

OPERATIONS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 28 SEPTEMBER 2006

Present: - Councillor S C Jones – Chairman.
Councillors R P Chambers, M A Gayler, E Gower, R T Harris,
A J Ketteridge, V J T Lelliott and P A Wilcock

Officers in attendance: -A Bovaird Chief Executive, M Brean Executive Manager (Customer Services), R Chamberlain Executive Manager (Housing Services), C Hughes Executive Manager (Human Resources), P O'Dell Executive Manager (Finance and Assets Strategy), C Roberts Committee Officer, P Snow Electoral Services Officer,

OP15 **APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M L Foley, D W Gregory, T P Knight, A R Row, M J Savage and G Sell.

Councillors R P Chambers, M A Gayler and S C Jones declared interests in items on the agenda as follows:-

Member	Item	Interest
Councillor Chambers	Items 5 (OGC).	Police Authority
Councillor Gayler	Item 8	Chairman of Dunmow Town Strategy Group
Councillor Jones	Item 10 (Councillor Jones would be leaving the room for this item)	Application for £2000

OP16 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on 29 June 2006 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

OP17 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) Minute OP4 – Thaxted Youth Club Funding

Members recalled that an amount of match funding had been anticipated from the Club or elsewhere but that no further information had been received. In the absence of this the Council could not be asked to contribute the suggested sum of up to £40,000 to the building of a new Thaxted Youth Centre

RESOLVED that officers pursue the matter of match-funding any Council contribution and that Members be informed of the upshot before the Council meeting.

(ii) Minute OP6 – Presentation by Northgate

Members and officers commented unfavourably on the presentation given and it was noted that their views had been conveyed to the managing director of Northgate.

OP18

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES

The Committee received the report of the Electoral Services Officer about the statutory review of polling districts and places commenced by the Council on 1 September 2005. Under legislation, the Council had to decide on suitable arrangements for its district after appropriate consultation. The new scheme adopted would operate at all elections held from the effective date onwards.

The Electoral Services Officer explained that a comprehensive process of consultation had taken place including reference to each Area Panel of the issues affecting its area. The recommendations of the Panels were set out in the report before the Committee and officers recommended their acceptance save that in the North area, for reasons set out below in each case, revisions be made to the original decision

RESOLVED that:

- 1 the recommendations of the East and the South West Area Panels be accepted
- 2 on the advice of the Electoral Services Officer the recommendations of the North Area Panel be accepted save in so far as the following amendments shall be made:-
 - (i) the North/South Boundary of Shire Polling District will be in accordance with Option 2 which was felt to be more convenient for the electors and simpler to explain.

(The description would be amended to read: 'Shire North: that portion of Saffron Walden Shire ward north of a line commencing on the western boundary of the ward where it meets with Audley ward at the junction of South Road with Peaslands Road, and running in an easterly direction along the centre of Peaslands Road to the junction with Thaxted Road, and then in a generally easterly direction along that road to a point on that road, then in a generally easterly direction along footpath 37, bridleway 19 and bridleway 18 to the ward boundary west of Cole End Lane.')

Shire South will consist of the remainder of Shire Ward not included in the area described above.

- (ii) The Castle Ward Polling Place will remain at St Mary's School, not at the Football Club. (It was felt that the Football Club was substantially less convenient than St Mary's School as a polling place for electors, particularly the elderly, disabled and those without transport, due to its relatively remote location.)

- (iii) A separate polling district be created to cover Wimbish (Carver Barracks); that the Polling District be designated in this case as the Polling Place; that officers be authorised to make arrangements for an appropriate polling venue so as to provide flexible electoral arrangements to incorporate the best available electoral accommodation at the time when it is needed and that the boundary of the new Polling District be as set out in Option 2 (Para 42 of the Electoral Services Officer's report) as follows:-

'that portion of the parish of Wimbish west of a line running from the north-east corner of Rowney Wood to a point on Thaxted Road immediately east of Myco House, then running in a generally northerly direction in a more or less straight line immediately to the east of Parsonage Farm/Gosias Grange and then to the east of Tiptofts'.

The remainder of Wimbish parish would be redesignated as Wimbish (Village) Polling District and would continue to poll at Wimbish Village Hall.

- 3 the revised polling scheme, including the revisions above, be implemented with effect from 1 December 2006.

OP19

REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

The Committee considered references from the meeting of the Community Committee held on 14 September and from the meeting of the Environment Committee held on 26 September.

(i) Minute C22 – Great Dunmow Museum

RESOLVED that the decision to approve a grant to Great Dunmow Museum Society be accepted to enable the Great Dunmow Museum Society to meet its share of the running costs of the Maltings Great Dunmow

(ii) Minute C26 – Funding Allocation Criteria

RESOLVED that whilst accepting the recommendations of the Community Committee, the Operations Committee considers that to structure the options in a more realistic way the ad hoc grants issue should be addressed also in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and by consultation on the capital programme as well as the revenue budget at the time of budget review to forward plan for schemes needing funds.

(iii) Minutes C27 and C28 – Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet Skateparks

RESOLVED That these applications be referred to Council for decision for the replacement of skateboard equipment at Great Dunmow and the redevelopment of Stansted Skateboard Park subject to provision of a full business case for the applications unless the business case is inadequate in the opinion of the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman.

(iv) Minute E21 – Fuel Pump Replacement

RESOLVED that, to reduce risk of costly breakdowns, the Operations Committee supports capital expenditure to replace fuel pumps and to install a fuel monitoring system at the Council's two depots and requests that the Full Council make provision of £15,000 in the Council's Capital Programme for the current financial year.

OP20

INTEGRATED CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT (ICM) PROGRESS REPORT

Members received a further update by the Executive Manager (Customer Services) on progress of the ICM project.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the progress report and congratulates the Executive Manager (Customer Services) on the progress made.

OP21

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2005/06

The Committee received the report of the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) presenting the revised Statement of Accounts for 2005/06 following the conclusion of the annual audit of the draft Statements by the Audit Commission.

Members noted the amendments to the finalised Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31st March 2006 attached to this report and the intention of the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer to re-sign the revised Statement of Internal Control attached to the report.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- (i) notes the amendments to the now finalised Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31st March 2006 attached to this report
- (ii) notes the intention of the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer to re-sign the revised Statement of Internal Control attached to this report.
- (iii) notes that the Audit Commission intends, subject to finalisation of a few issues, to issue an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts on 30th September 2006.
- (iv) notes the changes to the draft accounts, and supports officers in not amending the figure for intangible assets
(The amendments consist of the addition of one line concerning the Council's duty to achieve best value, and a heading for the paragraph about the annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control. Updated information has however been provided by officers as regards the figure for software leases misclassified as tangible rather than intangible assets in the accounts, the final figure for which is not regarded as material by the Commission.)
- (v) the Committee accepts the Performance Select Committee's recommendation to send a letter of protest to the Essex County Council concerning their actuaries' omission of the March pension

fund gain from the actuarial valuation of the Pension Fund, causing a substantial misstatement.

- (vi) recommends that the Audit Commission fee is challenged
- (vii) thanks the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) and his team for all their hard work.

OP22 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT 2006/07

The Committee received for information the report of the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) This report provided details of the Committee's spending and income compared to budget for the period 1st April to 31st July 2006. The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) asked that the Committee note the Council's budgetary control position as at 31 July 2006

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

OP23 CORPORATE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT 2006/07

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) This report provides details of the Councils' spending and income compared to budget for the period 1st April to 31st July 2006. The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) asked that the Committee note the Council's budgetary control position as at 31 July 2006

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

OP24 OPERATIONS COMMITTEE BUDGET 2007/08

Members considered the report of the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy). This report provided the starting point for preparation of the Committee's 2007/08 General Fund budget showing new spending pressures against the background of the Council's likely overall financial position. Final decisions on the budget would not be made until January and February 2007, although it seemed likely that significant savings would be required to balance the budget. In this light, officers required an early indication from the Committee which spending pressures were considered worthwhile. The report also examined the Committee's own budgets in the light of proposed devolution of budgets to Area Panels.

The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) recommended that the Committee:

- a. Approved the ongoing and one-off spending pressures contained in Appendix 1 to the report for inclusion in the draft budget and the proposal to bring individual business cases for all those items to the February 2007 meeting
- b. Indicated any of the spending pressures which it wished to be included in public consultation regarding the Council's budget.
- c. Confirmed that no budgets of the Committee were suitable for devolvement to Area Panels

Based on updated information supplied to the meeting, the request for funding of £2000 in respect of the Walden 1647 celebrations was withdrawn, with officers to look at virement possibilities to finance a smaller sum.

Members were concerned however about the large number of spending pressures and wished to see the specific justification for each of them.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1 Asks officers to reduce the number of ongoing and one-off spending pressures contained in Appendix 1 to this report for inclusion in the draft budget and approves the proposal to bring individual business cases for the remaining items to the February 2007 meeting
- 2 Confirms that no budgets of this Committee are suitable for devolvement to Area Panels
3. Agrees that any appropriate items on the list of spending pressures be used in budget consultation with the public.

OP25

GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2007/08

The Executive Manager Finance and Asset Strategy presented his report which provided an updated position statement on the Council's 2007/08 budget since new spending pressures had been considered by committees, and recommended a strategy for dealing with the resulting overall budget deficit projection. It also contained details of the progress made in developing a Medium Term Financial Strategy and considered the responses received from committees regarding budget devolution to Area Panels.

The Executive Manager Finance and Asset Strategy recommended the Committee to approve:-

- A six point strategy to achieve a balanced 2007/08 General Fund budget outlined in paragraph 10 of the report.
- Further research into devolution to area panels of the seven budgets identified as potentially suitable in paragraph 16 of the report.

RESOLVED that the Committee accepts

- 1 The six point strategy to achieve a balanced 2007/08 General Fund budget outlined in paragraph 10 of this report.
- 2 Further research into devolution to area panels of the seven budgets identified as potentially suitable in paragraph 16 of the report.

OP26

CIVIC SUITE CHARGING POLICY

The Executive Manager (Human Resources) presented a report that the room booking pricing regime had been in place since 1st of January 2002 and required updating. Internal Audit had recommended that following this report a yearly pricing review should take place. This could be part of the annual review of fees and charges undertaken by Scrutiny Committee. The immediate need was to update the

room booking pricing regime whilst accommodating the Councils own needs for accommodation.

The Executive Manager (Human Resources) suggested a comprehensive scheme which was set out in the report and also asked Members to consider whether:

- (i) They wished to see proposals for a more aggressive marketing and bookings approach and task the Executive Manager (HR) with preparing a further report for decision.
- (ii) They wished partner organisations (eg PCT or Police) to be charged at a reduced rate.

RESOLVED that the Committee accepts the charges and conditions recommended in the report but that aggressive marketing be suspended pending the end of the Stansted Airport planning inquiry.

OP27

RETIREMENT AND REDUNDANCY REQUIRED CHANGES TO POLICY

The Executive Manager (Human Resources) presented a report advising the Committee about issues submitted to the Committee for decision as a response to legislation. The recent changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), the new Age Discrimination Legislation and the proposed changes contained in the draft Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) Regulations 2006, require the two main policies dealing with redundancy and early retirement to be amended. The Discretionary Compensation Regulations will make changes to the type of discretionary payments that may be offered when employees retire on efficiency or redundancy grounds but the Regulations are in draft form with an anticipated implementation date of 1 October 2006. The best advice and guidance that is normally provided for authorities when Regulations or Employment Law changes is still in its initial phase.

RESOLVED that the Committee accepts the changes to the current Redundancy policy and the Early Pensions Payments policy and approves the suggested holding paragraphs to be included in Corporate Employee Policies pending further guidance, and that once the Draft Regulations on Discretionary Payments on termination of employment cease being draft and the best advice and guidance is available from specialist advisors a costed report is provided to Members for decision.

The meeting ended at 10.05.pm.