

Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee 20 November 2001

Minutes of the meeting of the **Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee** on **20 November 2001** when there were present:

Cllr Mrs J Helson – Chairman

Cllr R E Vingoe
Cllr P F A Webster

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
R Crofts	- Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
D Deeks	- Head of Financial Services
G Woolhouse	- Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

147 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor P F A Webster declared a self interest by virtue of being a user of the Council's leisure facilities.

148 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Joint Member Meeting with Essex County Council to discuss areas of mutual interest (Minute 146)(1)

It was noted that Southend-on-Sea Borough Council had yet to respond to the District Council's request for a further joint meeting to discuss service/site issues of mutual interest. The Chief Executive advised that other meeting fora, such as the Thames Gateway Project and Area Forums, may provide opportunity for the raising of issues.

149 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Sub-Committee received the schedule relating to decisions. Outstanding Issues would be carried forward.

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150 KEY ITEMS FOR THE BUDGET PROCESS

The Sub-Committee received the report of the Head of Financial Services setting out key information on the budget process for 2002/03.

In presenting the report/responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- Information had now been received indicating that no local authority will receive a worse Standard Spending Assessment than that for the previous year.
- Representatives of the Town and Country Financial Issues Group had now met the Minister for Local Government. The Minister had promised a further meeting following publication of the forthcoming White Paper together with unrestricted access to Civil Servants.
- The Government had recently announced that the format of the Council Tax Bill is to be changed.
- Reports on key developments in relation to Housing Revenue Account Finance, Housing Revenue Estimates and Housing Rents/Charges were being submitted to a Special Meeting of the Housing Management Sub-Committee scheduled for 4 December 2001.
- As last year, Finance Officers would be able to attend political group meetings by invitation to assist understanding of the budget process. As part of the process, arrangements will be made for an early meeting with representatives of the National Non-Domestic Ratepayers.
- The outcome of the actuarial review of the Essex County Council Pension Fund should be known during mid December.
- Officers would soon be coming forward with the conclusions following the Best Value Review of Housing Management and Strategy. The conclusions of the Member Remuneration Panel should be available by the end of December.
- The Government was currently considering amending the Performance Indicators associated with recycling to identify the percentages of an area covered by kerb-side recycling, rather than the percentage of recycling per se.

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151 BUDGET STRATEGY – CHARGES

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services setting out the need to identify the policy issues behind charges to accord with arrangements advocated by the Audit Commission and align with the Best Value approach to services

Whilst accepting that there is a need for charging policies, Members concurred with the Chairman that, given the high level of detailed work involved, it would be appropriate for policy formulation around this issue to be undertaken by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee within the new political structure. In terms of the forthcoming budget round, Officers could come forward with recommendations for charges based on current practice.

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That the need for a charging policy framework be accepted, proposals to be considered at an early meeting of the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee within the new political structure.
- (2) That, for the current budget round, Officers come forward with recommendations for charges as appropriate. (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 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

152 HARDWICK HOUSE – UPDATE

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care on Hardwick House. The report detailed progress to date and invited Members to consider future site strategy.

Officers highlighted the possible options which could be associated with the proposals submitted by the Swan Housing Association together with disposal possibilities. Approaches could include a mixed strategy, providing for both a Capital receipt to assist the Authority in the provision of accommodation for frail elderly elsewhere in the District and conversion of the existing building for general purpose housing.

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Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- For frail elderly person's schemes, conversion can prove relatively more difficult and costly than for new build. Opportunities for new build were quite rare.
- There is currently a high demand for general needs housing.
- Responsibility for managing the housing for the frail elderly would fall to the Housing Association, although the Council would have nomination rights.
- It is not possible to predetermine the outcome of any bid. Funding is an annual process with the submission of bids and proposals in the Autumn for evaluation by the Housing Corporation. Results are announced around February.

During debate, Members recognised that the issue was not so much about a policy giving priority to, say, the frail elderly, but rather about the mechanisms for achieving policy. From experience it could be noted that, whilst frail elderly tenants often preferred to retain a location, occasions can arise where they decide it would be preferable to relocate.

The Sub-Committee recognised that, notwithstanding the need for further information from the Housing Corporation to assist detailed understanding of legal/financial aspects, an early decision on this matter was required by Full Council.

It was agreed that consideration should be given to convening an Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council for the purpose of finalising a strategy for Hardwick House. The Meeting could also consider the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care on other Housing Corporation funding bids originally submitted to the Community Services Committee.

The Meeting closed at 9.25pm

Chairman

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Date

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