

## **Extraordinary Council – 30 January 2007**

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Minutes of the meeting of **Extraordinary Council** held on **30 January 2007** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs M J Webster

Cllr R A Amner	Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr Mrs P Aves	Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr C I Black	Cllr D Merrick
Cllr Mrs R Brown	Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr Mrs L A Butcher	Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr J P Cottis	Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr P R Robinson
Cllr T E Goodwin	Cllr P K Savill
Cllr K J Gordon	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr Mrs S A Harper	Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr K H Hudson	Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr A J Humphries	Cllr Mrs C A Weston
Cllr T Livings	Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P A Capon, Mrs T J Capon, K A Gibbs, Mrs H L A Glynn, C A Hungate, Mrs L Hungate, J R F Mason, Mrs M A Starke and M G B Starke.

### **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 and Performance Management
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

### **ST MARY'S CHURCH, HAWKWELL**

The Reverend Peter Smith, recently appointed Rector of St Mary's Church, Hawkwell was in attendance to officiate for prayers and to provide some detail on the Parish. The Parish covered Hawkwell and parts of Ashingdon, Hockley and Rochford. St Mary's offered all age services on the third Sunday of every month open to all with an interest in questions of Christianity and faith. There are regular house groups and facilities for mothers and young children, the retired and teenagers. There is also involvement in the assemblies at two schools. Forthcoming months would see both an exploration of assistance that can be offered to the recently bereaved and a review of provision for the 3 to 18 age group. In its sense a responsibility for others, the Church shared a key objective with the Council.

### 27 BUDGET STRATEGY 2007/08

Council considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management on approving the integrated five-year budget strategy starting in 2007/08.

In line with the requirements of Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Head of Finance, Audit & Performance Management, as Chief Finance Officer for the Authority, confirmed the robustness of the process for preparing the estimates and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

During discussion it was recognised that the report reflected intensive work activity by both Members and officers over recent months. The following observations were made:-

- The Authority should be pleased at having achieved one of the highest votes in favour of the transfer of housing stock in the country and could look forward to future associated investment in housing stock.
- It was good that the revised estimates for 2006/07 matched the total of the original estimate.
- The fact that the Government is holding back £148,374 of revenue support is a reflection of Government policy, not the Council's.
- Whilst Gershon requirements continue to increase, the District has, for many years, been the lowest spending Council in Essex based on expenditure per head of the population. Members and officers could be congratulated on achieving year on year savings.
- The integrated five-year budget approach continues to keep the authority in good stead.
- Young people of Great Wakering will no doubt be pleased to see the inclusion of monies towards youth facilities at Great Wakering.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the revised estimates for 2006/07, as detailed in the report, be agreed.
- (2) That the core estimates for 2007/08, as detailed in the report, be agreed.
- (3) That the priorities identified for 2007/08, as detailed in the report, be agreed.
- (4) That the 2007/08 Council Tax for Rochford District Council be at 4.9%.
- (5) That the schedule of fees and charges, as detailed in the report, be agreed.

- (6) That the Capital Programme, as detailed in the report, be agreed.  
(HFAPM)

### **28 CAPITAL STRATEGY – 2007/08**

Council considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management on approval of the draft Capital Strategy.

It was observed that the draft strategy was a good document. Responding to questions, the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management advised that pension fund costs were met through the revenue side of the general fund. The next three yearly Revaluation of the fund is due to take place in March 2007. Members will be provided with information on the Revaluation as soon as it is available.

#### **Resolved**

That the Capital Strategy, as appended to the report, be agreed. (HFAPM)

### **29 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2007/08**

Council considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management on the Council's treasury strategy for borrowing an investment for 2007/08.

It was noted that:-

- Whilst there had been a further base rate rise since report preparation, the interest rate forecast by Sector Treasury Services had not changed materially.
- The proceeds from the transfer of the Council's housing stock would be used to repay part of the debt associated with transfer. The Government would pay the remainder.
- The Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary are the maximum boundaries for external debt including any overdraft for unforeseen interruptions to cash coming into the Authority.

Specific reference was made to the highly technical nature of the facts and figures associated with the report and the other financial reports on the agenda. In the context of access to services there could be merit in including a plain English summary at the front of such reports, together with a glossary, to assist public understanding. Such an approach was moved by Councillor S P Smith and seconded by Councillor C I Black.

It was observed that the summary approach could, potentially, be introduced in other areas where highly complicated/technical reports need to be produced.

In terms of considerations, it was noted that:-

- Some highly complicated/technical reports are produced to very tight time scales. Some are prescriptive.
- Some documents may not lend themselves well to simplification and the loss of overall meaning could be a danger.
- In its monitoring of the Committee system, the Review Committee had already noted the value of introducing an executive summary to an Audit Committee related report and would no doubt develop a view on this subject as its work continues.
- There are a number of audiences for reports.
- Website development includes the translation of Council information so that it can be easily understood by visitors to the site.
- There are occasions when, notwithstanding that documentation is simplified as much as possible, misunderstandings remain. For example, whilst associated documentation is made as clear as possible, many people continue to believe that the District Council receives the income that it collects on behalf of precepting bodies.

In terms of the budget strategy and associated documentation, a Member observed that a simply worded article of up to five hundred words (with a table) in Rochford District Matters would be of interest and value to the public.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy, including the limits contained within the report, be agreed. (HFAPM)
- (2) That the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary for external debt as laid down in the report be agreed and that authority be delegated to the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management, within the total limit for any individual year, to effect movement between the separately agreed limits for borrowing and other long-term liabilities. (HFAPM)
- (3) That the inclusion of a plain English summary at the front of highly complicated/technical reports (financial and other) together with glossaries be provided where appropriate. (HFAPM/CE)

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The meeting closed at 8.17 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....