

Policy & Finance Committee – 9 March 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **9 March 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr T G Cutmore
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr C I Black
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr C G Seagers

Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr Mrs M J Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J Thomass

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
R J Honey - Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
D Deeks - Head of Financial Services
S Clarkson - Head of Revenue & Housing Management
S Logan - Revenue & Benefits Manager
Z Neeld - Corporate Policy Manager
K Doyland - Licensing Manager
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

The Chairman welcomed Zandra Neeld, the Council's Corporate Policy Manager, to her first Committee meeting since appointment.

90 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

91 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D G Stansby declared a personal interest in the item on grants to outside organisations by virtue of his wife being a member of the Rayleigh Historical Society and of being an occasional visitor to meetings of the Society.

92 REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the revenues and benefits partnership working initiative.

In introducing the report, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management advised that it was likely this year's business rate collection level could be around 99.1%, a full percentage point over the previous year. This had been achieved by adopting an "output based" approach which gave Chelmsford Borough Council freedom to collect the Rate by using their own established procedures. A detailed report on the business rate initiative could be submitted to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 6 April 2006. With regard to the revenues and benefits initiative, the functional structure diagrams identified at Appendix 3 of the report were indicative only.

It was noted that quarterly performance reports included year on year figures to facilitate comparison of collection figures. The next reports would include the year-end position for revenues and benefits.

The Committee concurred with the observation of the Chairman that, given the encouraging results associated with the business rate initiative, it would be useful for officers to work with Chelmsford Borough Council in issuing a joint press release on the success of the initiative. It was observed that the Anglian Revenue Partnership was a good example on how collaborative working could develop.

Responding to questions, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management confirmed that a further report on the revenues and benefit initiative could be submitted to Committee early in the next Municipal Year.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress made on collaborative working to date be noted and that:-
 - A further report on the business rate collection initiative be submitted to the meeting of this Committee scheduled for 6 April 2006.
 - A further report on the revenues and benefits initiative be submitted to the first meeting of this Committee's successor in the next Municipal Year.
- (2) That the proposal for further work on the revenues and benefits joint working initiative together with the Communications and Consultation Protocol and Project Plan, as set out in the report, be endorsed.
- (3) That officers work with Chelmsford Borough Council to issue a joint press release on the success of the business rate collection initiative at the appropriate time. (HRHM)

93 GRANTS TO OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on applications from outside organisations to be considered for grant support in 2006/07.

Members noted the background to the submission of a grant application from Downhall Under Fives. Whilst recognising that a grant of £500 for a new shed could be appropriate it was felt that factors associated with the organisation's longer term accommodation aspirations, such as the need for lease negotiations and planning permission, pointed to it being appropriate for separate consideration to be given to whether to grant £2,000 for the costs of a new building at a future date on request from the organisation. The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor C I Black and seconded by Councillor C A Hungate, in this regard.

Responding to questions, the Head of Financial Services advised on the background to the introduction of the current criteria used to assess grant applications, the criteria having been reviewed and endorsed by the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor Mrs M J Webster and seconded by Councillor T G Cutmore, that a sum of £800 be awarded to the Essex Disabled People's Association for the purpose identified in the report.

Members concurred with the observation of the Chairman that it would be appropriate for forthcoming general discussions with the Parish/Town Councils to include reference to District Council concern on the capacity of the community and voluntary sector which, in part, can be associated with the ability of that sector to attract grants into the District. The potential for increasing community resources through partnership working between the tiers could be raised as part of that discussion.

It was agreed that awards should be publicised via a detailed press release and the inclusion of an item in the Summer edition of the Council's newspaper, Rochford District Matters. It was noted that publicising should be seen as a mechanism for drawing attention to the availability of grant awards given that there may be a number of very deserving causes that are not aware of such awards.

Resolved

- (1) That Grants be awarded for 2006/07 as follows:-

Organisation	Grant Award £	
Rochford & Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau	76,500	
Barling Magna Evergreen Club	110	
Essex Racial Equality Council	700	
Great Wakering OAP Club	100	
Historical Society of Rayleigh (Windmill)	195	(an interim award pending new management arrangements)
Hockley & Hawkwell Old People's Welfare Committee	3,700	
Hullbridge Pensioners Fellowship	110	
Hullbridge Senior Citizens Welfare Council	3,700	
Mayday Mobile	1,220	
Rayleigh Age Concern	3,700	
Rayleigh Good Fellowship	360	
Rayleigh No. 1 Club	300	
Rayleigh Physically Handicapped Club	800	
Relate South Essex	900	
Rochford & District Access Committee for the Disabled	350	
Rochford & District Old People's Welfare Committee	3,700	
Rochford Sports Council	3,600	
Royal Association for the Deaf	620	
RRAVS – Funding under Service Level Agreement	1,800	(an interim award pending review of the Service Level Agreement)
Downhall Under Fives	500	(specifically for new shed. An award of £2000 in relation to costs of a new building to be considered separately at a future date on request from the organisation)
Essex Disabled People's Association	800	

- (2) That the awards be publicised via a detailed press release and the inclusion of an article in the Summer edition of the Council's newspaper, Rochford District Matters. Award recipients to be invited to provide comments for the purposes of this publicity.
- (3) That forthcoming general discussions with the Parish/Town Councils include reference to District Council concern on the capacity of the community and voluntary sector which, in part, can be associated with the ability of that sector to attract grants into the District. The potential for increasing community resources through partnership working between the tiers to be raised as part of that discussion. (HFS)

94 PROPOSALS FOR CASINOS – GAMBLING ACT 2005

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care that introduced the procedure by which proposals from local authorities for the siting of casinos in their area may be considered by the Government and sought resolution of the question as to whether or not a bid should be submitted for consideration.

During debate it was accepted that any detailed consideration of the subject of casinos would no doubt involve the weighing up of tourism/investment aspects against potential environmental factors and problems that may be associated with the subject of gambling.

Resolved

That the Council does not submit a bid for a Casino at this time. (HHHCC)

95 REVIEW OF ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) on amendments to the Council's Constitution.

In presenting the report, the Corporate Director confirmed that the Standards Committee had endorsed draft proposals relating to its area of work. The Standards Committee had recognised that, dependant on Government changes to the Conduct Regime for Local Government in England, there may be a future need to recommend changes around Committee role and function.

Responding to questions the Corporate Director advised that, as officers had not traditionally been appointed to Committees, removal of the Chief Executive from membership of the Emergency Planning Committee would bring consistency.

Recommended to Council that the draft Constitution, as submitted, be adopted. (CD(LP&A))

96 GERSHON SAVINGS – 2006/07

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on the statement to Government on how the Council proposes to achieve savings required under the Gershon initiative.

In presenting this item the Head of Financial Services advised that, since report publication, the Government had changed the standard target for 2005/06 and 2006/07 from £270,000 to £234,000 per year, of which 50% must be cashable.

It was confirmed that factors associated with the tonnage of street sweeping collected increasing by over 40% in 2005/06 included the impact of education and improvements to data collection and working arrangements. Members could be provided with detailed information on the factors.

Resolved

- (1) That the proposed savings for 2006/07, as detailed in the report, be agreed for inclusion in the Annual Efficiency Statement for 2006/07.
- (2) That the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer sign off the submission.
- (3) That Members be provided with detailed information on the factors associated with the tonnage of street sweeping collected increasing by over 40% in 2005/06. (HFS)

97 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES – WRITE-OFF

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) seeking approval to the write-off of a National Non-Domestic Rate debt in excess of £15,000.

Members noted that debts written off against the National Non-Domestic Rate Pool fell to the Government rather than the Council's budget.

Resolved

That the debt of £23,077.32, as identified in the report, be written-off against the National Non-Domestic Rate Pool. (CD(F&ES))

98 INDEMNITIES FOR MEMBERS – CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration) on the response received from the Local Government Association in reply to a request concerning the adequacy of Members' indemnity insurance.

Members thanked the Corporate Director for pursuing this matter and agreed that it would be appropriate to further communicate with the Association asking that outstanding points associated with previous correspondence be addressed.

It was noted that membership of the Local Government Association meant that the Council had access to the training, personnel and development services offered by the Regional Employers Association. It was also noted that, notwithstanding that aspects of the operation of the Association were indicative of a lack of interest in issues faced by District Councils, the Fourth Option Lobby Group had been sponsored by the Association. The Chairman advised that, in his role as the Council's representative on the Association, he would continue to emphasise the need for the Association to work in the interests of all authorities, whatever their size.

Resolved

That, subject to further communication with the Local Government Association asking that outstanding points associated with previous correspondence be addressed, the Association's position on indemnities for Members and Officers be noted. (CD(LP&A))

The meeting closed at 8.41pm.

Chairman

Date