

Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee

4 October 2000

Minutes of the meeting of the **Member Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee** held on **4 October 2000** when there were present:

Cllr G Fox – Chairman

Cllr Mrs J Helson
Cllr C R Morgan

Cllr R E Vingoe

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P F A Webster

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr T G Cutmore

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive
R Crofts – Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
R J Honey – Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
D Deeks – Head of Financial Services
J Bostock – Principal Committee Administrator

94 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 July 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

95 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

It was noted that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on proposals relating to land near the Civic Suite, Rayleigh (Minute 232/00).

Responding to questions on assets, Officers advised that:-

- There would be a future report relating to the Purdeys Industrial Estate, Rochford.
- The situation relating to land associated with Back Lane car park, Rochford would be revisited and the detail of associated provision in the Budget Book identified.
- An outcome of the Asset Management Best Value Review would be the production of an asset register.

96 TELEPHONES

The Sub-Committee considered the Report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on progress towards achieving savings in the Central Telecommunications budget.

During debate Members recognised that telephones were one aspect of communication between the public and the Council. Reference was made to the increase in costs which could be associated with public expectation that Officers return calls made on Mobile Lines and to the increase in work associated with responding to incoming e-mail. Reference was also made to the possibility that, in the near future, telecommunication organisations would be able to offer packages aimed at providing cost-effective solutions to all aspects of an authority's communication requirements.

Responding to Member questions, Officers indicated that:-

- Rochford's telecommunications experience was akin to that of other authorities.
- Statistically, it appeared all forms of communication were on the increase.
- The need to ensure that the Council's costs are kept to a minimum was clearly something to be addressed corporately.
- Further reports on addressing communication matters would be forwarded via the Best Value process.

The Sub-Committee noted the Report and the need to be mindful of maintaining a cost-effective approach to all aspects of the communication process.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED

That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

97 BUDGET STRATEGY

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Financial Services which outlined the budget for the current financial year together with broad guidelines for 2001/02 and 2002/03 to aid estimate preparations.

Responding to Member questions, Officers indicated that:-

- The County Council's precept was a key element of the overall Council's tax bill each year. Tax increases did not necessarily have a direct relationship with the District Council's budget position.
- The report had been produced to provide Members with early indication of this year's working parameters.
- Whilst there were some variances in income compared to estimates, overall report figures were in line with budget estimates at this stage.
- It was too early to accurately profile the income for car-parking following revised charge arrangements.
- Officers would be closely gauging income trends and reporting on the financial position as it evolves.
- The background and financial position of the Authority had been included in a number of public documents and an article on the current position could be included in the next edition of the Council's newspaper Rochford District Matters.

During debate Members referred to the value of the report in enabling early discussion of the tax position by the Political Groups. Whilst the Council may conclude that a tax level on the lines of the higher figure referred to in the report may be appropriate, the final position would clearly be subject to aspects such as Standing Spending Assessment, grants and income levels.

A Member commented on the value of setting a financial climate which would enable the Council to provide appropriate levels of public service. Comment was also made on the impact of capping regimes in earlier years and to the value of avoiding a short term approach leading to difficulties in future years. It would clearly be necessary for all Political Groups to reach agreement about tax levels.

RECOMMENDED

That it be accepted the Council needs to consider a possible tax increase up to the level identified in the report of the Head of Financial Services (set out as an exempt appendix to these Minutes), and recognised that the position will have to be reviewed in the light of the final Standard Spending Assessment, grants and income levels. (HFS)

98 ALBERT JONES COURT, ROCHFORD

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care which sought views on an

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enquiry from Essex County Council as to whether this Council would wish to purchase Albert Jones Court in the event of its closure.

RECOMMENDED

- (1) That Essex County Council be advised that this Council does not wish to purchase Albert Jones Court in the event that it becomes redundant.
- (2) That, in such circumstances, Essex County Council be urged to work with, and consult, this Council and other relevant organisations to identify a suitable alternative use that would be of benefit to the local authority. (HHHCC)

99 IT INFRASTRUCTURE – RECABLING

It was noted that the report on IT Infrastructure - Recabling had been withdrawn pending further discussions and site surveys.

100 BLATCHES FARM/PARK SCHOOL – PROGRESS

NOTE: The Chairman admitted this item of business as urgent in view of the need to determine the appointment of consultants in advance of further negotiations.

The Sub-Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive which advised on the content of a recent meeting between District and County Council officers in connection with Blatches Farm/Park School and sought approval to employ consultants to undertake detailed evaluations of the respective sites.

Members recognised that the current position provided potential for the Council to achieve objectives, although further consideration will need to be given to the detail of proposals.

RECOMMENDED

That consultants be employed to assist the District Council in negotiations with the County Council on the matters set out in the exempt report at a cost of £5,000. (CE)

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chairman.....

Date