

**RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 23 JANUARY 2003**

Present:- Councillor Mrs M A Caton – Chairman.
Councillors A Dean, D W Gregory, P G F Lewis, R A Merrion,
R J O'Neill, Mrs S V Schneider, R B Tyler and P A Wilcock.

Also Present:- Councillors R J Copping and R P Chambers.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, Miss E Anderson, M Brean,
J B Dickson, Mrs C Hughes, J Mercer, M Perry and P Snow.

RE54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D J Morson.

Councillor D W Gregory declared a non-prejudicial interest as an employee of Stansted Airport Carz.

Councillor A Dean declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 4 (i) Benefactor Contribution - Stansted Mountfitchet Leisure Centre.

RE55 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2002 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

RE56 BENEFACTOR CONTRIBUTION – STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET LEISURE CENTRE

This item was referred from the Leisure PFI Board Meeting held on 15 January 2003.

The Leisure PFI Board had been negotiating with a benefactor from Stansted over the past three years. The benefactor was willing to contribute £100,000 towards the Leisure PFI Project for a centre at Stansted Mountfitchet. One of the conditions was to include the name of the benefactor's charitable trust within the title of the leisure centre. Although the naming of the Centre was solely the responsibility of Uttlesford District Council, the Leisure PFI Board had previously decided to obtain comments on a suggested name from these two bodies. The benefactor had indicated that he wished to name the facility "The Romeera Sports and Leisure Centre" but after consultation it was found both the Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council and the Mountfitchet High School suggested the name was unacceptable. After further negotiations, it was suggested that the leisure centre be named the "Stansted Romeera Centre". The Parish Council and the High School were consulted but again indicated that this name was not acceptable. The PFI Leisure Board felt that the comments of these two bodies should be taken into consideration when naming the centre and agreed that the title should not include Romeera and be named the 'Stansted Mountfitchet Leisure Centre'. The likely consequence

of this would be the Council would not receive the £100,000 contribution from the benefactor and were therefore asking the Committee to make an additional capital allocation of up to £100,000 to the Leisure PFI Project.

Councillor Chambers fully understood why the Parish Council and School were consulted but did not understand why they would not accept the second proposed name of the "Stansted Romeera Centre". A number of Councillors felt there was not a problem with accepting the name of the "Stansted Romeera Centre" and felt that £100,000 contribution could not be turned down solely for this reason.

Councillor Copping felt that £100,000 represented a small proportion of the two million pounds being spent on this PFI Project and, therefore, felt that it would be more appropriate to name a small part of the leisure centre after the benefactors trust, e.g. the gym. He felt that the other partners involved in the Project, who had also made contributions, should have a say in naming the leisure centre. To change the decision not to accept the name of "Stansted Romeera Centre", might cause havoc and may create bad relations with the other partners.

Councillor O'Neill felt that it was a pity for the issue to be delayed and unless somebody else was offering a cheque for £100,000 that the Council, on behalf of its taxpayers, could not responsibly turn down the offer.

Councillor Gayler suggested deferring the decision pending further negotiations with the benefactor, Parish Council and the High School. The Director of Resources informed the meeting that the benefactor was out of the Country until after full Council, when the budgets would be finalised, so this would not be possible.

RESOLVED that full Council, at its meeting on 11 February 2003, be recommended not to provide additional funding of £100,000 for the PFI Project and to accept the name of "Stansted Romeera Centre".

RE57

STANSTED AIRPORT CAMPAIGN

The Chief Executive presented a report to provide a brief summary of the expenditure commitment to date in relation to the SERAS report, the progress to date and works still to be undertaken. This report asked Members to approve expenditure for the next eleven months, which would come out of reserves. Two elevenths would be funded in this financial year and the remainder of funding up until December be taken out of next years budget. It was estimated that there would be highs and lows to the campaign and an average of £5,500 per month should be allocated for the campaign plus an estimated additional £9,500 in total for expenses, giving a total of £70,000. Members were informed that £15,000 had already been approved to support specific projects for SSE, which had been taken out of an earmarked reserve of £25,000. The Chief Executive informed that until now resources for the Stansted Airport Campaign had been found from reserves and it was up to Members if they wanted to include provision in the budget but currently there was no provision in the revenue budget.

Councillor O'Neill questioned whether the Council could sensibly use reserves for something so important which might continue to require funding for some years. Councillor Wilcock noted that the MORI Report on budget priorities for Uttlesford District Council stated that two thirds of Uttlesford residents questioned agreed that the Council should spend money to help the campaign to oppose the development of additional runways at Stansted Airport.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1 notes expenditure commitment to date in relation to the SERAS report.
- 2 approves the provision of £70,000 for the continuing engagements of the Public Affairs Consultants.

RE58

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

The Electoral Services Officer presented a report outlining suitable polling venues for Shire North and Stansted North polling districts. These two matters had been left unresolved from the previous meeting of this Committee in November when consideration was given to a series of recommendations for revised polling arrangements taking into account the new District Wards effective from May 2003. The Committee were asked to approve the remaining venues for the revised polling arrangements to finalise the revised scheme.

There was also a question to resolve concerning the Audley North polling district. At the last meeting, it was approved that the URC Church Hall in Abbey Lane would be the designated polling place for Audley North but it had since emerged that this was not available and the vestry had been offered as an alternative venue. Members could accept this offer or revert to the Town Hall which had better access facilities than the vestry.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Four Acres common room be accepted as the designated polling place for Shire North.
- 2 The Peter Kirk Centre be confirmed as the designated polling place for Stansted North.
- 3 The Town Hall be approved as the designated polling place for Audley North.

RE59

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE LEGAL AND MONITORING SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW – FINAL REPORT

The Head of Legal Services presented a report detailing the findings of the Best Value Review and proposing an improvement plan that had been approved at Scrutiny 2 Committee meeting on 4 December 2002. The Committee was informed of the cost of services, how savings had been made

from carrying out more work in-house and of the Council's competitive hourly rate, which was favourable with the Essex advocacy. The terms of reference used within the review were detailed in the report along with the improvement plan. The improvement plan showed revised charging rates and details on in-house work. Councillor Gayler asked how the Best Value Improvement Plan would impact on the Council's budget. The Head of Legal Services said that savings in external legal costs would more than finance the post of a litigation lawyer. The Review had also proposed that corporate capacity needed to be strengthened in order to work on proposals such as the CPA, Performance Manager etc.

RESOLVED that the Improvement Plan be approved with the exception of the Performance Manager Post which would be considered later Agenda item 16 – Corporate Staffing.

RE60

THE HOUSING BENEFITS VERIFICATION FRAMEWORK

The Head of Revenues Services presented a report on the implementation of the Government's Housing Benefits Verification Framework (VF). It was agreed at the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 10 February 2000 to introduce the VF in principle but it was not convenient to introduce it at that time. Members were now asked to consider introducing the VF although currently it was not a legal obligation. The VF was designed by the Government to be a platform for secure and accurate benefit administration and to proactively combat fraud. It would help with performance standards and if the Council was not compliant with the VF it could affect the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for the Authority.

The Committee were informed that most authorities had signed up for the VF but it had staffing resource implications. For Uttlesford, three extra full time staff would be required as outlined in the report to provide the support and staff required to deal with the additional workload associated with the Benefits Verification framework. However, the Government provided funding for both set-up and ongoing costs.

In answer to a question from Councillor Tyler, the Head of Revenues Services said that the system tackled fraud from the initial application and throughout the life of the claim. Claimants would also be visited regularly throughout the life of their claim.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the appointment of the following positions be approved subject to the Councils funding application being accepted by the Department for Work and Pensions:-
 - (i) a permanent Benefits Verification Visiting Officer with effect from 1 April 2003.
 - (ii) a permanent Clerical Assistant (Verification) with effect from 1 April 2003.

- (iii) temporary Revenues and Benefits Officer on a 12 month fixed term contract/secondment basis with effect from 1 April 2003 subject to review.
- 2 the implementation of the verification framework from 1 June 2003, the costs of which are to be met from Government funding and additional income from Weekly Incorrect Benefits rewards, be approved.

RE61

THE NEW TAX CREDITS AND PENSION CREDITS

The Head of Revenues Services presented this report to the Committee. It detailed the impact of the new tax credits and pension credits which were being introduced from April and October 2003 respectively. The report covered the additional resources required for implementing the changes and the funding arrangements. The Committee were informed of the two types of tax credit; Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. The new Pension Credit was also explained. Members were asked to approve an additional part-time post to provide the additional resources required for implementing the changes.

In answer to a question from Councillor O'Neill the Head of Revenue Services replied that funding for this post from the Government, was reduced over the first three years, before it reached a consistent level. He said that this post was necessary as there would be an estimated 10% increase in Housing Benefit claims at a local level and this Council would need to process this work.

RESOLVED that the appointment of one additional permanent part-time (22.5 hours per week) Revenues and Benefits Officer from 1 April 2003 at no additional cost to the Council be approved.

RE62

IT PROGRAMME 2003/04

The Committee were presented with a report detailing a number of IT projects and seeking approval for a proposed 2003/04 IT Programme. The report also recommended that the sum of £146,170 be included in the draft Capital Programme to supplement specific e-government related grant of £200,000. The projects detailed in the report were divided into three groups; e-Government development, User defined developments and Core IT technical developments.

Councillor Merrion congratulated the Head of IT and Audit Services on the IT Programme. Project number 16 – 'Network Test Environment', had been reviewed and accepted at the recent e-Government Task group meeting. However, Members felt that grading the project at scale 4 on the list of priorities was too low and it should be a number 3 item on the priority list. Councillor O'Neill felt that project no. 6 – 'web casting of Council meetings' was not desirable and agreed it did not need high priority.

RESOLVED that

- 1 in addition to the specific Government grant of £200,000 in 2003/04 a sum of £146,170 be included in the draft capital programme for 2003/04.
- 2 the programme set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved subject to the comment from the e-Government Task Group to amend project number 16 – network test environment to become 3 instead of 4 on the priority scale.

RE62 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 7, 8 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

RE63 CORPORATE STAFFING

The Chief Executive presented a report proposing changes to corporate staffing as a result of identified needs and the forthcoming retirement of a key senior officer. It was reported that officers had tried to be mindful of pressures and consider the changing needs and requirements for the Council whilst being aware of resource implications. A carefully planned package had been put together for proposals of new posts for this Committee to consider and the Chief Executive was confident that these posts were needed in order to undertake work requirements. The proposals were listed within the report detailing the posts and the duties involved.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the posts of Performance Manager and Assistant be established as from the date of this meeting and recruited as soon as possible via internal and external advertising.
- 2 the appointment of the Head of Legal Services as the Council's Monitoring Officer be recommended to the Council to take effect from 1 May 2003 with the post holder receiving an additional increment.
- 3 creation of a post of part-time Publications Officer be not approved.
- 4 one off expenditure for training or external advice be funded from the Management of Change reserves up to a total maximum sum of £15,000.

RE63 FIRST AID ALLOWANCE

The Head of Personnel and Office Services presented the Committee with the terms of reference for the payment of a first aid allowance and Members were asked to approve an increase in the first aid allowance to be linked to future pay awards.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Members approve the attached terms of reference for the payment of a first aid allowance and retrospectively approve the increase in the first aid allowance to £10 per month.
- 2 the first aid allowance is not pensionable and any current practice which allows payment ceases as the allowance is non-contractual and as each first aider recertifies over the next three years the allowance becomes non-pensionable.
- 3 the allowance be increased yearly in line with pay awards beginning 1 April 2003.

RE64 WORK BASED TRAINEE PERFORMANCE AWARDS

Members were asked to consider increasing the work based trainee performance award each year in line with the pay award commencing 1 April 2003.

RESOLVED that the work based trainee performance award is increased in line with future pay awards commencing 1 April 2003.

At this stage the public were re-admitted to the meeting.

RE65 STAFFING UPDATE

Members noted a table showing vacancies, which had arisen since the last Resources Committee meeting. The table detailed the date the vacancy arose, the job title, the relevant service and the decision taken.

RE66 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2003/04

The Director of Resources presented the Committee with a report seeking interim funding decisions to enable preparation of the final capital programme report to be presented to the special meeting of this Committee on 5 February 2003. Since the Council became debt free in 1996 it had not been reliant on credit approvals for capital funding purposes because of a continuing flow of capital receipts from HRA Right to Buy sales. The report outlined why the Council should now use basic credit approvals (BCA's). The Committee was informed that all Authorities now are required to have a robust

capital strategy and this Authority was preparing for possible changes to the use of receipts included in the Local Government Bill.

RESOLVED that for the purposes of preparing the Capital Programme the Committee confirms that BCAs for 2002-03 and 2003-04 should be applied;

- (i) in the first instance as cover if needed for any receipts of Disabled Facility Grant above total ODPM allocations.
- (ii) the remainder to release HRA set aside capital receipts for use as a top up to MRA funding and to provide a prudent element of future flexibility for addressing the “decent homes” standards.

RE67 **RESOURCES COMMITTEE BUDGETS AND SERVICE PLANS 2003/04**

The Director of Resources presented a report on the draft revenue estimates for final consideration by this Committee. The report requested comments on the Member training budget and also to reconsider estimates before their inclusion in the overall budget. The key points of the service plans for 2003/04 were outlined within the report.

In answer to a question from Councillor Merrion, Councillor Chambers felt that £500 per Member was a reasonable sum for training.

RECOMMENDED that the draft revenue estimates as submitted be approved with the following identified additions:-

- (i) Financial Services staffing provision - £30,000
- (ii) Member training - £22,000 (funded from Management of Change reserve)

RE68 **BUDGET STRATEGY 2003/04 – SUMMARY GENERAL FUND POSITION**

The Committee were asked to consider the latest Summary General Fund Service Budget positions for 2002/03 revised and 2003/04 and to also consider feedback from the recent MORI Budget Consultation exercise. The Director of Resources reported that the Final Government Grant Settlement would be presented to this Committee at its special meeting on 5 February 2003. He informed the Committee that every Authority would be receiving a grant towards the cost of democracy for £300,000 regardless of the size of the Authority which was included in the overall Revenue Support Grant.

Councillor Chambers commented that this Committee needed to put forward a sustainable budget. He proposed adding £100,000 towards the Stansted Campaign and £50,000 towards community safety (Police Wardens). He stated that Community Wardens within Uttlesford would remain in the District and not be transferred elsewhere in Essex. The scheme for Community Police Wardens would be up and running from October 2003 with an estimated cost of £300,000. Councillor Chambers felt that the Committee should contribute towards this sum particularly as Community Safety had the

highest support in the Mori Budget Consultation exercise. The Council Tax would need to be increased by 7.5%, which would amount to approximately 14 pence per week increase on the average band D property.

Members supported making provision in the budget towards both the Stansted Airport Campaign and also the Police Warden Scheme. Councillor Mrs Schneider asked how the Wardens would be selected and what powers they would have within the Community when incidents arose. Councillor Chambers said he would provide a briefing paper for Members before the Special Resources Committee meeting on 5 February. Councillor Gayler agreed that copies of the Police Wardens paper should be available before the next meeting to enable the item to be considered fully in the budget.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the overall net service budget figure to be used as presented at £7,230,480 with the following adjustments:-
 - (i) Corporate Staffing provision reduction of £6,500
 - (ii) Stansted Airport Campaign £100,000
 - (iii) Community Safety (Police Wardens) £50,000

gives a final net budget total of £7,373,980.
- 2 7.5% be the preferred percentage Council Tax increase subject to any external factors from the Final Settlement.

RE69

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraphs 1, 7, 8 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

RE70

CONTRACT SERVICES ESTIMATES 2003/04

The Committee was asked to approve the revised estimates for 2002/03 and estimates for 2003/04 for Contract Services. A report was presented with detailed figures setting out the draft revised estimates for 2002/03 and the original estimates for 2003/04.

RESOLVED that the revised estimates for 2002/03 and estimates for 2003/04 be approved.

The meeting ended at 10.47 pm.