

Policy and Finance Committee - 10 June 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy and Finance Committee** held on **10 June 2003** when there were present:

Cllr P F A Webster (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs M A Starke (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr J E Grey
Cllr K H Hudson
Cllr A J Humphries
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr P K Savill
Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr S P Smith
Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr D A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C J Lumley

SUBSTITUTES

Councillor C I Black

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	– Chief Executive
D Deeks	– Head of Financial Services
S Fowler	– Head of Administrative and Member Services
J Bostock	– Principal Committee Administrator

258 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 April 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

259 CHARGING FOR DISCRETIONARY SERVICES

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on a consultation paper relating to charging for discretionary services.

Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- Under provisions within the Local Government Act 2000, Local Authorities had responsibility for the environmental, social and economic well-being of the community. This over-arching responsibility meant that it was no longer easy to clearly distinguish discretionary and non-discretionary services.

- Once charging for discretionary services was in place, it was likely that auditors would be particularly involved with Authorities that operated large scale trading services.
- Building control was an example of a service for which the Authority was already required to cover its costs without generating additional income.

During debate a Member observed that, where a service is already offered by the private sector, there could be a high likelihood that a local authority would be able to undercut charges. From this perspective, it could be seen as inappropriate for an authority to be involved.

Resolved

That the Officer comments in the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) be this Council's response to the consultation paper. (CD(F&ES))

260 PROPOSALS FOR PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ESSEX, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA AND THURROCK AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S AREA

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services detailing the proposals of the Boundary Commission for England in respect of Parliamentary constituency boundaries in Essex.

On a motion, moved by Cllr PFA Webster and seconded by Cllr J E Grey, it was:-

Resolved

That representations be made to the Boundary Commission for England on the following basis:-

“Rochford District Council supports the proposal made by the Boundary Commission for England to bring those electors in Hawkwell South ward who are presently in Rochford & Southend East constituency, numbering approximately 600, into Rayleigh constituency.

The Council objects to the proposal made by the Commission to move Ashingdon & Canewdon ward from Rayleigh constituency to the re-named Southend East constituency with Rochford ward being transferred from Rochford & Southend East constituency to Rayleigh constituency. Our objections are for the following reasons:

- The swapping of wards would mean that 8,472 electors would be moved from one constituency to another for no obvious benefit.

- The ward of Ashingdon & Canewdon is physically separated from Southend by the town of Rochford and, if the proposals of the Commission are accepted, it would not be possible to travel by road from Southend to Ashingdon & Canewdon ward without going through the constituency of Rayleigh.
- We do not believe that the electors in Ashingdon & Canewdon ward, being a largely rural area, see themselves as being part of the hinterland of Southend.
- Under the Commission's proposals, the new Rayleigh & Wickford constituency with 73,815 electors would be the largest one in Essex whereas Southend East having 68,064 electors would be the twelfth largest. The retention of the two wards mentioned in their existing constituencies would give Rayleigh & Wickford 71,975 electors, which would still make it the largest one in the county. The additional electors would give Southend East 69,904 electors and make it the seventh largest Essex constituency. This change from the Commission's proposals would, therefore, reduce the disparity in numbers of electors between constituencies.

The numbers of electors quoted above are taken from the 2000 figures, which are being used by the Commission as "building blocks" for this exercise." (HAMS)

261 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1999: PART 1– BEST VALUE AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive setting out details of the latest guidance received from the office of the Deputy Prime Minister which would need to be taken into account in this year's Corporate Plan/Best Value Performance Plan.

During debate of the targets associated with addressing drug problems it was noted that the Castle Point and Rochford Drug Reference Group, on which the Council had Member representation, was specifically involved in monitoring and prevention activity. The work of the Crime Reduction Partnership also included the addressing of drug related problems.

A new requirement that best value documentation should make reference to Parish and Town Councils where these had made proposals in relationship to partnership working and service delivery was discussed.

Resolved

That the guidance now issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and its implications for the Council's Corporate Plan/Best Value Performance Plan be noted. (CE)

262 THAMES GATEWAY – SOUTH ESSEX PARTNERSHIP – PROGRESS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which provided an update on developments within the South Essex Partnership and sought endorsement to the Council submitting a range of projects for potential funding.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- The proposed bid submissions were in line with the objective of emphasising Rochford's role in relation to leisure, recreation and tourism. Whilst there would probably be issues associated with development proposals within the gateway as a whole, much would depend on the contents of the yet to be published regional planning guidance.
- The outcome of the bidding process should be known by the Autumn. The Government had indicated that there would be additional monies available beyond the initial three year tranche.
- The bids were in no priority order. Whilst the situation was changing on an almost daily basis, the bids associated with infrastructure requirements for the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, the feasibility and potential of Southend Airport to become a regional airport facility and the development of a Healthy Living Centre within the former Park School site looked particularly promising at this stage.
- The inclusion of a Learning and Resource Centre at Rayleigh Windmill would have no implications for the outcome of a bid for lottery funding in respect of the Windmill lottery bid work.
- Whilst work to introduce a mechanism whereby Castle Point and Rochford would be able to secure specific funding and access to specialist skills was at an early stage, in the longer term such a mechanism could be suited to addressing the type of skill shortages which may occur with projects such as that at the former Park School site.
- It was hoped that, in the future, Councils within the Gateway Partnership would be given more time to consider and make bid proposals.

During debate Members recognised that, whilst investment can bring many benefits, not everyone will be happy with the type of development associated with enhanced infrastructure. In this context it was right for the District to emphasise the leisure, recreation and tourism aspects of its role.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress being made in terms of developing a mechanism through which Castle Point and Rochford projects can be advanced be noted.
- (2) That the range of bids to be submitted to the Partnership Office, which reflect priorities within the Corporate Plan/Best Value Performance Plan and the emerging Local Plan, be endorsed. (CE)

263 STAFF REWARD SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) on the means by which the Council demonstrates recognition of exceptional effort or performance of its staff and appreciation for long service.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- Notwithstanding the issue associated with landmark anniversaries which was addressed in the report, the Staff Reward Scheme appeared to have been well received by staff. Feedback would continue to be monitored and the scheme reviewed as appropriate.
- Details of days lost through sickness were set out within the Quarterly Performance Monitoring report mechanism.
- Officers would consider whether there were possibilities for introducing a mechanism whereby staff at all levels would be able to identify if colleagues are performing exceptionally, so that senior management would be aware of all potential cases.
- The names of all staff who have achieved long service could be included in the Members' Bulletin.

Resolved

That the Council Staff Reward Scheme be confirmed, subject to:-

- the addition that any employee leaving the Authority having completed ten years or more service without the benefit of a long service award should receive a gift to a value equivalent to that of their last landmark anniversary.
- The inclusion of the names of staff who have achieved long service in the Members' Bulletin. (CD(LP& A))

264 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 paragraphs 11 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

265 CHIEF EXECUTIVES APPRAISAL

The Committee considered the exempt note of the Chief Executive's appraisal.

Resolved

That the exempt note of the Chief Executive's appraisal held on 9 April 2003 be received. (CE)

266 IT CONTRACTOR

Note: The Chairman had admitted this item of business as urgent because information about the Council's contractor had only just been received.

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on ownership changes relating to the Council's IT Contractor and associated negotiations aimed at achieving contract conditions which are advantageous to the Council.

Resolved

That the negotiations with SIS/Vivista, as outlined in the exempt report, be endorsed. (HAMS)

The Meeting closed at 8.24pm

Chairman.....

Date.....