

# **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 8 December 2005**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **8 December 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr K H Hudson  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr P K Savill

Cllr R G S Choppen  
Cllr Mrs S A Harper  
Cllr T Livings

Cllr P R Robinson  
Cllr P F A Webster

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr K J Gordon.

## **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Financial & External Services)
D Deeks	- Head of Financial Services
S Rom	- Economic Development Officer
M Martin	- Committee Administrator

## **ALSO ATTENDING**

J Sheaf	- Essex Chamber of Commerce
K Wickham	- Federation of Small Businesses
C Watson	- Rayleigh Chamber of Trade
J Stanton	- Hockley Chamber of Trade
M Hodson	- Rayleigh Chamber of Trade

## **507 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to noting that Cllr R G S Choppen had tendered his apologies for that meeting.

## **508 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS**

The Committee received the Schedule relating to Progress on Decisions and noted the progress. The Chief Executive advised that the Audit Commission would be submitting the Comprehensive Performance Assessment's formal progress report to the Council on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2005.

## **509 BUDGET STRATEGY – CONSULTATION WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from the business community to the meeting. Mr Sheaf indicated that he would be representing the views of

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Mr H Squier from the Rochford Chamber of Trade. The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services inviting Members to receive the views of the Business community and to include those views in the report to Council when the priorities and budgets for the Council are determined.

A document was tabled which listed a summary of those bids that had been identified as a result of meetings between the District Council and representatives of the business community. At a recent Budget Away Day, Members of the Council had prioritised the bids. These had been highlighted.

Officers confirmed that funding from the Government this year was slightly increased, and would go towards correcting the problems caused by lack of funding in previous years. This should enable some small schemes to benefit.

Rochford was still the second lowest Council within Essex in terms of grant per head of population. In percentage terms it was difficult to quantify what this would mean for the authority, as there were a number of new funding responsibilities for the Council this year. These would need to be evaluated.

### **Hockley Chamber of Trade**

On behalf of the Chamber, Mr Stanton expressed his thanks for the funding which would enable the Chambers of Trade to develop and improve their websites. It was anticipated that the funding would be available to start this project by the end of the year.

The Chamber's key areas of concern were graffiti, criminal damage and chewing gum on pavements.

Officers confirmed that:-

- whilst the Council had undertaken to tackle graffiti on Council-owned buildings, there were often difficulties with gaining consent for privately owned properties.
- the Police continued to have some success with prosecutions for criminal damage. The Rochford Crime and Disorder Partnership had provided Crimebeat funding for working proactively with young people.
- On-going funding would be available for the periodic cleaning-up of chewing gum. Enforcement of this as a litter issue was difficult and more education was required within schools.

### **Rayleigh Chamber of Trade**

Areas of priority centred around car parking; in particular the request to look at the provision of more spaces within the town centre, together with better signage at the entrances indicating the number of available spaces; more disabled/mother toddler spaces and further consideration to be given to the feasibility of introducing a pay on exit system of payment at car parks, with the aim of encouraging users to stay for longer.

In response to these concerns, officers advised:-

- The number of disabled parking spaces across the District was already greater than the national average.
- As with disabled spaces, enforcement of specifically designated mother and toddler spaces would be difficult.
- Increased car parking had been achieved recently in Rayleigh.
- The issue of the Mill Hall being used for long term parking for the nearby railway station could be investigated.
- It was anticipated that electronic on-street signage would be provided in time via a County-wide programme.
- The Council had given detailed consideration to the feasibility of introducing pay-on-exit car parks. The existing size and design of the car parks were not suitable.
- It was very difficult to identify appropriate land for an additional car park.

### **Federation of Small Businesses**

The Federation wished to highlight the following priorities:-

- Encourage provision of small starter units.
- Provide Stambridge Mills for possible hotel/conference centre and craft workshops.
- Use of green belt/redundant buildings for business use. Increased business units could be provided by a 'change of use' of existing buildings.

### **Rochford Chamber of Trade**

The Rochford Chamber wished to highlight the following priorities:-

- The provision of small starter units.

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- Improved working between schools and employers.
- The pedestrianising of Rochford Square and improved access from the new supermarket site.
- Provision of a new amenity site in Rochford.
- Issues around chewing gum/litter on pavements/graffiti on buildings.
- The tidying up of Back Lane car park.
- The expansion of the London Southend airport.
- The development of tourism.

### **South East Essex Chamber of Commerce**

The South East Essex Chamber of Commerce wished to highlight the problems associated with traffic grid-locking and commercial waste disposal.

Officers confirmed that:-

- The Essex and South Essex Waste Consortiums were looking for a solution that would harness the collection and despatch ends over a wide spatial area.
- A debate was continuing around a transport strategy for South Essex.

In response to questions around the effectiveness of Closed Circuit Television in the town centres, officers advised that this had been provided by the Town/Parish Councils, together with the Chambers of Trade. Decisions around the use of lighting and/or CCTV needed to involve all interested parties.

The business representatives wished to record their appreciation to the Economic Development officer for her work on their behalf.

The Committee were pleased to note that the concerns of the business community allied closely with those issues identified by Members and should be included in the report to Council when the priorities and budgets for the Council are determined.

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The meeting closed at 9.45 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....