

Council – 20 February 2018

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **20 February 2018** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs L A Butcher

Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr C C Cannell	Cllr Mrs C M Mason
Cllr M R Carter	Cllr E O K Mason
Cllr N L Cooper	Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr J E Newport
Cllr R R Dray	Cllr Mrs C E Roe
Cllr D S Efde	Cllr Mrs L Shaw
Cllr Mrs J R Gooding	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr J D Griffin	Cllr D J Sperring
Cllr B T Hazlewood	Cllr C M Stanley
Cllr N J Hookway	Cllr M J Steptoe
Cllr Mrs D Hoy	Cllr I H Ward
Cllr M Hoy	Cllr M J Webb
Cllr Mrs T R Hughes	Cllr Mrs C A Weston
Cllr G J Ioannou	Cllr A L Williams
Cllr M J Lucas-Gill	Cllr S A Wilson
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J C Burton, R Milne, T E Mountain and R A Oatham.

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton	-	Managing Director
A Hutchings	-	Strategic Director
J Bostock	-	Assistant Director, Democratic Services
N Lucas	-	Section 151 Officer
M Petley	-	Head of Finance
M Power	-	Democratic Services Officer

43 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 December 2017 and of the Extraordinary Meeting held on 13 February 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman was presented with a copy of the Gideon's Bible by a representative from the Gideon's Society.

The Chairman announced that one of the highlights of her year was the recent visit of HRH the Duke of Kent to the District to present a second Queen's Award for Innovation to Excalibur Screwbolts Ltd, Hockley. She and other Councillors had also attended the Holocaust Memorial Service.

45 MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Council received the Minutes of Executive and Committee meetings held between the period 2 December 2017 to 9 February 2018.

46 REPORT OF THE LEADER ON THE WORK OF THE EXECUTIVE

Council received the following report from the Leader of the Council on the work of the Executive:-

"This is the fourth Ordinary Council meeting of the 2017/18 Municipal Year and I would like to welcome all Members.

Since the meeting on 12 December, the Executive has met once, during which considerations included:-

- The Quarter 3 2017/18 Financial Management and Performance Report;
- The progress made by the Leaders and Chief Executives on strategic place shaping in the preparation of a South Essex 2050 Vision.

Other matters that my colleagues and I on the Executive have dealt with include:-

- Accepting the Brownfield Register of potential brownfield planning sites within the District into the Council's evidence base and publishing it on the Council's website;
- Acknowledging the need for a Memorandum of Understanding for the Essex Coast Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy as an effective means to discharge the Council's Duty to co-operate responsibilities with other Essex Councils and Natural England in relation to this specific strategic and cross-boundary matter and delegating authority to the Assistant Director, Planning and Regeneration Services to sign the Memorandum and ensure that it is discharged at an operational level.

As always, I will be happy to take any questions from Members in respect of the work of the Executive and I am sure my Executive colleagues will be happy to contribute where appropriate."

47 SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX 2018/19

(Note: the Leader of the Council declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item as a Member of Essex County Council.)

Council considered the report of the Section 151 Officer seeking authorisation on setting Council Tax for the year 2018/19 for the District Council and agreeing the full Council Tax for Rochford District, which included Essex County Council, Essex Police and Crime Commissioner, Essex Fire Service and Town and Parish Council precepts.

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:-

“Chairman and, through you, Councillors, members of the public and press. This is my fourteenth budget as Leader of the Conservative Administration. The budget pressures under which local government operates have intensified and this Authority continues to look closely at opportunities for savings and, most importantly, at how it can increase revenue. This is not only in response to cuts in levels of grant and spending power, but also to significant cost increases arising from demographic pressures.

Local Government has faced an unprecedented period of funding pressures since 2010, and this looks set to continue at least for the medium term, with central government placing increasing emphasis on local authorities to raise revenues locally rather than relying on grant income. Rochford District Council will lose all of its Revenue Support Grant funding in 2018/19 (a reduction of £1.2m since 2015/16) and faces a potential financial cliff edge in 2019/20 with the proposed implementation of negative RSG, which could reduce the Council’s funding by a further £600,000 per annum. This is coupled with considerable financial pressures; in particular, increased demand for services, new statutory duties for Homelessness, and rising inflation; which together give rise to a projected gap of around £1.8m by 2022/23. Rochford District Council has already taken significant steps to start addressing this projected gap, through identification of proposals, including efficiencies, savings and new income streams, which will help it to continue the journey towards financial self-sustainability in the medium term.

Looking to the future, we have a Business Plan that sets the high level priorities that the Council will work towards in the next couple of years. Its themes give a focus on capital investment and provide a clear direction to inform the better use of Council resources to deliver priorities. Our priorities are to:-

- become financially self-sufficient;
- use early intervention to manage demand on our services;
- maximise our assets; and
- enable communities.

Despite the challenges faced, we have continued to deliver excellent services to our residents. Our achievements over the past year include:-

- Launching a new web chat service on the Council website to make it easier and quicker to contact the Council during normal office hours and a new Twitter account for public health so that our ‘followers’ will have the most up to date news on anything to do with public health.
- Our 14th annual Wild Woods Day, which took place on 3 June at Hockley Woods and attracted over 4,000 visitors who had a chance to try their hand at activities including axe throwing, bush craft, and tent building.
- Hosting a landlord forum in partnership with Southend and Castle Point Borough Councils.
- Continuing to provide local businesses with advice and support, including hosting Business Breakfasts.
- A programme of one day events for students across our secondary schools providing an insight into the business world. The focus is on employment sectors where there is an evidenced skills gap, supporting students to gain employment and businesses to access individuals with the relevant skills set.
- Awarding grants totalling £50,000 to a range of community initiatives around the District.
- Launching a ‘Safe at Home’ grant to support local residents living in their home with a dementia diagnosis.
- Being second in the Country (out of more than 350 authorities) for recycling – with a recycling rate of 63.9%.
- Investing £330,000 in refurbishing three of the District’s public conveniences so that people continue to have a good standard of facilities whilst they are out and about.
- Being awarded Community Safety Accreditation Scheme Powers by Essex Police which gives employees of the Council targeted police powers to help tackle anti-social issues.

As a Council with a history of prudent financial management we will continue to look at areas where costs can be further reduced or additional income generated. However in 2018/19 there is a need to increase Council Tax by 2.98% to help fund the huge financial pressures the District is facing. This equates to an increase of 12p per week for a Band D property

The proposal is to set Rochford District Council's Band D Council Tax for 2018/19 at £223.65 per year. The breakdown of the total annual Council Tax for a Band D property in 2018/19 will be:

Essex County Council	£1,143.09
Essex County Council Social Care Levy	£78.66
Police & Crime Commissioner for Essex	£169.02
Essex Fire Authority	£70.38
Town / Parish Councils	£45.91
Rochford District Council	£223.65

The total average Council Tax for a Band D property in 2018/19 would be £1730.71 - an increase of £79.37 since 2017/18.

In conclusion, although these are still difficult financial times, Rochford District Council remains committed to providing excellent services to its residents and partners. With this in mind we will be doing all we can to deliver innovative and high quality services.

Chairman, I commend the Rochford District Council Tax for Members' approval.

Thank you Chairman."

A motion that the report recommendations be agreed was moved by Cllr T G Cutmore and seconded by Cllr S P Smith.

The Leader of the Green and Rochford District Residents Group drew attention to the fact that the increased amount of Council Tax of £79.37 for the year represented an increase of 4.8%, considerably higher than Consumer Price Inflation, which was quoted at 2.7%. He felt that this would continue to be a problem as the Government released caps on precepts and Council Tax. He would be abstaining from voting on the report recommendations as he could not agree to recommendation (5), the 2.98% increase in the Rochford District Council element of the Council Tax.

The Portfolio for Finance emphasised that Rochford District Council was not in a position to influence what other authorities set as Council Tax, but had the duty of collecting it on their behalf. He added that the increase for the District Council's element equated to £6.48 per annum, or 12p per week.

The Deputy Leader of the Green and Rochford District Residents Group advised that he too would be abstaining from voting on recommendation (5).

He observed that the transfer of responsibility for public conveniences to certain Parish/Town Councils effectively represented the imposition of additional costs and associated tax rise on these Councils by the District Council. The Portfolio Holder for Environment observed that the Parish/Town Councils had been given the opportunity to continue the public convenience facility in their area and that two Parish Councils had not increased their precept for 2018/19.

The Leader of the UKIP Group stated his intention to abstain from voting on the report recommendations because of the above-inflation rate increase in Council Tax.

The Leader of the Council emphasised that part of the increase in Council Tax was the Essex County Council Social Levy, which could be seen as extremely important in an ageing society. He added that the increase in the Police and Crime Commissioner precept in the Rochford District would enable there to be an increased level of local policing.

On a show of hands, the motion was declared carried and it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2018/19 (excluding Parish and Town precepts) is £6,999,591.
- (2) That the Council Tax requirement of the District Council together with the Parish and Town Councils, be £8,436,419 for the same period.
- (3) That the basic amount of Council Tax (including Parish and Town Precepts) be £269.56 for the year. This being the Council Tax requirement £8,436,419 divided by the Council Tax base of 31,297.2.
- (4) That the total of Parish and Town precepts included within the above be £1,436,828.
- (5) That the basic rate of Council Tax relating to the District Council without Parish and Town precepts be £223.65, which is a 2.98% increase.
- (6) That the total tax for both District Council and the Town/Parish Councils be as set out in the schedule at Appendix B of the officer report.
- (7) That the sums given above for Band D but now shown in the particular valuations bands A-H be as set out in the schedule at Appendix C to the officer report.
- (8) That the precepts issued to the Council in respect of Essex County Council, Essex Police and Fire Crime Commissioner (Fire and Rescue Authority) and (Policing and Community Safety) for each valuation band A-H be as set out at Appendix D to the officer report.

- (9) That the total Council Tax for the area for each valuation band A-H is as set out at Appendix E to the officer report. These are the amounts set as Council Tax for the year 2018/19
- (10) That the total of the sums payable into the Council's General Fund in respect of redistributed business rates and New Homes Bonus and adjustments from the collection fund, be £2,896,438. (S151O)

(Note: Cllrs C C Cannell, N L Cooper, D S Efde, N J Hookway, Mrs D Hoy, M Hoy, Mrs T R Hughes, Mrs C M Mason, E O K Mason, J R F Mason J E Newport, C M Stanley and S A Wilson wished it to be recorded that they had abstained from voting.)

48 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2018/19

Council considered the report of the Managing Director on a proposed Pay Policy Statement for 2018/19.

On a motion that the report recommendations be agreed, moved by Cllr T G Cutmore and seconded by Cllr B T Hazlewood, it was:-

Resolved

That the Pay Policy Statement 2018/19 be adopted. (MD)

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm.

Chairman

Date

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