
Minutes of the meeting of the **Corporate Resources Sub-Committee** held on **22 January 2002** when there were present:

Cllr D R Helson – Chairman

Cllr R Adams
Cllr R A Amner
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr Mrs J Helson
Cllr V H Leach

Cllr T Livings
Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr P J Morgan
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr D A Weir

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
D Deeks	Head of Financial Services
Mrs H Drye	Corporate Policy Manager
Mrs M Martin	Committee Administrator

439 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 November 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

440 COUNCIL TAX 2002/03

The Chairman welcomed to the Meeting the following representatives from the Chambers of Trade.

D Barnes	Rayleigh & District Chamber of Trade
Mrs J Mears	Industrial Officer, Rayleigh & District Chamber of Trade
J Sheaf	Essex Chamber of Trade
H Squier	Rochford Chamber of Trade
D Willsher	Rayleigh and District Chamber of Trade

Apologies had been received from C Potter, Mark 1 Hire; M Street, Rayleigh and District Chamber of Trade and K Wickham, Federation of Small Businesses.

Members of the Sub-Committee and the business community received a presentation from the Head of Financial Services which outlined the main options relating to the setting of this year's Council Tax.

The following was noted:-

- Detailed papers will be issued shortly to Members.

- Final decisions on the award of the Leisure Contract are awaited.
- The Budget will be determined at the meeting of Council to be held on 7 February 2002.
- The Council Tax will be set at the meeting of Council to be held on 19 February 2002.

441 BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Members of the Sub-Committee and representatives of the business community received a handout prepared by the Chief Executive which summarised the content of the recent Government White Paper on Local Government – Strong Local Leadership; Quality Public Services – in respect of Business Improvement Districts. The following points were considered to be of interest to the local business community.

- The Government's initiative in relation to Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) which will require legislation. The earliest date for this legislation to be promoted through Parliament might be Autumn 2002. The Government see this initiative as a mechanism for promoting partnership working between a local authority and local businesses.
- The starting point in establishing a BID would be the identification of a gap or weakness in the local services provided which may be a source of concern to businesses, such as policing, community safety and highways issues.
- Two key rules are proposed under the initiative; all occupiers of rateable business premises (hereditaments) within the BID area, who would pay the BID levy, would be eligible to vote and secondly, the introduction of the BID levy would require a simple majority of those voting plus a majority by rateable value of hereditament of those voting.
- A BID levy might be raised on specified classes of businesses, thus facilitating the sort of BID which might be of interest to retailers and not to other businesses.
- The determination of the amount to be paid by each ratepayer would be for local agreement as part of the package to be voted on.
- The initiative envisaged allowing either a Council or business community to put a BID proposal to the vote.
- The vote would allow ratepayers to veto a BID proposal which they felt would cause problems.
- Where a Council veto was used, ratepayers would be able to appeal to the Secretary of State, who could overrule the veto.

The following concerns were noted:

- small businesses in particular might perceive that the Business Rate tax should already cover the type of projects suggested by the White Paper.

- the level of administration and resource support required in the introduction of any BID, particularly in relation to consultation and voting.
- the initiative appeared to be aimed at business protection rather than business improvement.
- detailed queries relating to voting and contributions – small businesses may in particular be adversely affected.

442 OTHER ISSUES FROM THE CHAMBERS OF TRADE

Members of the Sub-Committee considered that annual consultation relating to the Budget and Council Tax is insufficient and would welcome more frequent consultation.

In response to the issues raised by the Rayleigh & District Chamber of Trade prior to the meeting, the following was noted:

Lighting Levels in Car Parks

A study of the level of lighting in Council Car Parks had been undertaken and reported to the appropriate Committee. Work was being undertaken by the Contractors.

Designation of Car Parks

There were currently no proposals to change the existing designation of car parks in relation to short or long stay.

Freeze on Current Tariffs for Parking

There were currently no proposals to increase charges. The Council will consider this again in detail from March and the Chambers of Trade would be consulted.

Continuation of Free Parking after 1 pm on Saturdays

There is currently no proposal to change this, although it would feature in the review of charges mentioned above.

Effect on Parking of New Development in Websters Way

Officers confirmed that future surveys of car park usage would be carried out in peak times and would take account of the different parking patterns which existed at individual car parks.

Season Tickets and Short Stay Car Parks

There were no plans to alter the current situation, whereby season ticket holders are allowed to park in any car park, regardless of the designation, although this would need to be considered as part of the review of charges.

Money for Additional Car Parking in Town Centre

There was currently no financial provision to expand car parking.

Anomaly of Mill Hall and Freight House Car Parks

These issues were being considered as part of the Leisure contract.

Use of Mechanical Sweeper in Town Centre

Issues surrounding the efficient use of the mechanical sweeper would be considered at the meeting of the Transportation & Environmental Services Committee to be held on 30 January 2002. The possibility of carrying out occasional “one-off” cleansing would be included in future discussions relating to the Contract.

Expenditure for Town Centre Strategic Development Plan

The Chamber of Trade would be formally consulted on the review of the District Plan.

Request for Funds to Extend the Enhancement at Mill Hall up to Homeregal House

The Rayleigh & District Chamber of Trade reported that they had spoken with the County’s contractor regarding this matter and Officers agreed to investigate. The issue of whether the Chambers of Trade were a consultee for the County Council’s Locally Determined Budget could be considered at the next meeting of the Transportation & Environmental Services Committee.

Funding of Repairs in the Town Centre

As above, this is an issue relating to consultation on the County Council’s Locally Determined Budget.

Promotion of Town Centres

It was noted that the Leisure Contract tender document included the issue of Rochford District Matters, its format, production and delivery. It was further noted that the Rayleigh & District Chamber of Trade wished to see the Civic Suite decorated at Christmas time as part of the town centre decorations.

Increase in Licence Fees

It was noted that the Government were currently looking at discretionary areas of charging. However, with current changes in legislation it would not be possible to guarantee that increases would be kept to the level of inflation.

Decriminalisation of Parking

Members agreed that the Chambers of Trade would be consulted as fully as possible on this issue.

Industrial Estates

Members noted the concerns of the Rayleigh & District Chamber of Trade which related specifically to the Brook Road Industrial Estate, Rayleigh. It was noted, however, that similar problems existed across the whole District. Particular areas of concern were:-

- difficulties encountered with disposal of recyclable waste - officers agreed to communicate with the Chamber further over this issue and Ward Members would be kept informed.
- lack of money spent on regenerating industrial estates – it was noted that the Chambers of Trade would be a consultee for the District's Economic Development Strategy.
- traffic issues relating to entering and leaving the estates together with the associated problems caused by insufficient on-site parking for employees. Consultation does take place with businesses on planning matters although there is frequently difficulty in identifying landlords. It was agreed to forward a copy of the Council's report on the Government's Green Paper on Planning to the Chambers of Trade for information once it had been prepared.
- Lack of security/policing – it was agreed that the District Council would seek the representation of the Chambers of Trade on Rochford District's Crime and Disorder Partnership.

National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR)

This is a national form of taxation which is forwarded to central government by the District Council and some funds are provided to local authorities. NNDR receipts cannot be allocated to Parish areas or local businesses. Any support must be part of the District's revenue budget.

Regeneration Funds

The £5000 per year sum is currently included within the draft estimates for 2002/03 and the Head of Financial Services would be communicating with the Chambers of Trade following the meeting of the Council on 7 February 2002 when it was envisaged the Council's budget would be agreed.

Breaches of Planning Control

Where breaches of planning control such as retail trading from light industrial units exist, they are either rectified or are allowed to continue within parameters approved by the District Council.

Mill Hall, Rayleigh

The use of this building was being considered as part of the new Leisure Contract. The Council will be looking for the centre to be more focused on community type activities.

Rayleigh Town Centre – Outstanding Issues

The next meeting of the Rayleigh Town Centre Working Group was scheduled for 6 February 2002.

Rochford Town Centre

Rochford Chamber of Trade expressed concern about the effect the Town Centre Enhancement works might have on trade during the

period of the works. The Head of Financial Services agreed to supply information on any relief that was available under NNDR legislation.

Consultation Process with Chambers of Trade

Members noted the views of the Chambers of Trade regarding the need to set up a better consultation process with the District Council than currently existed.

Recommended

That the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider the structure for consultation with the Chambers of Trade on all relevant issues. (CEX)

Chairman

Date

The meeting ended at 10.20 pm.