

Minutes

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee Tuesday, 15th December, 2015

Attendance

Cllr Mrs McKinlay (Chair)	Cllr Clark
Cllr Kerlake (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Hossack
Cllr Hirst	Cllr Parker
Cllr Barrett	Cllr Russell

Apologies

Cllr Aspinell

Substitute Present

Cllr Kendall

Also Present

Cllr Mynott

Officers Present

Kim Anderson	- Partnership, Leisure and Funding Manager
Gordon Glenday	- Head of Planning & Development
Chris Leslie	- Finance Director
Gabrielle Murphy	- Asst Strategy Performance Analyst
Philip Ruck	- Head of Paid Service
Jean Sharp	- Governance and Member Support Officer
Steve Summers	- Head of Customer Services
Daniel Toohey	- Head of Legal

287. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Aspinell.

288. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Policy, Finances and Resources Committee held on 2 November 2015 were **RESOLVED** to be a true record.

289. Variation in the order of the agenda

Since there was a number of interested parties present, the Chair proposed and it was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY** that Agenda item 11 – Hutton Community Centre - be considered next.

290. Hutton Community Centre

The report before Members considered the response to Expressions of Interest received from organisations interested in taking a lease on the Hutton Community Centre.

An assessment of the two bidders was undertaken by officers to determine the best options for the Council ensuring that Hutton Community Centre continued to deliver broad community use, expanding what was currently being delivered and that this would be sustainable in the long term.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendation in the report, with an amendment, and following a full discussion and a vote taken on a show of hands it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That delegated authority be granted to the Head of Paid Service and Section 151 Officer to negotiate the terms of lease on Hutton Community Centre in consultation with a sub-committee comprising of the Chair and Vice-chair of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee and a representative of the Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups.

Reasons for Recommendation

An assessment of the two bidders was undertaken by officers to determine the best options for the Council ensuring that Hutton Community Centre continued to deliver broad community use, expanding what was currently being delivered and that this would be sustainable in the long term.

291. Preliminary Medium Term Financial Plan

Members were reminded that the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) set out the key financial management principles and budget assumptions. It was then used as the framework for the detailed budget setting process to ensure that the Council's resources were managed effectively in order to meet its statutory responsibilities and deliver the priorities of the Council, over the medium term.

The Section 151 Officer advised Members that the Council's budget was still being finalised and the information included within the report provided an early indication of the situation.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendations within the report and following a full discussion and a vote taken on a show of hands it was

RESOLVED that:

- 1. The preliminary General Fund funding gap for 2016/17 and beyond be agreed.**
- 2. The preliminary new capital proposals for 2016/17 and beyond be agreed.**
- 3. The implications to the HRA resulting from the announcement made by the Chancellor as part of the summer budget to reduce HRA rents by 1% for the next 4 years be agreed.**

Reasons for Recommendation

Effective financial management underpinned all of the priorities for the Council.

(Cllr Hirst declared a non-pecuniary interest under the Council's Code of Conduct by virtue of being a County Councillor since reference was made to care homes during the discussion which fell within the remit of Essex County Council).

292. Draft Complaints Policy

Members were reminded that the Customer Access Strategy provided the overarching framework for the channels or methods the Council would use to interact with customers to ensure the successful delivery of its services with the resources available.

Key to the delivery of the Customer Access Strategy was the Implementation Plan which contained a number of actions. One of these actions was the review of the Council's complaints procedure and development of a new Complaints Policy.

The report before Members requested they consider and approve the draft Complaints Policy which was attached to the report at Appendix A.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Parker SECONDED the recommendation in the report, a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That the Committee approved the draft Complaints Policy.

Reason for Recommendation

The Customer Access Strategy provided the overarching framework for the channels the Council used to interact with customers to ensure the successful delivery of its services with the resources available.

293. Partnership Policy and Procedures 2015

The Council needed to ensure that any partnerships that it was involved in were efficient, effective and that they could deliver value for money for residents. A large amount of public money was invested in partnerships and therefore they should be action and outcome focussed, whilst encouraging innovative solutions for change. Partnerships should also be monitored regularly to ensure any underperformance was highlighted and any appropriate action taken.

The outcome of an internal audit report dated 31 March 2015 indicated limited design and effectiveness of the Council's current partnership working and provided four recommendations for improvement. Resulting from the audit recommendations the revised Partnership Policy and Procedures would ensure that there was a framework of procedures for staff to follow who were engaged in, giving consideration to engagement in, or withdrawing from partnership activities. This would provide a consistent approach when the Council entered into a partnership agreement to ensure that the partnership would not only support the Council's priorities, but strengthen the accountability amongst partners, minimise the risk to the Council and rationalise the Council's partnership working arrangements.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Russell SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That Members agree to the revised Partnership Policy and Procedures as appended to the report.

Reasons for Recommendation

The Internal Audit review of the Council's partnership working recommended strengthening its partnership arrangements. The revised Partnership Policy and Procedures would ensure that the Council was only involved in partnership working which supported one or more of the Council's priorities to deliver the outcomes that would support Brentwood Borough residents.

294. Delegated Authority of Grant of Leases

Delegated authority was requested to be given to the Section 151 Officer to grant leases of up to £25,000 per year on properties leased at market rate.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendation in the report, a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That delegated authority be granted to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Chair or Vice Chair of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee to grant leases of up to £25,000 (excluding VAT) per year on properties leased at market value.

Reasons for Recommendation

To ensure the Council operated effectively it was important to have suitable delegated powers.

295. Income Generation Update

The report provided an update on the income generation activities presented to the Committee on 15 September 2015 and requested that the future actions were agreed.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a discussion and a vote taken on a show of hands it was

RESOLVED

That the income generation actions outlined in Appendix A to the report were approved.

Reasons for Recommendation

It was agreed by the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee on 15 September 2015 that the income generation activities agreed would be developed and presented to the Committee.

296. 2015/16 Local Council Tax Support Scheme

Members were reminded that it was previously agreed to form a Members' Task & Finish Group to consider any changes to the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme for 2016/17.

Following the Welfare Reforms announced by the Chancellor in his Summer Budget on 8 July 2015 consideration was given to the possible impact on the Council's current scheme costs. Officers subsequently modelled proposed changes and concluded that there would be little to no impact on the cost of the existing scheme.

The Task & Finish Group was advised therefore that no major changes to the scheme would be proposed for 2016/17.

Two minor proposals to the scheme were proposed to the group;

- the rules for assessing self employed claimants
- the rules dealing with late applications

These proposals were subsequently raised as part of a public consultation.

Cllr Russell MOVED and Cllr Hirst SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a discussion, a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED

To approve minor changes to our current Council Tax Support scheme by introducing;

- 1. Where claimants were claiming that they were self employed and submitting accounts to show that they were earning consistently below minimum wage, officers would be able to decide the level of award based on at least minimum wage (or the national living wage). This would only come into effect after their first year of claiming support or trading or whichever was sooner.**
- 2. To restrict late applications of Council Tax Support to 4 weeks provided 'good cause' had been shown; this would bring the Council Tax Support scheme in line with Universal Credit and Housing Benefit legislation.**
- 3. The amended Council Tax Support Scheme to be presented at the Ordinary Council meeting on 27 January 2016.**

Reasons for Recommendation

To agree and adopt the proposed Council Tax Support scheme for 2016/17 prior to 31 January 2016.

297. Income from Property Investment

Members were reminded that in March 2015 the Asset and Enterprise Committee approved the Acquisition Policy which set out the process for acquiring income generating assets.

The Committee also recommended that the Finance and Resource Committee approved a capital allocation to fund the acquisitions.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Parker SECONDED the recommendations in the report and Cllr Kendall MOVED and Cllr Barrett SECONDED an AMENDMENT which was ACCEPTED.

Following a discussion and a vote taken on a show of hands it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY that:

- 1. The acquisition policy agreed in March 2015 be reviewed and a revision brought forward to a future committee.**
- 2. The creation of a £10m property acquisition fund was revisited regarding the appropriateness of the sum and a staged approach be considered and brought forward to a future committee.**
- 3. The use of existing assets be considered for future property development with an options report and associated business cases to be presented to future Committees.**
- 4. Consultation should take place with other Essex Councils regarding how they have generated income.**

Reasons for Recommendation

It was agreed by the Asset and Enterprise Committee in March 2015 that a capital allocation be considered in relation to the Acquisition Policy.

A robust programme needed to be developed on a sound financial footing if a property acquisition programme was to be undertaken.

298. Update on Planning Process Working Group

Members were reminded that at the 2 November 2015 Policy, Finances and Resources Committee meeting it was agreed to undertake a 6 monthly review of the Modern Planning Service, also to set up a Members Working Group to review the service. The report before Members outlined the findings of that review.

In addition to the Members Working Group, the Council also commissioned an internal audit of the Modern Planning Service. Its findings had also been taken into account in the recommendations of this report.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Kerslake SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a discussion, a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY that

1. Given the findings of the Member Working Party review, the Council continues to implement and develop its Modern Planning Service, subject to the Actions listed in Appendix 1 to the report.

2. The service continues to be monitored and that any further improvements identified will be implemented as soon as practicable. Approval of any such improvements will be delegated to the Head of Planning and Development in consultation with the Chair of the Planning and Licensing Committee.

Reasons for Recommendation

The Modern Planning service had been in operation for around 6 months and so there was a need to review it to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

Subject to the recommendations in the Action Plan in Appendix 1, the Members Working Group agreed that the Modern Planning Service was a more efficient and effective way of delivering the planning service to the Council's customers.

299. Urgent Business

Cllr Mrs McKinlay added a further comment regarding Agenda item 7 – Income Generation Update – that it was proposed to utilise opportunities from services the Council provided, eg to increase the market share of trade waste, the sale of waste bins, CCTV etc.

The meeting ended at 21.00 hrs.