

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 7 FEBRUARY 2008

Present:- Councillor R P Chambers – Chairman.
Councillors R Clover, K L Eden, M A Gayler, D M Jones, A J Ketteridge, T P Knight, R M Lemon, H S Rolfe, G Sell, R D Sherer, A D Walters and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance:- D Burrige, D Bradley, T Cowper, S Martin, J Mitchell, M Perry, C Roberts and A Webb.

FA36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from the Chief Executive.

FA37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R P Chambers declared an interest insofar as he was a councillor of the Essex County Council and Chairman of the Police Authority. Councillor R Clover declared an interest insofar as he was a councillor of the Dunmow Town Council.

FA38 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2008 were received, confirmed and signed as a correct record. There were no items of business arising.

FA39 GREAT DUNMOW OFFICES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Support and Revenue Services on use of the Great Dunmow Council Offices.

Simon Martin explained that an opportunity had arisen to share premises with the Essex County Council in Great Dunmow as regards housing the Great Dunmow Customer Information Centre which was at present housed in the former Great Dunmow Council Offices, such a move would contribute to the provision of "joined up" services for the public and also release the Great Dunmow Council Offices for possible sale, subject to the Council's commitment to the Voluntary Sector organisations which temporarily used the offices.

He added that Councillors Rolfe and Miller with the Director of Operations had visited the new library building being provided by the Essex County Council and had found it good. Members discussed the possibilities and Councillor Gayler commented that the Voluntary Organisations found it a great advantage to work together and it would be good to retain this in any new premises; also the Dunmow Council Offices were viewed locally as the

Council's presence in the town and it would be desirable to visibly label any new premises to retain the impression that Uttlesford District Council was present in Dunmow.

Councillor Chambers (who had declared an interest in his capacity as the Chairman of the Essex Police Authority) said that he hoped there would be Police presence at the library as well as at the new police station at Dunmow. He anticipated that service would be better and felt it important that the signage at the building should be highly visible from the road as well as within the building.

Councillor Rolfe suggested that the Government of the Town Council could also be brought within the one stop shop concept.

Councillor Wilcock made a proposal which was seconded, but lost, that additions be made to the recommendations in the report confirming the Council's commitment to the Voluntary Sector and making a proviso in the case of recommendation C that the development be for the good of Great Dunmow. Councillors Ketteridge and Rolfe argued that the recommendations were acceptable as written.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Members agree in principle to move the Great Dunmow Customer Information Centre from the Council Offices to the new Great Dunmow Library, subject to negotiation with Essex County Council.
- 2 The Council makes best efforts to help relocate the various voluntary groups and the Great Dunmow Citizen's Advice Bureau from the Great Dunmow council offices.
- 3 The Great Dunmow Offices are put up for sale in due course.
- 4 In the meantime the lease, for office accommodation, between the Council and the Council for Voluntary Services Uttlesford (CVSU) is extended for one year, with provision for one month's notice during that period. Existing arrangements with the CAB are also extended for one year, with provision for one month's notice during that period.

FA40

WITHDRAWN ITEMS

The Chairman of the Committee had explained that the following items were being withdrawn from consideration to be submitted to future meetings.

Item 5 – special arrangements for retirement and recruitment of Museum Education Officer

Item 8 – Treasury Management

FA41 INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Committee had received the report of Bill Roots, a former Chief Executive and Director of Finance following his investigation into the Council's financial position.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the recommendations and guidance contained in it discussed at the next meeting of the Committee when Mr Roots will be in attendance.

FA42 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09 TO 2010/11

The Committee considered the report of the Acting Head of Finance on the Capital Programme. Mr Webb explained that, as set out in appendix 2, most capital programmes had been pushed back a year.

In answer to a question from Councillor Rolfe, he explained that it had been decided to await the OR results the better to assess the implications of replacing or not the IT for planning, etc listed as number 5 in the Approved Schemes and Building Programmes. Mr Webb added that it was thought improvement would be cheaper than buying.

Members discussed the pros and cons of purchasing versus leasing in a number of contexts across the capital programme. In answer to a question, the Director of Operations described the work done to promote Right to Buy sales.

RESOLVED that

- 1 The revised capital programme and associated financing proposals as contained in appendix 2 be recommended to the Council for formal approval on 19 February 2008.
- 2 That officers investigate the generation of additional capital receipts through the "Right to Buy" sales and the sale of surplus general fund HRA assets.

FA43 COUNCIL REVENUE BUDGET 2008/09

(The meeting was adjourned from 8.17 pm to 8.30 pm to assist Members who had not had an opportunity to read the report).

The Acting Head of Finance apologised for the lateness of the report which was detailed, complex and had unavoidably taken longer than usual to prepare. Paragraph 10 of the report showed the assumptions included in the 2007/08 revised budget which officers particularly wished to draw to Members' attention and paragraph 17 pointed out the assumptions Members required to be aware of as regards the 2008/09 original budget.

Members considered the report at length.

Councillor Sell asked whether the figure for additional cost of redundancies was final and Mr Bradley confirmed that it was all that officers were aware of.

In answer to a question from Councillor Rolfe, he explained that the figure for staff vacancies was about £500,000, but would have to be reviewed in two month's time. Councillor Rolfe asked for a paper to be brought to the Committee to update the matter. The Acting Chief Financial Officer and the Acting Head of Finance stressed that it was essential that Heads of Department control their budgets and they informed the meeting that all capital avenues had been explored.

In answer to a question from Councillor Wilcock, the Acting Chief Financial Officer explained that capitalisation could apply as regards redundancy payments and the matter was currently with Central Government.

He added that as regards BAA, it would be appropriate to initiate discussions with the firm. The Director of Planning confirmed that there was much room for negotiation.

The Acting Chief Financial Officer advised the meeting that in order to meet minimum General Fund Balance levels it would be necessary to transfer from the PFI Reserve to the general Fund Balances a sum in the region of £400,000. The ACFO stressed that this was in effect a paper based exercise only and PFI Reserve money was not actually being spent. The Reserve would be replenished as soon as possible and it was proposed that any Housing and Planning Delivery Grant received over and above the budgeted amount (£200,000) should be used to return the PFI Reserve to its previous level

RESOLVED that on page 8 of the report the totals for the years 2009/10 and 2010/11 be amended to read respectively £4,085,808 and £4,106,237 and that the Committee recommends to full Council that:

- 1) Approval be given to the contributions from Earmarked Reserves in 2007/08 and 2008/09, summarised in Appendix 1 and shown in detail in Appendix 2 to this report.
- 2) Final Approval is given to the General Fund Revenue Revised Estimates for 2007/08 and the General Fund Revenue Estimates for 2008/09, as set out in Appendix 1.
- 3) A Council Tax increase for 2008/09 of £6.48 (4.979%) based on a District Council Budget Requirement of £8,431,849 (excluding parish precepts) is approved.
- 4) Any amount received for 2008/09 from the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant in excess of £200k is returned to the PFI Special Grant Reserve, up to the previously transferred amount.
- 5) The General Fund contribution to the District Election Reserve for 2008/09 is deferred and that contributions re-commence in 2009/10.
- 6) A figure of £19k is appropriated from the Housing Needs Survey Reserve to the General Fund in 2008/09.
- 7) The Housing Needs Survey Reserve is closed and the balance on the Reserve of £25,000 is transferred to the General Fund.

- 8) The Energy Efficiency Investment Reserve is closed and the balance on the Reserve of £15,000 is transferred to the General Fund.
- 9) This Council's maximum net cost will be £250,000 and if partner income falls below £250,000, then the gross expenditure of £500k will be reduced by the same amount.
- 10) Any amount received for 2008/09 from the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant in excess of £200k, is returned to the PFI Special Grant Reserve, up to the previously transferred amount.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.