

Policy & Finance Committee - 11 November 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **11 November 2004** when there were present:-

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

Cllr C I Black
Cllr K H Hudson
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr J Thomass

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M G B Starke

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr Mrs L I V Hungate

VISITING

Cllrs R A Amner and P R Robinson

OFFICERS PRESENT

Paul Warren	-	Chief Executive
R J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
D Timson	-	Property Maintenance and Highways Manager
C McClellan	-	Human Resources Manager
S Rom	-	Economic Development Officer
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

477 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

478 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T G Cutmore declared a personal interest in the items on the Economic Development Strategy and the Essex Rural Strategy by virtue of being a member of the Essex Prosperity Forum.

479 ROCHFORD DISTRICT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2004-2007

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on a revised and updated version of the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2004-2007.

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive confirmed that the forthcoming year would see work continue in a number of areas that would influence strategy content. For example, the tourism study should produce a pragmatic action plan for the tourism agenda. Thames Gateway South Essex had now commissioned an economic baseline study that would identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the South Essex economy. On the education front, the Learning and Skills Council was about to consult on its Strategic Area review. The Chief Executive also confirmed that future document updates would enable a comparison of existing and proposed wording.

The Committee concurred with the Chairman that particular thanks should be extended to Susan Rom, the Council's Economic Development Officer, for all her work with the business community.

Resolved

That the Economic Development Strategy, as revised, be approved. (CE)

480 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY POLICY

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) that proposed an updated Equalities and Diversity Policy in line with recent and impending legislation.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- Whilst it would be possible to exclude some areas, such as class, a key aim of the proposed policy update was to broaden diversity and facilitate the treatment of people as individuals.
- In line with existing policy, Unison was the recognised union for human resources issues.
- The policy would be revisited on a regular basis.

During debate on general discrimination within society it was observed that, at times, individuals may be justified in feeling concern that they are being treated unequally because their body size does not fit ideas of the norm. It was also possible that someone could be treated differently by virtue of their political views or by their background if it was known, say, that they had had a spent criminal conviction.

Resolved

That the Equalities and Diversity Policy, as appended to the report, be adopted. (CD(LPA))

481 ESSEX RURAL STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the recently published draft Essex Rural Strategy.

Resolved

That the Officer comments set out in the report be this Council's response to the revised draft Essex Rural Strategy. (CE)

482 HOUSING AND PLANNING IN THE REGIONS – CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care on a consultation paper relating to proposals to merge regional housing boards with regional planning bodies.

During debate, it was agreed that key issues that could be associated with the proposals included the fact that they would not address the need to recognise the diverse requirements of different parts of the country. It was particularly difficult to see how local authorities could retain the appropriate level of independence when being asked to deliver on something that would be subject to central government control.

The Committee considered a motion, moved by Councillor C A Hungate and seconded by Councillor T G Cutmore. It was agreed that the motion succinctly highlighted the Council's problems.

On an requisition pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 16.4, a recorded vote was taken on the motion as follows:-

For(11) C I Black, T G Cutmore, K H Hudson, C A Hungate,
Mrs L I V Hungate, J R F Mason, C G Seagers, S P Smith,
D G Stansby, Mrs M A Starke and J Thomass

Against (0)

Abstentions (0)

Resolved

That, given the result of the Regional Assembly Referendum in the NE of England last Friday, this Council write to the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, demanding that he completely reviews the role and function of the "so called" Regional Assemblies that currently exist. We also demand that the East of England Regional Assembly be dismantled and that the strategic

planning powers and responsibilities be devolved back to County, Unitary and District and Borough Councils in a form agreeable to County, Unitary and District and Borough Councils.

This Council further calls upon the Deputy Prime Minister to re-appraise the work of the Regional Development Agencies and ensure that they work at an appropriately local level and that they are accountable to local councils.
(HHHCC)

483 TAXI VOUCHER SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management that provided an update of the taxi voucher scheme.

During debate, reference was made to the value of the scheme in enabling residents to lead independent lives of some quality.

Resolved

- (1) That the current number and value of vouchers issued be maintained.
- (2) That budgetary provision of £106,000 (including an estimated contribution from Essex County Council of £21,000) be considered as part of the budgetary process for the 2005/06 financial year.
- (3) That, as part of the Environmental Services Committee's overall responsibility for the Taxi Voucher Scheme, a further report be prepared after the completion of 3 full years operation of the scheme.
(HRHM)

484 REVISION OF CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) that sought approval to change Contract Procedure Rules in line with modern procurement techniques.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- The word "contractors" in the final line of paragraph 2.7 should have been "contracts".
- It was Council policy to appoint small local contractors as often as possible. One of the purposes of recent "business breakfasts" was to ensure that local contractors were engaged in work relating to Essex Marketplace. An aspect of the proposal for future standing lists was the objective of ensuring that small contractors applying for small works would not be unnecessarily burdened by the contracting process.

- The vetting process used by Rochford District Council in respect of the approved list included checks on employers insurance and permits and licences (Corgi/Niceic). It was not possible to insist that a contractor was a member of specific professional association, but the term "or similar" could be used.
- The summary of requirements for tenders and quotations, as set out in paragraph 2.1 of Appendix B, reflected Procurement Agency requirements aimed at covering a multitude of different types of contract. The Council had a number of internal control procedures and checks associated with the purchasing process.
- It would be possible for the Council to implement a policy providing that, subject to the discretion of the Chief Executive, where the estimated value of a contract is between £5,000 and £10,000 at least three quotations shall be invited.
- The provision identified under paragraph 5.4.4.2 in Appendix B relating to the amendment of arithmetic errors was a standard clause used by local authorities, one purpose of which was to protect both a contractor and the Council from a situation whereby an agreed price is unsustainable. This provision, together with those in paragraphs 6.1 and 7.1, reflected the Council's existing Contract Procedure Rules, which emanated from model rules of procedure. The Council had given specific consideration to the arrangement for tender opening at the time of considering the model rules.

During debate it was observed that, whilst there is no direct cost to users of accreditation services, costs are usually reflected in the price paid by the end customer. The view of a Member that the seeking of one quotation for a job was not a mechanism for achieving best value when compared with the proving of price through negotiation was acknowledged.

The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor C I Black and seconded by Councillor C G Seagers, relating to the seeking of three quotations for contracts valued between £5000 to £10,000 and it was:-

Recommended to Council

- (1) That the Contract Procedure Rules include a provision that, unless the Chief Executive authorises otherwise, where the estimated value of a contract is between £5,000 and £10,000 at least three quotations shall be invited.
- (2) That, subject to (1) above, the Contract Procedure Rules be amended as set out in the report. (CD(F&ES))

It was further **Resolved**

- (1) That the revised procedure for standing lists be noted.
- (2) That Rochford District Council become a member of Construction Line Services which is currently free to users of the service. (CD(F&ES))

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of 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.

485 CHIEF EXECUTIVES APPRAISAL

The Committee received the exempt note of the Chief Executive's appraisal.

The meeting closed at 9.02pm

Chairman

Date