

CONSULTATION WITH THE DISTRICT CHAMBERS OF TRADE AND BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATIONS (Minute 442/02)

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members views on the consultation arrangements with business representative organisations in the District.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Representatives of the business community were invited to attend Committee on the 22nd January 2002 to discuss National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) arrangements in the District for 2002/03.
- 2.2 At that meeting Members asked for better consultation arrangements between business representatives and Rochford District Council to be considered at a future meeting.

3 CURRENT CONSULTATION ARRANGMENTS

- 3.1 The following consultation arrangements are in place.
- 3.2 **NNDR**
- 3.2.1 Members have agreed to invite Representatives of the business community to Finance and Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee twice per year to discuss the NNDR arrangements. These meetings would take place in September/October and February each financial year.
- 3.3 **Officer Meetings with the Chambers of Commerce, Trade and Federation of Small Business**
- 3.3.1 These take place four times per year with attendance of the representatives of the above organisations and officers from the authority. Officers in attendance include Head of Planning Services, Head of Housing, Health and Community Care, the Corporate Policy Manager and the Economic Development Officer.
- 3.3.2 Items discussed include updates on South East Essex Economic Strategy and Thames Gateway South Essex, updates on enhancement works in the district and other issues of importance to the business community. Recently guests have been invited to update the group on

the support they can offer to businesses such as Business Link for Essex.

- 3.3.3 Feedback from the group suggests they find this forum of value and informative.

3.4 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

- 3.4.1 Business representative organisations are invited to attend the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, to ensure business views are taken into consideration. Previously the representatives had raised concerns that the business community was not being taken into account.

3.5 Working groups

- 3.5.1 Businesses or their representatives have been involved in the following largely task and finish working groups; Taxi Licensing Working Group, Rochford Town Centre Working Group, Rayleigh Town Centre Working Group, Hullbridge Village Working Group and Hockley Town Centre Working Group.

3.6 Best Value Reviews

- 3.6.1 Business Representatives have been invited to take part in Best Value Reviews as part of the Customer Feedback process. Two representative organisations have expressed a desire to become involved in the Financial Services Best Value Review currently underway (see 4.3 below).

3.7 Information

- 3.7.1 Information is available to representatives of the business community sent via e-mail such as planning application lists.

4 OFFICER COMMENT

- 4.1 The representatives of the business community have raised concerns in the past that they are not effectively consulted on the development of Rochford District Council policies that may have an impact on the business community.
- 4.2 Nonetheless, as outlined above, meetings with Business Representatives are fairly regular and members of the group have been in contact with officers between meetings where they require additional information.

- 4.3 There is an opportunity to include business representatives in the Best Value process, possibly in the Financial Services Review in relation to business rate. Two business representatives have expressed a desire to be included in consultation of this nature with the Council.
- 4.4 The Overview and Scrutiny process does allow Members to invite outside representatives to discuss items on the agenda. Members may therefore wish to consider whether the business community could be involved more with the Council and if so how this could be achieved. Members may wish to consider asking the business representatives how they would like to be consulted.
- 4.6 The Council is setting up a Local Strategic Partnership over the coming months to help develop a Community Strategy for the District. The views of the business community will be an important part of the partnership and the strategy. As part of the communication process with the business community, Members should therefore consider how the businesses could be represented on this Local Strategic Partnership and whether this represents the best means of engaging with the business community in the longer-term.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council is required to consult with businesses when setting the NNDR for the district.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Members' views are sought on the following:
- (a) Whether the business community could be informed more by the Council and if so how this could be achieved.
 - (b) How the business community be represented on the Local Strategic Partnership. (CEX)

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