

Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 7 December 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee** held on **7 December 2006** when there were present:-

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

Cllr J E Grey
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr C G Seagers

Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr J Thomass

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C A Hungate.

VISITING

Cllr C J Lumley

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
R J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Internal Services)
G Woolhouse	-	Corporate Director (External Services)
Y Woodward	-	Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management
Z Neeld	-	Corporate Policy Manager
S Logan	-	Revenue and Benefits Manager
T Harper	-	Senior Performance Management Officer
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

421 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

422 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs J E Grey, C J Lumley, Mrs J A Mockford and R A Oatham each declared personal interests in the Progress on Decisions Item relating to the Dutch Cottage, Rayleigh by virtue of being Members of Rayleigh Town Council.

423 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Progress on Decisions Schedule.

(a) Members' Performance Report – 2006/07 Quarter 1 (Minute 294/06)

The Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to issue a press release expressing the Council's concern at there having been no

response from the Department for Work and Pensions to correspondence issued to them.

Resolved

That a press release be issued on this Council's concern that, given that the Authority has targets to meet, there has been no response from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to official correspondence issued nearly two months ago relating to the problems that the DWP is having in processing housing benefit claims. (CE)

(b) Future Development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park (Minute 299/06)

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

- All ecological surveys relating to areas A and D had been completed and the First Draft of the Landscape Character Assessment had been received. The intention was to submit a planning application by mid-February 2007.
- Various sources of funding were being considered, including Thames Gateway South Essex and The Forestry Authority. Once planning permission is in place, the likelihood of funding bids being successful may increase.

It was noted that, in response to an invitation for bids from the Thames Gateway Delivery Unit of the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Chief Executive had flagged up the Country Park for additional funding.

(c) Dutch Cottage, Crown Hill, Rayleigh (Minute 304/06)

Responding to questions, the Corporate Director (External Services) confirmed that there had been several delays in arranging the meeting with Rayleigh Town Council and that the indication in the schedule that views were awaited from the Town Council was incorrect and should be removed. Further possible meeting dates had now been identified for early January and contact would be made with the Town Clerk on 8 December.

(d) Recommendations of the Waste Management & Recycling Sub-Committee (Minute 261/06)

It was observed that it was pleasing to see the roll out of recycling to flats, which should have an impact on the Council's recycling figures. Responding to questions from a Member, the Corporate Director (External Services) advised that a detailed break down of the number of wheeled bins introduced for flats expansion would be provided.

**424 STRONG AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES LOCAL GOVERNMENT
WHITE PAPER**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the Strong and Prosperous Communities Local Government White Paper and its implications for this Council.

In presenting the report, the Chief Executive referred to the fact that some aspects relating to the White Paper had already moved on since agenda despatch. For example, the Chancellor's budget speech had given an indication that publication of Sir Michael Lyon's report would now be delayed until March. Also, it seemed likely that a number of County bids for unitary arrangements might be submitted. A number of statements in the White Paper directed at smaller District Councils indicate that 'no change' is not an option. Consequently, the Authority will need to consider its governance/political decision making structures in the light of the emerging agenda. Details of the Local Government Bill should be available shortly.

During discussion, Members expressed concerns that the level of expectation concerning Members' commitment was continuing to increase. Pressure to conform to certain models of decision making was apparent, as was the relatively low value attributed to small District Councils in terms of their capacity to deliver and continue to improve. In a business context, big was not always the best and the same could be applied to local government. It was acknowledged that Members needed to be involved in taking the emerging agenda forward and engaging with the community in that context

Given the importance of this subject and the need for much more detailed discussion and consideration, it was agreed that the proposal for a Member seminar should be endorsed. The Chief Executive confirmed that officers would be available to provide a pre-seminar briefing to the political groups if requested to do so.

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted and that officers arrange a Member seminar early in the New Year once details of the Local Government Bill become apparent so that Members can consider in depth how the agenda needs to be taken forward in the context of Rochford District Council. The Political Groups to contact the Chief Executive if they would like to receive a pre-seminar briefing from officers. (CE)

**425 PROGRESS REPORT – INTRODUCTION OF A REVISED PERFORMANCE
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management on implementation of a revised Performance Management System. The next step is the adoption of a Member Guide to Performance Management which was agreed by the Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That progress made in implementing the revised Performance Management System be noted.
- (2) That the Members' Guide to Performance Management be agreed. (HFAPM)

426 2006/07 MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT TO MEMBERS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the mid-year performance report covering the period April to September 2006.

It was noted that the Audit Commission had recently advised that, in terms of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process, the Council would be measured against a cluster of best value performance indicators (as identified on pages 12.17 and 12.18 of the report appendix).

Resolved

That the performance achieved in the first half of 2006/07 be noted. (CE)

427 THE HOUSING BENEFITS PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the six-monthly update on housing benefit performance standards.

It was noted that a recent meeting with the Audit Commission had established that it was likely the 19 measures would be carried forward and that scoring had been impacted by the unsatisfactory problems that the Department for Work and Pensions is having in processing housing benefit claims.

Resolved

That self-assessment score of 3 (Good) be endorsed. (CD(ES))

428 REVENUE AND BENEFITS – EXTENSION OF CAPITA CONTRACT

(Note: Councillor T G Cutmore declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of part time work involvement with a call centre).

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on an extension to the pilot scheme for extended contact hours telephone cover provided by Capita Plc.

During discussion a Member observed that, whilst the call centre arrangement as it relates to revenues and benefits appears to be working well, careful consideration would need to be given to extending arrangements to other areas of the Council's work.

Responding to questions, the Revenue and Benefits Manager advised that the quarterly reports from Capita would be included in the Members' Bulletin.

Resolved

That the Capita partnership be renewed for a further year whilst the Revenues and Benefits partnership continues to be developed with Chelmsford Borough Council. (CD(ES))

429 EVALUATION OF CCTV PROVISION

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the way forward with regard to CCTV provision.

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- Issues on the effectiveness of street lighting provision should be raised through the partnership working arrangements with the County Council.
- The police are of the view that 24 hour CCTV provision is only likely to be appropriate in Rayleigh due to the scale of the town and levels of activity, compared to other parts of the District.
- Whilst the presence of CCTV cameras may at times give an impression of safety this should be considered in the context of the actual effectiveness of cameras. There was research commissioned by the Home Office which suggested that lighting was more effective than cameras if it was a choice between the two. As part of the refurbishment of the main town centres in the recent past, new lighting had been installed.
- Officers would try and seek to recover the cost of removing CCTV equipment from the lamp columns in Hockley, Rochford and Hullbridge given that such removal would be at the request of the County Council.
- When analogue cameras were introduced at local shopping parade areas it was primarily to deal with perceived youth nuisance.
- The Police now favour the use of mobile covert cameras to tackle crime and disorder issues across the District.

The Chairman confirmed that a press release was to be issued on the use of covert cameras by the Police.

Resolved

- (1) That all the Council's analogue CCTV equipment be removed.
- (2) That the CCTV equipment installed on lamp columns in Hockley, Rochford and Hullbridge be removed but, given that this is at the request of Essex

County Council, this Council seek to recover the cost of removal from the County Council.

- (3) That CCTV continue to be considered within the context of the management of the Council's sites and property, with appropriate provision made for the management and maintenance of such equipment.
- (4) That this Council continue to support the use by the Police of covert cameras across the District to target crime and disorder issues. (CE)

430 DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the introduction of a Disability Equality Scheme to meet legislative requirements.

It was noted that the Essex Disabled Peoples' Association had indicated that it was happy with the proposed documentation and would be willing to work with the Council as the Council develops its approach.

A Member observed that it was good to see the level of resource emanating from the bid for funding to Building Capacity East. It was acknowledged that a lot of work had gone into scheme development.

Responding to questions, the Corporate Policy Manager confirmed that there would be regular progress reports to Members.

Resolved

That the disability equality scheme 2007-2010, as appended to the report, be adopted. (CE)

431 MEMBERS' ROLES

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which introduced a set of defined activities for Members' roles, together with a proposal to create the post of Deputy Leader of the Council from 2007/08.

In introducing this item, the Chief Executive advised that the clarification of Members' roles would assist the Remuneration Panel in understanding Member activity in future years.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- The Local Government Bill was likely to revise the Code of Conduct to allow Councillors' to speak out on Licensing and Planning issues within their Ward.
- It would be appropriate for documentation on roles to be in place from the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

- The sub-heading 'key activities' should be included under the headings for Vice-Chairman of Review Committee and Vice-Chairmen of Committees.
- It would be appropriate to include the role of Deputy Group Leader, the wording for which will be 'To support the Group Leader in his/her duties and to deputise when necessary and appropriate'.

Recommended to Full Council:-

- (1) That the appointment of Deputy Leader of the Council be introduced with effect from the 2007/08 Municipal Year.
- (2) That, subject to inclusion of the sub-heading 'key activities' under all main headings and to provision for the role of Deputy Group Leader as identified above, the key activities for each of the Members' roles, as outlined in the appendix to the officer report, be agreed for inclusion in the Constitution and other relevant publications with effect from the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

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

432 APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANTS – POST BALLOT PHASE OF HOUSING TRANSFER

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the appointment of consultants to the post ballot phase of housing transfer.

In presenting the report, the Corporate Director (External Services) advised that the quotation from Graham Moody Associates should be increased by £5,320 plus VAT to reflect some additional days consultancy for contingency and that there may be further process related costs should delays arise that prevent transfer by July 2007.

Resolved

That, subject to a ballot result in favour of housing transfer, Graham Moody Associates and Bircham Dyson Bell be appointed as financial and legal consultants respectively for any further work associated with the transfer process. (CD(ES))

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The meeting closed at 9.27 pm.

Chairman

Date