

Council – 19 February 2019

Minutes of the meeting of **Council** held on **19 February 2019** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr D Merrick
Vice-Chairman: Cllr R R Dray

Cllr Mrs L A Butcher
Cllr C C Cannell
Cllr M R Carter
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr D S Efde
Cllr A H Eves
Cllr Mrs J R Gooding
Cllr J D Griffin
Cllr B T Hazlewood
Cllr Mrs D Hoy
Cllr M Hoy
Cllr G J Ioannou
Cllr M J Lucas-Gill
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr Mrs C M Mason
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr Mrs J E McPherson
Cllr R Milne
Cllr T E Mountain
Cllr Mrs C A Pavelin
Cllr Mrs C E Roe
Cllr Mrs L Shaw
Cllr P J Shaw
Cllr S P Smith
Cllr D J Sperring
Cllr C M Stanley
Cllr M J Steptoe
Cllr I H Ward
Cllr M J Webb
Cllr Mrs C A Weston
Cllr A L Williams
Cllr S A Wilson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J C Burton, N L Cooper, N J Hookway, K H Hudson and R A Oatham.

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton	- Managing Director
A Hutchings	- Strategic Director
J Bostock	- Assistant Director, Democratic Services
M Harwood-White	- Assistant Director, Commercial Services
N Lucas	- Section 151 Officer
D Tribe	- Assistant Director, Transformation
G Sullivan	- Electoral Services Manager
S Worthington	- Democratic Services Officer

29 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

30 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman had attended a number of events since the last meeting and enjoyed many carols during December. He had attended civic dinners, a moving Holocaust Memorial Day service and a 70th anniversary service at Basildon Borough Council. The Essex Wing Air Training Corps Awards were

impressive in respect of the discipline, smartness and attention to detail on display.

31 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD BETWEEN THE PERIOD 1 DECEMBER 2018 TO 31 JANUARY 2019

Council received the Minutes of the Executive and Committee meetings held between the period 1 December 2018 to 31 January 2019.

32 REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE, COMMITTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES TO COUNCIL

(1) Report of the Investment Board

Outline Business Case: Asset Delivery Programme

Council considered the report of the Investment Board on the outline business case for the asset delivery programme and funding required from General Balances to progress the programme to full business case stage.

The Deputy Leader emphasised that the Council's asset strategy had a clear vision to reduce the future running costs associated with the Council's assets, generate capital receipts to help fund future investment, bring forward an optimised asset base that is fit for purpose and for 21st century operation and enable quality service provision for residents and visitors through a sustained programme of transformation. This project has seen Members and officers working together on a complex, critical project in order to bring forward clear proposals to deliver the Council's objectives through a highly integrated delivery programme across the Council's key strategic assets. He thanked officers and the working party who put a great deal of work into this and spent many hours on this project. He moved a Motion, seconded by the Portfolio Holder for Enterprise, that the recommendations set out on page 8.1.3 of the report be approved.

Officers advised, in response to a Member question relating to the costs of moving the Council Chamber accommodation, that the outline business case set out the financials for the project; it was estimated that for that stage of the project there would be a net capital requirement of £0.6 million. However, the intention, as set out in the business case, was that capital receipts from some of the sites would subsidise the building of the new facility at the Freight House.

During the debate another Member expressed concern that the Council was proposing to use assets worth around £2.8 million to provide an office at the Freight House and was not convinced that this was the best use of those assets. Another Member questioned the approach taken by the Council of best risk/financial risk route of partnering with a company to take on that risk; he claimed that the risk was not lowered by partnering with a company. He expressed the view that although the total figure for the project was large, the

sums were made up by the joining of a number of smaller building projects, rather than one big one, so the complexity related more to one of organisation rather than complicated building methods. He was therefore surprised that the option to run the project in house had not been given more serious consideration. He expressed concern that by choosing the partnership option the Council would be giving away a large sum of money to the partner company.

The Portfolio Holder for Enterprise stated that the asset delivery programme was an integrated one that would deliver the Council's asset strategy objectives. The Council had sought the advice of experts, given the scale of the project. The outline business case had been completed with due diligence and he thanked the Member working party for all its hard work.

The Leader of the Council emphasised that the concern raised relating to risk and the partnership option had been discussed at the Investment Board meeting. He referred to paragraph 11.2 of the report which provided revenue costs details and stressed that the revenue costs of the preferred scheme option demonstrated that this option could generate ongoing annual revenue savings of in excess of £300,000 compared to the Do Minimum option, which would increase in future in order to maintain the current Council buildings. He also drew particular attention to the table set out in paragraph 11.5 of the report providing capital funding details and stressed that what was being proposed was imaginative and that the current accommodation was ageing and needed money to be spent on it.

In response to a Member question as to whether there had been any independent review of the outline business case, officers advised that the Council had taken independent specialist advice along the way to help prepare the business case and had, in addition, been through an independent review, the results of which would be released, once available. Responding to a supplementary question as to the accreditation of the independent review, the Deputy Leader confirmed that this had been carried out by Gateway Assured Review, by a local partnership set up jointly and owned by H.M. Treasury and the LGA.

Resolved

- (1) That the outline business case for the asset delivery programme, as set out in the exempt appendix A, be approved and published (with appropriate redaction).
- (2) That a further £298,200 be drawn down from General Balances to fund the resources required to progress the programme to full business case stage. (ADCS)

(Note: Cllrs C C Cannell, M Hoy and C M Stanley wished it to be recorded that they had voted against the above decision.)

(2) Report of the Planning Policy Sub-Committee

Local Plan: Local Development Scheme 2018-2021

Council considered the report of the Planning Policy Sub-Committee relating to the Local Development Scheme 2018-2021.

Resolved

That the draft Local Development Scheme 2018-2021 be adopted. (MD)

Gypsy and Traveller Issues Paper and Sustainability Appraisal: Regulation 18 Consultation

Council considered the report of the Planning Policy Sub-Committee relating to the Gypsy and Traveller Issues Paper and Sustainability Appraisal: Regulation 18 Consultation.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning moved a Motion, seconded by the Deputy Leader, that the consultation be withdrawn to allow the Council more time to prepare a plan to balance the diverse needs of the Traveller community and the concerns raised by the settled community.

During debate of the Motion, a Member questioned what had changed since the meeting of the Sub-Committee which had resulted in the Motion being brought forward. The Portfolio Holder for Planning stated that two potential sites within the document had been withdrawn by the landowners, another two sites were subject to planning appeals, and there was a forthcoming planning application for the Michelins Farm site, all of which would have an impact on any consultation. In addition, recent advice from Central Government in respect of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation should also be taken into consideration as part of any potential consultation.

In response to a further Member question as to why the Council had not taken positive steps to bring Michelins Farm forward as a Gypsy and Traveller site, the Portfolio Holder for Planning advised that there were planning applications coming forward in relation to that site which had to be taken into consideration as they had a bearing on the future of the site. In response to a supplementary question as to when the Council might expect to deliver a Gypsy and Traveller site at Michelins Farm, the Portfolio Holder for Planning advised that the Council was actively looking at potential sites but Michelins Farm was the Council's preferred site, as designated within the Council's Core Strategy. The Michelins Farm site had been sold and the new owner was putting forward planning applications for the site. It was possible that with a new owner and the site cleared there was a better possibility of the site coming forward as a Gypsy and Traveller site.

The Leader emphasised that the sites included within the consultation document were not sites chosen by the Council to be put forward, but rather

sites put forward by members of the public, landowners and businesses owning land in the District.

In response to a further question as to when the consultation document was likely to come back to Council it was noted that it was difficult to quantify a timescale, given the need to wait for the outcome of planning appeals and applications and to wait until further guidance came forward from Central Government in respect of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision.

Resolved

That the Gypsy and Traveller Issues Paper and Sustainability Appraisal: Regulation 18 Consultation be withdrawn to enable the Council to balance the diverse needs of the Traveller community with concerns raised by the settled community. (MD)

(Note: Cllrs C C Cannell, Mrs C M Mason, J R F Mason, T E Mountain, C M Stanley and S A Wilson wished it to be recorded that they had voted against the above decision.)

33 REPORT OF THE LEADER ON THE WORK OF THE EXECUTIVE

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

“This is the fourth Ordinary Council meeting of the 2018/19 Municipal Year and I would like to welcome all Members.

Since the meeting on 11 December, the Executive has met once during which considerations included:-

- The quarter 3 2018/19 financial management and performance report and the latest position on the Council's key performance indicators.
- Approving the transfer of £600,000 of budget from the in-year under spend to the Local Development Fund reserve to increase the funds for planning policy work to support the delivery of the Local Plan, Joint Strategic Plan and related development plan documents over the next five years.
- Delegating authority to the Assistant Director, Environmental Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder of Environment, to approve the Enovert Community Grant award of £45,000 for play equipment at Great Woking Open Space and the consequent execution of the project.
- Noting the arrangements being made to secure the long term visitor potential of Wallasea Island, including an event in May 2020 allied to the Council's Discover 2020 Festival.

- Agreeing the ongoing procedures for allocating the Voluntary Sector Grants fund for the financial year 2019/20 and noting that process aligns outcomes with local strategic priorities, as detailed in the Council's Business Plan and the Joint Rochford and Castle Point Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Agreeing that the Rayleigh, Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Services will receive top sliced funding from the same pot, based on performance as the community connector and expert.

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

- Approving the formal response to Basildon Borough Council's consultation on its Local Plan Publication Draft (Regulation 19).
- Agreeing that the Brownfield Land Register (December 2018) be accepted into the Council's evidence base and published on the Council's website.

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

It was noted in response to a Member question as to the expected spend in total on the new Local Plan, including spend to date, that a best estimate was just under £1 million; reserves had been set aside, but it was early on in the process. The Leader of the Council also emphasised that the Council was proceeding with the Joint Strategic Plan and that it was anticipated that this would result in significant infrastructure in the future.

34 SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX 2019/20

Council considered the report of the Section 151 Officer seeking authorisation on setting Council Tax for the year 2019/20 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 fifteenth budget as Leader of the Conservative Administration. The budget pressures under which Local Government operates remain significant and this Authority continues to look closely at opportunities to make efficiency savings and generate new sources of revenue. This is not only in response to the removal of Government grants but also to deal with significant cost increases arising from inflationary and demographic pressures.

Looking to the future, we will be refreshing our Business Plan that sets out the high level priorities that the Council will work towards over the medium term;

this will incorporate the Council's plans to deliver an Asset Programme which aims to maximise the value from the Council's key strategic sites.

Our current priorities, as set out in the 2016-2020 plan 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:-

- Being placed joint second in the league for recycling out of more than 350 local authorities across England.
- Hosting a Wedding Fayre at our newest wedding venue, The Old House, Rochford on 20 May.
- Our 15th annual Wild Woods Day, which took place on 14 July at Hockley Woods where visitors had a chance to try their hand at activities and stroll around the pop-up market place.
- Continuing to provide local businesses with advice and support, including hosting various business breakfasts.
- Adopting the Environmental Health Service Plan.
- Mandatory Child Sexual Exploitation awareness training for RDC taxi drivers in July, August and September.
- Becoming a Hate Incident Reporting Centre, where members of the public can be assisted to report a hate incident or crime.

As a responsible Council we will continue to look at areas where costs can be reduced or income generated. However, in 2019/20 there is a need to increase Council Tax by 2.98% to help fund the financial pressures that the District is currently facing. This equates to an increase of 13p per household per week on a Band D property.

The proposal is to set Rochford District Council's Council Tax, for a Band D property, at £230.31 per year. The breakdown of annual Council Tax for a Band D property would be:-

Essex County Council	£1179.63
Essex County Council Social Care Levy	£90.81

Essex County Fire and Rescue	£70.38
Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner	£192.96
Average Town / Parish Councils	£48.66
Rochford District Council	£230.31

The total average Council Tax for a Band D property for 2019/20 would be £1,814.82 – an increase of £84.11 (approximately 4.9%).

In conclusion, although these are still difficult financial times, Rochford District Council remains committed to providing excellent services to our 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."

The Leader of the Rochford District Residents and Green Group expressed the view that the Council's reserves could be used rather than increasing the rate of Council Tax as proposed. Another Member commented that the rate of inflation was less than half of the proposed percentage increase in Council Tax and that any increase in Council Tax should be in line with the rate of inflation.

Resolved

- (1) That the council tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2019/20 (excluding parish and town precepts) be £7,270,915.
- (2) That the council tax requirement for the Council, together with the parish and town councils, be £8,807,194 for the same period.
- (3) That the basic amount of council tax (including parish and town precepts) be £278.97 for the year. This being the council tax requirement £8,807,194 divided by the council tax base of £31,570.4.
- (4) That the total of parish and town precepts included within the above be £1,536,279.
- (5) That the basic rate of council tax relating to the Council without parish and town precepts be £230.31, which is a 2.98% increase.
- (6) That the total tax for both the Council and the town/parish councils be as set out in the schedule in appendix B.

- (7) That the sums given above for Band D but now shown in the particular valuation bands A-H be as set out in the schedule in appendix C.
- (8) That the precepts issued to the Council in respect of Essex County Council, Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service for each valuation band A-H be as set out in the schedule in appendix D.
- (9) That the total council tax for the area for each valuation band A-H be as set out in appendix E. These are the amounts set as council tax for the year 2019/20.
- (10) That the total of the sums payable into the Council's General Fund in respect of redistributed business rates, levy surplus grant, New Homes Bonus and adjustments from the collection fund, be £3,574,907. (S151O)

(Note: Cllrs C C Cannell, A H Eves, Mrs D Hoy, M Hoy, Mrs C M Mason, J R F Mason, T E Mountain, C M Stanley and S A Wilson wished it to be recorded that they voted against (5) above.)

35 COUNCIL TAX – EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM

Council considered the report of the Section 151 Officer outlining proposals for increasing the amount of Council Tax Empty Homes Premium charged on long term empty properties.

In response to a Member question as to whether there had been an assessment of how many potential properties could be brought back into use, officers advised that it was estimated that this would include around 65 properties, although an estimate could not yet be provided for the following year. It was further noted that the private sector housing team was working closely with the owners of the relevant properties with the aim of bringing them back into use.

It was noted, in response to a question raised by a Member as to how the Council applied the test of what was unfurnished and occupied in order that the rules weren't flouted by, for example, the placement of some furniture in empty properties, that the rules were ultimately applied by means of officers' discretion; however, details would be circulated to all Members outside the meeting of any central guidance on defining what constituted 'substantially unfurnished' and the specific rules applied by the Council.

Officers advised, in response to a further Member question relating to how many of the cited 65 empty properties were in a state of disrepair and uninhabitable, that a breakdown of this information would be provided to Members outside the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council Tax empty homes premium be increased as follows:-

To 100% from 1 April 2019 for properties that have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 2 years or more.

To 200% from 1 April 2020 for properties that have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished between 5 and 10 years; and

To 300% from 1 April 2021 for properties that have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 10 years or more.
- (2) To apply the Council Tax empty homes premium in all cases that meet the criteria in (1) above with the exception of the statutory exceptions. (S151O)

36 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

(Note: Cllr T G Cutmore wished it to be recorded that he would not take part in debate of this item and would also abstain from voting.)

Council considered the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel providing details of its review of the Council's remuneration scheme for Members of the District Council.

In response to a Member question as to whether the Council had the opportunity to amend any of the report recommendations, officers advised that Councils should have regard to Independent Remuneration Panel recommendations, but did not have to approve recommendations.

One Member observed that, in respect of paragraph 2.14 relating to Committee Chairmen, there were differences in the level of responsibilities of different Committee Chairmen; the Chairman of the Development Committee had greater responsibilities, for example, than the Chairman of the Audit Committee, with a greater number of meetings regularly scheduled, and this should be taken into consideration.

Another Member made the point that Member allowances had not changed for some considerable time although the amount of work undertaken by some Members of the Council had increased.

Officers advised, in response to a Member question relating to the number of Councillor expense claims, that they did not have an exact figure to report, but that there were not many.

Cllr Mrs C M Mason moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs J E McPherson, that option 2 be approved, as this would yield savings to the Council and appeared to be an equitable way forward.

Particular reference was made to the fact that the proposed changes to Members' allowances in respect of, for example, meal allowances, would bring them in line with officer allowances.

Resolved

- (1) That basic and some special responsibility allowances be adjusted in accordance with appendix B to this report.
- (2) That the multiplier for the allowance for Independent Persons and Parish Members of the Standards Committee, Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel, Member Champions and Co-Optees be retained at 10% of the basic allowance for Rochford District Council Members.
- (3) That the childcare and carer's allowances be retained at their current levels, as follows:-

Childcare allowance to be set at £15.00 per hour maximum, subject to the following conditions:-

- Dependent children must be under the age of 16 and living at home with the Member and claims must be made for actual expenditure incurred.
- Allowance is claimed on production of a signed statement which states care has been provided by a babysitter.
- Any rate of the allowance above £10.00 per hour will only be paid on the basis of a formal receipt from a qualified childcare professional.

Carer's allowance to be set at £15 per hour maximum, subject to the following conditions:-

- Elderly or dependent relatives must be living at the same address as the Member and claims must be for actual expenditure incurred.
- Production of receipt from a professional carer must be supplied.

- (4) That the private car allowance be increased from 40p to 45p per mile in line with HMRC rates and that other allowances stay the same so that claims for travelling expenses must be based on one of the following:-
 - Bus fare or second class railway train fare.
 - A mileage allowance for use of the Member's vehicle, together with an additional allowance for passengers.

- A private car allowance of 45p per mile.
- A passenger allowance of 5p per mile.
- A motorcycle allowance of 24p per mile.
- A bicycle allowance of 20p per mile.

In certain circumstances, the amount of the actual fare of a taxi cab. This will only be paid in cases where use of public transport is not available or where excessive travelling time would be involved.

- (5) That the rate of allowances for breakfast, lunch and evening meal should be changed and the tea allowance deleted to keep them in line with officer allowances so that subsistence allowances be applied as follows:-

When attendance at a Conference, course, etc. is as a representative of the Council and involves the purchase of meals and/or overnight accommodation away from home, subsistence allowance is payable. This allowance is intended to cover expenses incurred on meals and hotel accommodation during absence from home and can only be paid when the approved duty is as a representative of the Council.

Rates of allowance are detailed below:-

1. The rates shall not exceed:-

- (a) In the cases of an absence, not involving an absence overnight from the usual place of residence:-

i	Breakfast allowance (more than 4 hours away from normal place of residence – before 1100 hours)	£5.00
ii	Lunch allowance (more than 4 hours away from normal place of residence – including lunchtime between 1200-1400 hours)	£10.00
iii.	Evening meal allowance (more than 4 hours away from normal place of residence, ending after 1900 hours)	£20.00

For overnight stays the actual cost of hotel accommodation will be claimable, subject to a maximum of £120 per night. This sum is increased to £180 per night if staying in Central London.

2. Central London means the City of London and the London Boroughs of Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith, Fulham, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster.
3. Any rate determined under paragraph 1 above shall be deemed to cover a continuous period of absence of 24 hours.
4. The rates specified in paragraph 1 above shall be reduced by an appropriate amount in respect of any meal provided free of charge by an authority or body in respect of the meal or the period to which the allowance relates.

Note: Allowances above will be amended as and when rates payable to officers are amended to keep officer and Member rates identical.

Meals on Trains

When main meals (i.e., breakfast, lunch or dinner) are taken on trains during a period for which there is entitlement to a day subsistence allowance, the reasonable cost of the meals (including VAT) may be reimbursed in full, within the limits specified below.

In such circumstances, reimbursement for the reasonable cost of a meal should replace the entitlement to the day subsistence allowance for the appropriate meal period.

Limitations on reimbursement are:-

- (a) for breakfast, an absence of more than 4 hours before 1100 hours.
- (b) for lunch, an absence of more than 4 hours, including between 1200-1400 hours.
- (c) for evening meal, an absence of more than 4 hours, ending after 1900 hours. (ADDS)

(Note: Cllrs T G Cutmore, R R Dray, D Merrick, I H Ward and M J Webb wished it to be recorded that they had abstained from voting on the above decisions and Cllrs D S Efde and Mrs C E Roe wished it to be recorded that they had voted in favour of the above decisions.)

37 RETURNING OFFICER'S FEES AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR ELECTIONS

Council considered the report of the Assistant Director, Legal Services seeking Members' approval of the Returning Officer's scale of fees and associated expenses from 2019.

Members noted an amendment on page 15.4 of the report in relation to Poll Clerk Training, replacing the sum of £30.00 with that of £34.00.

Resolved

- (1) That it be agreed to retain the fees paid to the Returning Officer at their current level and as set out in appendix 1 at table A.
- (2) That it be agreed to retain the fees for Clerical Allowance at their current level and as set out in appendix 1 at table B.
- (3) That the increased Election Fees be agreed, as set out in appendix 1 at table C, subject to amending the Poll Clerk Training figure to £34.00. (ADLS)

38 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Council considered the report of the Strategic Director providing details of a review of polling districts and polling places within the District.

The Strategic Director outlined two further proposed changes following closure of the consultation: to replace a polling station in Hockley and Ashingdon ward at Greensward Academy with one in Hockley Evangelical Church which was within walking distance of the original polling station and was able to accommodate the necessary numbers; and in Lodge ward to replace Oaktree Children's Centre with one in Rayleigh Lodge that can accommodate the necessary numbers.

Officers advised, in response to a Member question about Hullbridge Community Centre, that the community centre had asked hirers who had bookings in place for election day to re-schedule; however, one hirer was unwilling to change their booking and as such the venue could not be used as a polling station.

In response to a Member concern relating to the proposed use of a public house – the Traveller's Joy, Rayleigh – as a polling station, officers advised that there was no prohibition on the use of licensed premises as polling stations. In this particular instance use of the public house was, officers emphasised, preferable to use of a portacabin/generator in terms of health and safety. Responding to a further Member concern relating to the use of an external parking management firm in the Traveller's Joy car park, officers confirmed that there was free car parking on site for 2-3 hours; voters would need to obtain a ticket from the machine in the car park but would not need to pay for car parking. Officers emphasised, in response to Members' concern that voters might be fined in the car park if they failed to get a ticket from the machine, that polling station staff would tell voters on arrival that they needed to obtain a ticket prior to voting. Officers further stressed that an equalities impact assessment had been undertaken and that alcohol would not be served in any rooms being used as polling stations.

Members expressed concern that if the vehicle registration recognition system could not be temporarily disabled during election day at the Traveller's Joy this would present a barrier to people being able to cast their votes. Members stressed the need for officers to explore whether this system could be disabled on election day or for a policy to be put in place to address the issue of potential parking fines imposed on voters using that location on election day. Members also stressed that use of premises serving alcohol could also be perceived as a barrier to voting for some residents with religious, etc beliefs.

Members also expressed concern about use of Rayleigh Lodge as a polling station, citing the fact that this venue was very busy. Officers advised that there was a dedicated entrance to one side that should allow direct access for voters to the proposed polling station, as well as level access for wheelchair users, etc. If necessary, a separate exit for voters to leave could be organised, with appropriate signage displayed. In response to a further query relating to the number of rooms proposed to be used for voting at Rayleigh Lodge, that there would be one room used for both polling stations; the room was large enough to be able to accommodate the necessary numbers. Officers further confirmed that it was not the conservatory area that was proposed for the polling stations, as this had steps leading down to it with associated accessibility issues.

Officers advised, in response to a specific question raised by a Member as to whether the proposed room was large enough to accommodate two polling stations that they would return to Rayleigh Lodge and review whether it was large enough, in light of concerns raised. If deemed to not be large enough, a polling station would have to be in place at Grove Wood Primary School, against the expressed wishes of the school. In addition, officers confirmed that they would review use of the Traveller's Joy public house, in light of concerns raised by Members.

Resolved

That the final proposals for changes to polling arrangements in the District, as summarised in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.5 of the report, subject to officers reviewing use of Traveller's Joy, Rayleigh and Rayleigh Lodge as polling stations. (SD)

39 DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATES RETAIL RELIEF POLICY

Council considered the report of the Section 151 Officer asking Members to approve a new retail rate relief policy.

Resolved

That implementation of the new retail rate relief policy be agreed. (S151O)

**40 RESPONSES TO BUSINESS RATES RETENTION REFORM AND
RELATIVE NEEDS AND RESOURCES CONSULTATIONS**

Council considered the report of the Section 151 Officer setting out the Council's proposed responses to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government consultations on 'Business Rates Retention Reform' and 'A Review of Local Authorities' Relative Needs and Resources'.

Resolved

That responses be submitted to the consultations, as set out in the appendix to the report. (S151O)

The Leader of the Council, on behalf of the Council, extended thanks to Mr Bostock for his service to the Council over many years and wished him well for the future on his retirement. The Chairman also thanked Mr Bostock for all his support and guidance during his year as Chairman of the Council.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

Chairman

Date

If you would like these minutes in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.