

# **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 19 April 2007**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee** held on **19 April 2007** 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 J Thomass

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M G B Starke

## **VISITING**

Cllr J P Cottis

## **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 |
| T Harper    | - Senior Performance Management Officer             |
| Z Neeld     | - Corporate Policy Manager                          |
| J Bostock   | - Principal Committee Administrator                 |

## **128 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **129 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Councillor T G Cutmore declared a prejudicial interest in the item on Rayleigh Grange Community Centre – Lease by virtue of involvement with another community centre and left the meeting during its consideration. Councillor D Merrick chaired the meeting for this item.

## **130 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS**

The Committee considered the Progress on Decisions schedule.

### **(a) Large Scale Voluntary Housing Transfer – Progress Report (Minute 51/07)**

It was noted that the term “scheduled for disposal” in relation to vacant bed-sit dwellings referred to their exclusion from the rent system, there being a need for sufficient accommodation to be available to facilitate

unit upgrade work associated with stock transfer. Options relating to The Chestnuts were under consideration and would be the subject of a report prior to July's planned transfer date.

### **131 ACCESS TO SERVICES – SERVICE INSPECTION REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the Access to Services – Service Inspection Report published by the Audit Commission.

#### **Resolved**

That the four recommendations set out on pages 11 – 13 of the Audit Commission's report, together with the proposal to re-title the post of 'Head of Administrative and Member Services' to 'Head of Information and Customer Services' be agreed, quarterly reports to be received on progress in implementing the recommendations. (CE)

### **132 2006/07 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT TO MEMBERS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management on the Performance Report to Members for Quarter 4 of 2006/07 and the proposed content of 2007/08 reports.

It was noted that:-

- Statistical performance data would be issued to Members in the following week.
- Statistics relating to graffiti would be included in the year-end report.
- Once liaison with County Highways on a suitable road scheme is concluded, a planning application in relation to acquiring land areas A and D for the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park would be submitted.
- It is not possible for the Authority to claim for waste composted by householders. Representations had been made to the Government on this aspect.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the performance achieved in the fourth quarter of 2006/07 be noted.
- (2) That the proposed content of the Performance Report to Members for 2007/08 be approved. (HFAPM)

### 133 RAYLEIGH GRANGE COMMUNITY CENTRE – LEASE

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the future management arrangements for Rayleigh Grange Community Centre.

In presenting the report, the Corporate Director (External Services) advised that the Trustees had reported that there had been expenditure of approximately £193,000 since 1987 on repair, maintenance and improvements and that liquid assets approximated to half the carried forward figure of £80,000 in the accounts. Given the nature of the building, there were some bookings in place beyond July.

During discussion, reference was made to the value of this type of facility to the community. Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- In that the Council does not lease any other community hall buildings in a similar way, leases cannot be easily compared. Generally speaking, it is common for the duration of leases to be in multiples of seven years.
- Longer leases can be seen as beneficial in terms of being able to attract grant aid.
- According to the accounts, expenditure at the Centre is marginally higher than income.
- The building has not yet been subjected to a structural survey.

A motion relating to the undertaking of a structural survey and the production of a report on the possibilities for aligning provisions associated with the Rayleigh Grange Community Centre lease with the type of lease in place for the Council building in Back Lane, Rochford was moved by Councillor J E Grey and seconded by Councillor C G Seagers. Officers advised that it would be possible to extend the Community Centre lease for a twelve month period to facilitate further consideration.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That a structural condition survey be undertaken of the Rayleigh Grange Community Centre property and the results reported to Members.
- (2) That officers consider and report on the possibilities for aligning provisions associated with the Rayleigh Grange Community Centre lease with the type of lease in place for the Council building in Back Lane, Rochford in the context of an objective of an even approach to letting, rental income and responsibilities for repair across the District.

- (3) That, to facilitate (1) and (2) above, the lease relating to the Rayleigh Grange Community Centre be extended for a 12-month period.  
(CD(ES))

Note: Councillor R A Oatham wished it to be recorded that he had voted against the above decision.

### **134 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2007-11**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on a revised Economic Development Strategy for Rochford District for the period 2007-11.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- A visitor guide was to be published within the next few weeks.
- Dependent on site-specific issues the Authority has, as times, permitted the re-use of industrial buildings.
- There are differences between the skill and wage levels associated with employment in the leisure and manufacturing sectors. These differences can be considerations in terms of strategy.
- There could be a check that the percentage figure in paragraph 3.5 associated with the resident population that cannot afford private rental is correct.

It was agreed that it would be appropriate to include an indication of the effects that can be related to an ageing population and reference to the skills base and opportunity associated with the emerging City Regions Agenda under 'key issues for the area'.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2007-11 be adopted subject to:-
- A check that the percentage figure in paragraph 3.5 associated with the resident population that cannot afford private rental is correct.
  - Indication of the effects that can be related to an ageing population and inclusion of reference to the skills base and opportunity associated with the emerging City Regions Agenda under 'key issues for the area'.
- (2) That progress on the Action Plan be reviewed in 12 months time. (CE)

### 135 GRANTS TO OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management setting out applications to be considered for financial assistance in 2007/08.

Members felt that, apart from the application from the Citizens Advice Bureau, it would be appropriate to delegate the detailed consideration of applications to a Sub-Committee. Given both timing and the fact that the organisation delivers a number of services related to the Council's own objectives, a grant of £79,000 to the Citizens Advice Bureau could be endorsed.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That, given timing and the fact that the organisation delivers a number of services related to the Council's own objectives, a grant of £79,000 be made to the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- (2) That authority be delegated to a Sub-Committee of five Members (Councillors T G Cutmore, Mrs H L A Glynn, K J Gordon, Mrs M J Webster and one Liberal Democrat appointee) to consider the remaining applications for financial assistance. (HFAPM)

### 136 HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING ADVICE OFFICER POST

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Community Services on making a Homelessness and Housing Advice Officer post permanent.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the post of Homelessness and Housing Advice Officer (number 35211) be made permanent.
- (2) That the 2007/08 salary costs for this post be funded from the Homelessness Grant and future means of funding be considered through the budget-setting process. (HCS)

### 137 GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the adoption of a Gender Equality Scheme.

#### **Resolved**

That the proposed Gender Equality Scheme, as attached to the report, be adopted. (CE)

### 138 AGE OF OPPORTUNITY STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive inviting comment on the County Council's four-year strategic plan for supporting the choice and independence of older people.

#### **Resolved**

That the County Council be advised that the draft strategy and proposed actions are supported in principle, but that more detailed information as to implementation, outcomes and resource requirements would be welcomed. (CE)

### 139 LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS GROWTH INCENTIVE (LAGBI) AWARD

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on a higher than anticipated award under the LAGBI initiative and seeking views as to how that award should now be spent.

Members agreed that, given their link to the Council's corporate objectives of encouraging a thriving local economy and improving the quality of life for people in our District, it would be appropriate to pursue the first three suggestions set out in the report.

It was recognised that the identification of schemes for this higher than anticipated award did not preclude the consideration of other suggestions set out in the report, including finishing of the interior of Rayleigh Windmill, towards the end of the year in the context of future possible LAGBI awards.

#### **Resolved**

That £160,000 of the Year 2 LAGBI Grant be allocated to the following:-

- Contribution to the recently agreed Joint West Rochford Study with Southend to kick-start the process.
- Funding of a Master Planning exercise for Rochford Town Centre and adjoining area – to feed into the Local Development Framework process.
- Funding of a Master Planning exercise for Hockley Town Centre and the adjoining area – to feed into the Local Development Framework process. (CE)

**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.

**140 STAFFING MATTERS**

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

**Resolved**

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

The meeting closed at 8.38pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

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