

## **Policy & Finance Committee – 8 July 2004**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **8 July 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)  
Cllr S P Smith (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C I Black  
Cllr C A Hungate  
Cllr J R F Mason  
Cllr P K Savill

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

### **VISITING MEMBER**

Cllr D Merrick

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs K H Hudson, D G Stansby and Mrs C A Weston.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
S Clarkson	- Head of Revenue & Housing Management
D Timson	- Property Maintenance & Highways Manager
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

### **299 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **300 ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

#### **(1) Essex Savers Net Credit Union**

The Committee considered the report of the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 May 2004.

#### **Resolved**

That this Council does not, at this stage, support the setting up of a local community branch of the Savers Net Credit Union. (HFS)

### 301 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the schedule relating to progress on decisions.

#### **Electronic Communication Links (Minute 434/03)**

It was noted that the new website was being trialled internally. It was anticipated that this would be fully operational in August 2004.

#### **Land at Bradley Way, Rochford (Minute 438/03)**

Officers advised that references had been taken up and the survey completed.

#### **Disposal of Old Ship Lane Public Convenience and Car Park – Further Issues (Minute 355/03)**

It was noted that the car park would be completed by the end of July and would include disabled bays.

#### **Development of Council Owned Land (Minute 600(17)/03)**

Officers advised that, with respect to Hardwick House, the land had been transferred to the Housing Association and that the ecological survey had been conducted. Slow worms had been found on site and would be moved prior to the start of any development.

#### **Kerbside Recycling Expansion/Additional DEFRA Funding (Minute 210/04)**

It was noted that the County Council would probably consider the request for an additional civic amenity site within the District in the context of the Second Deposit of the Local Plan.

### 302 DRAFT REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR THE EAST OF ENGLAND

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services summarising a draft Regional Economic Strategy published by the East of England Development Agency and seeking Members' views on the strategy.

During debate, Members, while fully endorsing the comments in the report, further felt that there would be merit in ensuring that any priorities to come out of the strategy should be centrally funded.

#### **Resolved**

That the comments in the report be sent to the East of England Development Agency in response to the consultation document 'Progressing A Shared

Vision'. (HPS)

### **303 BUSINESS RATE COLLECTION – PREFERRED PARTNER**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management identifying a 'preferred partner' for the delivery of the Business Rate Collection Service.

#### **Resolved**

That Chelmsford Borough Council be advised that they are this Council's preferred partner and that this matter be progressed as outlined in the report. (HRHM)

### **304 COUNCIL TAX PAYMENT METHODS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on current Council Tax payment methods and a proposed customer consultation exercise.

During debate, Members, while mindful of the large savings that could be achieved by discontinuing the payment instalment books, were concerned about withdrawing them without first conducting a survey of those who still used them. It was felt preferable to defer any decision until September, when the results of the survey would be known.

On a Motion moved by Cllr S P Smith and seconded by Cllr C I Black, it was:-

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That a random 10% customer survey of those still using instalment books be undertaken of Council Tax payment methods and that a report be brought back to this Committee in September.
- (2) That publicity be continued to encourage taxpayers to adopt electronic forms of payment. (HRHM)

### **305 SPECIALIST ADVICE SERVICES FOR PLANNING**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services seeking Members' views on the arrangements for the delivery of specialist advice to the Planning Division by the County Council from 2005/06.

It was noted that there was currently no alternative provider to the County Council for specialist planning advice on archaeology, listed buildings and urban design.

### **Resolved**

That costs for a 3-year contract for the provision of specialist advice services to Planning be included in the draft budget for 2005/06. (HPS)

### **306 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT – REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management asking Members to consider a request for additional funding from Rayleigh and Rochford Association for Voluntary Services in order to continue to run the Community Transport facility.

During debate it was felt that there would be merit in referring this matter to the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee for more detailed consideration of whether the funding was being appropriately allocated.

On a Motion moved by Cllr T G Cutmore and seconded by Cllr M G B Starke it was:-

### **Resolved**

That this item be referred to the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee for more detailed consideration. (HRHM)

### **307 STAR PARTNERSHIP – FURTHER FUNDING**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking Members' views as to whether the Star Partnership should continue to be funded for a further two year period.

Members praised the work of the Star Partnership and were pleased to see that this was extending to different parts of the District. There was a general consensus that a further contribution should be made to the Partnership, and that a service level agreement should also be made and that a press release should be issued advertising the Partnership and its achievements and also the contribution made by this Council towards the Partnership.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That a contribution of £18,000 per annum be made to the Star Partnership from the Council's Crime and Disorder Reserve to cover the operation of the project for a further two years, commencing in October 2004, and that an appropriate service level agreement be made.
- (2) That the Star Partnership report into the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis so that Members can continue to monitor progress and evaluate its effectiveness.

- (3) That a press release be issued advertising the Star Partnership's achievements and this Council's contribution to the Partnership. (CE)

### **308 CCTV EVALUATION**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking Members' agreement to an evaluation of various CCTV systems that are currently being used throughout the District.

In response to Member concern that £8,000 appeared high for an evaluation study and that such an evaluation could be carried out in-house, officers advised that neither the technical expertise nor the capacity was available in-house to properly conduct such an evaluation.

Responding to a Member enquiry, officers advised that there had been some convictions arising out of CCTV footage within the District and that furthermore the Police had identified positive usage of the mobile CCTV units. It was noted that the presence of CCTV cameras did have some deterrent value and did provide residents with some degree of comfort, with respect to fear of crime.

On a Motion moved by Cllr C A Hungate and seconded by Cllr J Thomass it was:-

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the proposal to evaluate the existing CCTV systems be agreed, with the evaluation costs of £8,000 being funded from the Crime and Disorder Reserve.
- (2) That the Town and Parish Councils and Chambers of Trade, where applicable, be approached, with a view to providing a contribution towards the costs of evaluation. (CE)

### **309 ASSET MANAGEMENT – PROPERTY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advising Members of the need to collect information on property performance indicators, which will be collected by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the autumn.

#### **Resolved**

That the changes in performance indicators from 2002/03 to 2003/04 be noted. (CD(F&ES))

### **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 paragraphs 5 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

### **310 NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATING – MANDATORY AND DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF**

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on three determinations of mandatory rate relief and four applications for discretionary rate relief.

During debate, it was felt that there would be merit in issuing a press release about the Council granting discretionary rate relief to charitable organisations.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That 10% Discretionary Rate Relief be granted to St Mary's Horse Refuge.
- (2) That 20% Discretionary Rate Relief be granted to South East Essex Christian Hospice.
- (3) That Discretionary Rate Relief be refused in respect of the Vulcan Restoration Trust.
- (4) That Discretionary Rate Relief be refused in respect of Brandy Hole Yacht Club.
- (5) That a press release be issued with respect to (1) and (2) above.  
(HRHM)

### **311 RECEPTION BUILDING – ROCHFORD OFFICES**

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) on the likely costs of the new reception at the Rochford offices.

Responding to Member concern relating to the high rental costs for a temporary building, officers advised that this was as a result of planning permission being granted for a period of 3 years, rather than 5. It was further pointed out that there had been an increase in interest rates, which had also increased costs.

Members believed that there would be merit in exploring whether it would be a cheaper option to purchase the temporary building. Given the tight deadline for complying with the Disability Discrimination Act, it was felt that authority should be delegated to officers, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, to progress the scheme, while exploring whether purchasing would be more economical.

### **Resolved**

That the scheme be progressed as outlined in the report, with authority delegated to officers, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, to purchase a temporary building, should this prove to be a more cost effective option. (CD(F&ES))

**(Note:** Cllr M G B Starke wished it to be recorded that he had abstained from the above decision).

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....