agenda, reports and minutes be published on the internet as soon as practicable. (Timescale commence from May 2001 if practicable)
- (6) That in future Officers only be provided with a paper copy of an agenda if they are attending a meeting. (Timescale immediate)
- (7) That all Members be encouraged to make use of the internet as a means of communication with the Council offices and for receiving committee papers. (Timescale ongoing)
- (8) That attachments to the Members Bulletin be the exception (with officers using précis techniques wherever possible) and the Bulletin be emailed on request to all Members with home email facilities. (Timescale immediate)
- (9) That once all agenda, minutes and reports are available on the internet, a review be undertaken on the possibilities for parish councils and public libraries to be able to access documents from that source. (Timescale once internet availability achieved)
- (10) That Officers be encouraged to communicate through the Council's email network and intranet wherever practicable.

(Timescale once electronic records management policy agreed)

- (11) That emails from the public be responded to by email wherever possible (Timescale immediate)

Recycled Paper

That the Head of Administrative and Member Services be asked to consider further how the current usage of recycled paper can be increased. (Timescale May 2002)

Desk Top Publishing

That a further report be brought to Members on how desk top publishing/graphic design could best be undertaken within the Council. (Timescale Autumn Cycle of meetings 2001)

Word Processing

That the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) and the Head of Administrative and Member Services undertake further work on how decentralisation of basic word processing might be achieved and report back to a future meeting of this Committee. This report to take account of the Council's future requirements for desk top publishing/graphic design and web design and maintenance. (Timescale Autumn Cycle of meetings 2001)