

**RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 20 SEPTEMBER 2001**

Present:- Councillor Mrs M A Caton – Chairman
Councillors R A E Clifford, A Dean, M L Foley, M A Gayler,
P G F Lewis, R A Merrion, D J Morson, R J O'Neill and
Mrs S V Schneider

Also present:- Councillor R P Chambers

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E C Forbes, Mrs L J Crowe, J B Dickson and
Mrs C Hughes.

RE1 NEW MEMBERS

The Chairman welcomed Councillors Clifford and Morson to their first meeting of the Resources Committee.

RE2 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R B Tyler.

RE3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 19 June 2001 were received.

RE4 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute 40 (iii) - Thaxted Community Information Centre

In answer to a question from Members, officers said that the level of demand and service at the Thaxted CIC was being monitored. The Head of Community and Leisure would submit a report to the relevant committee early in the New Year.

(ii) Minute 41 (i) - Expenditure on Swan Meadow Pond

Officers confirmed that work was to be carried out on the Swan Meadow pond in accordance with the proposals submitted to the Amenities Sub-Committee on 24 May 2001.

(iii) Minute 40 (vi) - Car Parking Spaces at the Council Offices Saffron Walden

In answer to a question from Councillor Dean, the issue of car parking spaces at the Council Offices, Saffron Walden should be picked up in the Best Value Review on Asset Management. A report on why it had taken so long to address the original decision would be made to a future meeting.

(iv) Minute 44 - Bridge End Gardens Project – Heritage Lottery Bid

Councillor Morson informed Members that a decision on the bid for a grant of £363,327 towards the funding of the restoration of the Bridge End Gardens in Saffron Walden should be made towards the end of November.

RE5 APPROVAL OF THE COUNCIL'S STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Members received the Council's draft Statement of Accounts together with a report setting out the background to the requirement for Members' approval which also included some brief notes on the statement. The regulations required authorities to have prepared a statement of accounts by 30 September 2001.

RESOLVED that the draft Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2001 be approved.

RE6 POLICY PRIORITIES AND BUDGET 2002/03

Members received a report outlining proposals for budget savings, targets and committee cash limits arising from the review of priorities, which had been undertaken by the Administration. Subject to each committee's consideration and overall confirmation by the Council on 16 October 2001, it was intended that these targets, which for the Resources Committee was £247,000, and the Administration's proposals underlying them, be used by officers as the basis for preparing service plans and committee budgets for 2002/03. The Resources Committee was asked to confirm its own position.

The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) required all principal authorities to produce Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) statements by 31 July 2001. Due to the extremely tight timetable, it had not been possible to present this IEG statement to a committee or Council meeting before the 31 July 2001 deadline. The Government was considering giving capital grants which would be doubled if partnership arrangements could be made.

Officers would use the targets from the review of priorities recently undertaken by the Administration as the basis for preparing service plans and committee budgets for the next financial year. The budget strategy report presented to committee in June had projected a potential savings figure of £465,000, for the General Fund, allowing for a target Council Tax increase of no more than 2.5%. This figure did not allow for any new growth items.

Target savings now identified for each committee totalled £635,000, which was £170,000 more than the funding gap projected in June. This sum was all that was available to meet any growth items or anything else unforeseen at this stage. It was planned that each scrutiny committee would have a budget of £10,000 next year which would be met from the £170,000 figure.

Following discussion, it was

RECOMMENDED that officers start to prepare service plans and detailed budgets with a view to achieving a saving of £247,000 subject to overall confirmation by the Council.

RE7

BUDGET STRATEGY 2002-2003

Councillor R P Chambers declared an interest as a Member of the Police Authority.

The Committee received a report updating them on the budget strategy report approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 19 June 2001. The report summarised the policy priorities and budget reports that had been considered during this cycle by the Council's main policy committees following the Administration's review of priorities. It also provided some indications on budget variances that might arise during the current year.

Councillor Gayler drew attention to the letter that Members had received from Unison concerning staff vacancies. Staff were concerned that some posts were not being filled after employees left. Members felt that the staff replacement policy should look closely at vacant posts and not just replace like for like. The Director of Resources said that it was good management policy to examine vacant posts. Some councils had a policy of freezing posts for a period of time. The Leader assured Members that there were no proposals for compulsory redundancies. In reply to Unison's concern that the cost of temporary staffing was not shown, the Director of Resources confirmed that these figures had been included within employee costs. It was agreed that there should be a staff replacement policy.

In reply to a question from Councillor Gayler concerning the transfer of the Planning Service to Saffron Walden, officers said that investigations were under way as part of the Best Value Review, into the advantages of selling or leasing the premises in Dunmow. The Director of Resources assured Members that the CIC would provide a service as good or better than at present. It was an ideal opportunity to look at partnerships with the police and any other interested organisation.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the Council approve the target cash limits for each Policy Committee as considered by committees during this cycle of meeting and
- 2 Policy committees be invited to propose draft budgets at the November cycle of meetings which reflect the agreed cash limits.

It was further

RESOLVED this Committee receive an information report showing any frozen staff posts.

RE8 **PAYROLL SERVICES**

Members received a follow up report on the arrangements for providing the Council's payroll service. It highlighted work still to be undertaken, and options for consideration, in particular full external provision by another local authority.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the review proceeds within the wider context of opportunities presented by the Corporate Services Best Value Review and.
- 2 Members support the options identified including investigation of full external provision.

RE9 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

The Committee received a report setting out details of the Council's borrowing and investments in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Treasury Management in Local Authorities.

This Council's investment income was slightly less than other similar authorities as the majority of districts used a fund manager. Officers had made preliminary investigations into the use of a fund manager to manage a proportion of the Council's core cash balances. The principal advantage to this Council would be increased investment income compared to that achievable by its in-house activities due to the use of external specialist resources. The minimum amount that a fund manager would take on to invest would be £5,000,000. The issues of potential volatility of returns, credit risks and fees charged would need careful consideration.

RESOLVED that use of a fund manager be investigated further and that the Director of Resources report back to the Committee before a final decision was made regarding entering into a contract.

RE10 **BALANCES AND RESERVES**

Members received a report detailing balances and reserves at 31 March 2001. The figures were from the draft statement of accounts, which were still subject to audit. The decision on the level of balances and reserves not earmarked was based on the advice and professional judgement of the Director of Resources.

In connection with the Housing Revenue Account, the working balance at 31 March 2001 was £586,000, some £86,000 above the target level of £500,000. The additional balance was in line with the anticipated level in the approved revised estimates and would be used to support the Housing Revenue Account in 2001/02. At the end of 2001/02, it was expected that the working balance would be £500,000. The only balance earmarked for a specific purpose was £128,000 for future housing repair costs.

RESOLVED that the Council retain the target levels for balances for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account at £1,200,000 and £500,000 respectively and that these targets be reviewed during the budget setting process.

RE11

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY – ACTION PLAN

Members received a report seeking their approval for an action plan to help develop the communications strategy, which had been approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 19 December 2000. The report suggested options for a way forward for resourcing communications work. In connection with building on the good working relationships with Essex County Council, Councillor Mrs Schneider referred to difficulties encountered with the Essex Youth Service. Councillor Gayler suggested that the Uttlesford Youth Forum could be invited to do a presentation at a future Council meeting.

Some Councillors did not agree that the Council page had improved. They suggested that a task group should be set up to look at the Council page followed by a report to this Committee.

In answer to a question from Councillor O'Neill, the Chief Executive explained that a citizen's panel was a standing group of members of the public and the panel was in existence for a set time. It was

RESOLVED that

- 1 the action plan appended to the report be approved,
- 2 focus groups, questionnaires and surveys be used as part of the communications strategy where appropriate,
- 3 the option of establishing citizens panels be not pursued,
- 4 officers explore further opportunities for partnership working and examine further the options for staffing and resourcing communications,
- 5 a small task group be set up to look at the Council page, which would report back to this Committee.

RE12 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2002/03

Members received a report outlining proposals for the production of the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) 2002/03; together with a timetable of key dates up to the approval of the final plan in February 2002.

RESOLVED that officers consider options and present these to this Committee in November followed by a workshop in December.

RE13 LONG SERVICE AWARDS

At a meeting of the Local Joint Committee (LJC) on 24 July 2001, the issue of long service awards had been discussed. It was proposed by the LJC that two long service awards be established at 20 years and 30 years and that the length of service might be accumulated around career breaks or breaks in service. It was also recommended that the awards should be made retrospectively to any existing employees from 1 September 2001. It was agreed that the one-off costs would be financed from a reserve fund. It was

RESOLVED that

- 1 A long service award of £250 be established at 20 years and £500 at 30 years. The service may be accumulated around career breaks or breaks in service. The years service to include service with the constituent authorities of Uttlesford District Council. Other local authority service not be considered.
- 2 Long service awards be offered on attainment rather than retirement. The award to continue as a gift.
- 3 a yearly awards ceremony be established involving presentation by the Chairman of the Council with local press publicity, subject to employee's acceptance.
- 4 Awards be made retrospectively to any existing employee who had the qualifying years service at a one-off cost to the Council of £10,250.
- 5 The implementation date be 1 September 2001.

RE14 CIVIC SUITE

Members received a report asking them to agree a revised letting and charging policy, as the existing charging policy for the hire of the Civic Suite had not been reviewed for several years. Councillor Gayler said that the proposed fees for the Council Chamber were not in proportion with the proposed fees for the Committee Room.

RESOLVED that

from 1 January 2002, excluding bookings already accepted on existing charges, the Civic Suite be charged at an hourly rate including VAT as follows:-

Voluntary groups, (as listed in the report),	£10.00 an hour + £10 setting up Costs (or booking fee)
Registered Charities and management committees of local clubs and societies that work in partnership with the Council	Refreshments to be paid for at current rates.
Commercial Rates	Council Chamber £35.00 an hour + £10.00 booking fee. SW Committee Room £15.00 an hour + £10.00 booking fee. Dunmow Committee Room £15.00 per hour + £10.00 booking fee Staff Room - £15.00 an hour + £10.00 booking fee (out of office hours).

- No bookings to be accepted when full Council and Committee meetings are scheduled.
- The Civic Suite to be available for conferences, meetings, exhibitions and other suitable functions.
- The Council is not licensed for Music & Dancing or for selling alcohol.
- No electrical equipment to be brought into the premises unless it has a current Portable Appliance Test Certificate, which must be seen by the Steward.
- Parking to be available out of office hours only.

RE15

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 7 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act. Page 7

RE16 PAY REVIEW OF BUILDING MAINTENANCE OPERATIVES (DSO)

Members received a report, which identified four possible options for aiding the recruitment and retention of trades persons through pay.

RESOLVED that a further report be prepared for the next meeting of the Committee setting out the detail and implications of addressing the issues involved.

RE17 REQUEST FOR EARLY REQUIREMENT

Members received a report detailing the implications for the early retirement of a Council officer. The report recommended that the Committee agree, on the grounds of the efficiency of the service, and make a one-off lump sum payment to the Essex County Council Pension Fund of £7,255.

Some Members questioned whether it was appropriate to make a decision on this matter before the Best Value review had been completed. It was

RESOLVED that the officer concerned be offered early retirement on the grounds of efficiency of the service and a one-off lump sum payment of £7,255 be made to the pension fund to make up the difference to age 65.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.