

Policy & Finance Committee – 9 February 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **9 February 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr T G Cutmore
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr C I Black
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr D G Stansby

Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr J Thomass
Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Honey - Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
R Crofts - Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

44 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee reviewed the progress on decisions schedule.

(1) CCTV Evaluation (Minute 308/04)

Resolved

That this item be removed from the schedule on the basis that officers will bring forward a full Committee report early in the new Municipal Year. (CE)

(2) The Local Authorities (Indemnity for Members and Officers) Order 2004 (Minute 196(15)(a)/05)

The Committee concurred with the observation of the Chairman that, given that the Council contributed financially to the Local Government Association and that the question raised could have consequences for local authorities nationally, it would be appropriate to further communicate with the Association.

Resolved

That a further letter be sent to the Local Government Association expressing this Council's disappointment that a response has not yet been received on the question of whether an indemnity in law for elected Members representing their authorities on outside bodies generally and regional assemblies in particular should be pursued. (CD(LP&A))

(3) Motion on Notice from Councillors C I Black, C J Lumley, Mrs J R Lumley and R A Oatham (Minute 225/05)

Disappointment was expressed that no further action could be taken on this item. Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) confirmed that, notwithstanding indications to residents from the Offices of the Planning Inspectorate, a decision of a Planning Inspector is binding, with the only course of appeal being to the High Court on a point of law. It is not the case that additional conditions can be negotiated after the Inspector's decision and judicial review can be very costly.

(4) Member Interview Panel for Corporate Director (External Services) and Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management (Minute 528/05)

It was noted that interviews for the Head of Service post had been scheduled for 15 February. Interviews for the Corporate Director post were likely to be held on 7 March.

46 KEY PLANS AND ACTIONS FOR 2005/06: PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on progress on the key plans and actions for 2005/06 outlined in Chapter 7 of the current Performance Plan.

Responding to a question on current performance for the recovery of housing benefit overpayments, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advised that a target of 55% was not too optimistic when the service is operating at full capacity. At the current time an element of "catch up" was required.

Resolved

That the progress made to date be noted. (CE)

47 ESSEX LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

Note: Councillor T G Cutmore declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of serving on the Essex Rural Partnership.

Councillor Mrs M J Webster declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of being a trustee and County representative on the Rural Community Council for Essex.

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking endorsement to the District Council signing into the Local Area Agreement for Essex, due to come into operation from April 2006.

The Committee concurred with the observation of the Chairman that there are many areas where partnership working will be able to deliver results for the community.

With regard to Priority 13 (Empower Local People to Have a Greater Voice and Influence Over Local Decision Making and the Delivery of Services) a Member observed that the size and localised nature of the District Council pointed to the likelihood that it would be able to deliver in terms of responding to community influence and representing the community. Leadership (political and officer) is likely to be important.

The Chairman referred to a recent meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership Steering Group which had seen endorsement of the draft documents. In terms of analysis, it had been pleasing to note that Police re-organisation is likely to mean that Police statistics will now be broken down between the Castle Point and Rochford areas. It had also been pleasing to note that the Steering Group recognised that work would be appropriate on why this area of Essex saw both high levels of business start ups and high levels of business failure. This is likely to be related to questions of ethos, education/training and a need to develop higher level skills.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council's participation and signatory to both the Essex Local Area Agreement and the draft Children and Young People's Plan be agreed.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to agree any necessary minor wording changes or commitments on behalf of the Council. (CE)

48 LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS – CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking views on a consultation paper produced by the Government in connection with the structure and operation of Local Strategic Partnerships.

Resolved

That the comments set out in Appendix B of the report be endorsed as the basis of this Council's response to the Government's consultation on Local Strategic Partnerships. (CE)

49 SMOKING ROOM AT CIVIC SUITE, RAYLEIGH

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services that recommended a change of use for the Smoking Room at the Civic Suite, Rayleigh.

During discussion it was agreed that the proposals would introduce a productive facility and that some form of booking arrangement would be appropriate. The inclusion of lockable cabinets for use by political groups would be useful. It was suggested that usage levels of the new facility should be monitored over a six-month period.

Responding to questions, officers advised that any additional costs could be met from the global repairs and maintenance budget.

Referring to other parts of the Civic Suite it was agreed that it would be appropriate for future consideration to be given to use of the anti-room to the Chairman's Office. Reference was made to the possibility that this could be an alternative location for the computer facility currently located within the Members' Lounge.

Resolved

That arrangements be made for the Members' Smoking Room at the Civic Suite, Rayleigh to be converted to a Members' office facility (to include a booking arrangement and lockable cabinets for use by Groups as identified in the report) and for the Members' Room at Rochford to be re-designated as office accommodation. Usage levels of the Members' office facility to be monitored over a six-month period. (HAMS)

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 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

50 SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) on the introduction of a staff retention scheme to address specific time limited emergency situations.

It was observed that it would be appropriate to state that any payment to the post holder identified in the report is made on an exceptional basis relating to a need for extra support and contribution to service delivery. It was felt that, rather than incorporating retention payments into the Council's recruitment and retention policy, it would be preferable to consider each instance on a case-by-case basis. The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor M G B Starke and seconded by Councillor Mrs M A Starke, in this regard.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) clarified the background thinking to the development of the report and the key work milestones associated with the activity of the post holder.

Following discussion of the alternative ways of introducing a payment, it was felt that it would be appropriate for there to be a staged monthly approach. The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor D G Stansby and seconded by Councillor C A Hungate, in this regard.

Resolved

- (1) That, on an exceptional basis related to a need for extra support and contribution to service delivery, a payment of the amount identified at paragraph 2.4 of the exempt report be made to the post holder identified in the report. The payment to be made on a staged monthly basis, concluding on 31 March 2007.
- (2) That any future instances of risk to service delivery associated with staffing be reported to Committee on a case-by-case basis.
(CD(F&ES))

51 EARLY RETIREMENT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care on the granting of early retirement.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) advised that:-

- The only grounds available were either ill health retirement or retirement in the interests of the efficiency of the service. When considering applications for retirement on grounds of ill health the occupational health service is required to apply a retirement age of 65.

- The report production process means that all reports of this nature are seen by the Chief Executive. There have been previous similar reports.
- Every case of this nature needs to come before Members and be judged on its individual merits.

Resolved

- (1) That the post holder identified in the exempt report be retired from the Council's employment in the interests of the efficiency of the service.
- (2) That the post be advertised at the Scale identified in the exempt report. (HHHCC)

52 STAFFING MATTERS

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive on vacancies, long-term sickness absence and maternity absence within the authority.

Resolved

That the current levels of vacancies, long-term sickness and maternity absence be noted. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.44pm.

Chairman

Date