

Minutes

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee Monday, 2nd November, 2015

Attendance

Cllr Mrs McKinlay (Chair)
Cllr Hirst (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Aspinell
Cllr Barrett
Cllr Clark

Cllr Faragher
Cllr Hossack
Cllr Parker
Cllr Russell

Also Present

Cllr Barrell
Cllr Carter
Cllr Kendall
Cllr Mrs Murphy
Cllr Mynott
Cllr Ms Rowlands
Cllr Ms Sanders
Cllr Tee

Officers Present

Greg Campbell	- Project Manager - Customer Transformation
Chris Gill	- Strategic Asset Manager
Gordon Glenday	- Head of Planning & Development
Chris Leslie	- Finance Director
Philip Ruck	- Head of Paid Service
Jean Sharp	- Governance and Member Support Officer
Daniel Toohey	- Head of Legal

198. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

199. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the 15 September 2015 Policy, Finance and Resources Committee were approved as a true record.

200. Adoption of the Vision for Brentwood 2016-2019

The report before Members requested their agreement to adopt the three year plan 'Vision for Brentwood' covering 2016 – 2019. This vision replaced the previous corporate plan 2013 – 16 and set out clear strategic direction for the Council which would lead to projects and programmes being formulated in order to deliver the plan's objectives.

Following public consultation on the Council's priorities the draft vision for Brentwood 2016 - 2019 was placed on deposit from the end of the last Policy, Resources and Finance Committee to the end of September 2015.

Members noted that some minor comments had been received and incorporated into the document.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Hirst SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a full discussion it was RESOLVED:

- 1. That the new draft corporate plan 'Vision for Brentwood' 2016-2019 be recommended to Council for approval and adoption.**
- 2. That it be agreed that heads of service develop and mature work programmes to deliver the 'Vision for Brentwood' 2016-2019 in consultation with the chair of the relevant committee.**

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

1. The recommendation was based on the previous comments received, the need for a plan to be adopted which identified political priorities, the need to be ever more efficient and develop a modern thinking and delivering council.
2. The need to identify projects to deliver the programmes of work through which the vision could be achieved.

201. Planning Process Review

Members were reminded that on 24 March 2015, Ordinary Council unanimously approved a report relating to the review of the planning service's processes and procedures. This review included a change in the way that the Council operated its planning service in relation to planning applications, incorporating the replacement of the former "weekly list" with an email alert process.

The changes were approved with the aim of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning service. This modernisation agenda still remained the focus. However, some concern over various aspects of the new approach had been raised and in order to move ahead and provide Brentwood with a robust planning service, a review of the new process was needed. This would provide an opportunity to identify and iron out any weaknesses. The new approach would ensure that an efficient and effective planning service for all was delivered.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Parker SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a vote being taken on a show of hands it was RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

- 1. That a cross party member working group (Conservatives: 4, LDs: 2, Labour: 1) be established to identify any changes or improvements that are needed to the new system.**
- 2. That the findings and recommended actions of the review be reported to the PFR committee on the 15th December 2015 for formal adoption.**

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Modern Planning service had been in operation for circa 6 months and there was a need to ensure it was fit for purpose. A review was therefore needed to assess how well the new process was working and to gauge if any improvements were needed to increase its effectiveness.

202. Licensing the Town Hall Rooms for Wedding, Civil and Celebratory Services

Members were advised that the Council had been approached by Essex County Council (ECC) to apply for a licence to have marriage ceremony rooms in which to hold weddings, civil and celebratory services. This could generate an income 'upwards of £20,000 per annum' based on historical data. This took into account on-going costs estimated at £22,000 and set up costs of £5,000.

The service would offer rooms for hire from Wednesday to Saturday, maximising revenue, whilst enabling Committee Rooms to be available on Mondays and Tuesdays for Council use. Committee Rooms would therefore be out of use day and evening from Wednesday to Saturday.

The Council would seek to commence the service by early 2016.

Cllr Hirst MOVED and Cllr Russell SECONDED the recommendations within the report. Following a discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

- 1. That the Council applies for a licence to hold ceremonies in the committee suite area including Committee Rooms 1, 2 & 3, Meeting Room 1, the Mayor's Parlour and the Council Chamber.**
- 2. That the Council seeks to commence bookings from early 2016 for Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.**
- 3. That the group rooms be freed up for booking meetings by officers during normal office hours.**

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

This represented an opportunity to realise an income from an area that was under utilised.

Using this space exclusively for ceremonies was unlikely to have a detrimental effect on the ability to book rooms and hold meetings at the Town Hall if other rooms were made available.

203. Proof of Life Certificate

Members were asked to determine the future provision of the Council's Proof of Life Certification service. The options were to continue provision of the service for free, charge for the service or cease the service.

Cllr Faragher MOVED and Cllr Parker SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That a charge of £25 for the provision of a proof of life certification service is approved.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

This recommendation had been made to give Members the opportunity to decide on the future provision of a Council service.

204. Shenfield Scout Lease

The report before Members considered the granting of a new lease to the 1st Shenfield Scouts for their Scout Hut in Shenfield Road.

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

That a new lease be granted in accordance with the Heads of Terms set out at Appendix B to the report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

A new lease for the Scouts being put in place would ensure continuity of accommodation for the Scout Group.

205. Land Transfer from Essex County Council

The report before Members considered the acquisition of an area of land adjacent to the Merrymeade House site and Brentwood School football pitches accessed from Shenfield Road.

The area of land was identified on a plan attached to the agenda and Members noted it was currently owned freehold by Essex County Council. The land comprised a single unmade access track which was part of the former Merrymeade Estate and it was proposed that Brentwood Borough Council purchase the land from Essex County Council for the sum of £1.

Cllr Faragher MOVED and Cllr Hirst SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the area of land is purchased by Brentwood Borough Council in order to secure control of the potential future development of sites adjacent to and accessed from the area of land.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

To secure control of the potential future development of sites adjacent to and accessed from the area of land.

In conjunction with the review of the Local Plan, additional protection to the Green Belt policy could be provided by the land being designated as a Local Green Space. A local green space designation is a way to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities.

(Cllrs Aspinell and Hirst each declared a non-pecuniary interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct by virtue of being Essex County Councillors).

206. Hutton Community Centre

The purpose of the report was to invite the Committee to consider increasing the potential term available for community groups to lease Hutton Community Centre. A previous report to this Committee dated 30 June 2015 limited the term to a period of 7 years.

The Council was marketing Hutton Community Centre for community use for a term of 7 years subject to the Heads of Terms attached to the report. As part of the marketing process a community organisation had asked if the Council would consider granting a lease of longer than 7 years. They suggested that this was to allow them to raise grant funds to invest in the property.

Details of all offers, outcome of the evaluation of offers and officers' recommendations would be submitted for consideration at this Committee at the 15 December 2015 meeting.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Russell SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That proposals for a lease of Hutton Community Centre for a term of longer than 7 years will be considered.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Committee agreeing to consider granting a lease of Hutton Community Centre for a term of longer than 7 years would maximise the appeal of the opportunity to a wider range of organisations.

207. Termination of Meeting

In accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules, the meeting not having been concluded by two hours after its start, the Chair interrupted the meeting and took a vote as to whether to continue the meeting for 30 minutes and this was accordingly **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY**.

The meeting was adjourned for a short comfort break at this point.

208. Mid Year Budget Review 2015/16

The report before Members provided the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee with an update of the Council's revenue and capital outturn position as at the end of September 2015.

The estimated outturn on General Fund expenditure was projected at £10.180m against the current budget of £9.875m, a projected over spend of around £305k. This figure included a projected shortfall of £80k on the savings target of £650k agreed for 2015/16.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was projecting an in-year surplus of £97k, which was a decrease of £137k when compared with the current budget of an estimated surplus of £234k. The HRA was a ring-fenced account and could make or receive contributions to/from the General Fund.

The projected spend on capital stood at £7.587m for 2015/16 against the current programme of £14.591m. Capital budgets could not contribute to the General Fund revenue position although officers ensured that all appropriate capitalisations occurred.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Hirst SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a full discussion and a vote taken on a show of hands it was RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Notes the projected outturn position for 2015/16 of the Council's General Fund revenue budget as at 30 September 2015, as detailed in paragraph 4 of the report;**
- 2. Notes the progress being made on achieving the savings target of £650k in 2015/16 as detailed in paragraph 5 of the report;**
- 3. Notes the projected outturn position for 2015/16 of the Council's HRA at 30 September 2015, as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report; and**
- 4. Notes the current projected position for 2015/16 of the Council's capital budget as at 30 September 2015, as detailed in paragraph 7 of the report.**

Officers were commended for their work in relation to this report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee was aware of the Council's revenue and capital outturn position as at the end of September 2015.

209. Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-year Review Report 2015/16

Members were reminded that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2015/16 was approved by this Council on 4 March 2015.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) issued a Code of Practice for Treasury Management. The Code suggested that Members should be informed of Treasury Management activities at least twice a year.

The report before Members which covered the first six months of the 2015/16 financial year therefore ensured this Authority was embracing best practice and meeting the statutory requirements.

The legal status of the Code was derived from regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 which required local authorities to "have regard to guidance that the Secretary of State may by regulations specify." The Code and the CIPFA Prudential Code fell into this category.

Cllr Hirst MOVED and Cllr Faragher SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee notes the Treasury Management Activity for the period 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015.

Officers were commended for their work in relation to this report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The report met the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice of Treasury Management.

210. Town Centre and Town Hall Projects

The report before Members provided the Policy, Finance and Resources (PFR) committee with an update on the key corporate projects of the Council. These were currently defined as:

- a) The Town Hall & Service Delivery Hub
- b) The Local Development Plan (LDP)
- c) The Town Centre (incorporating William Hunter Way)
- d) The Transformation Agenda of the Council

The above was not an inclusive list and other projects might be incorporated as determined by the committee. However such projects were defined as being integral to the delivery of the revised Corporate Plan 2016-2019.

Cllr Mrs McKinlay MOVED and Cllr Parker SECONDED the recommendation within the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was RESOLVED:

That Members agree to the actions and timescales incorporated in the report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To ensure that the Corporate Plan 2016-2019 was supported by projects that delivered the necessary change.

Urgent Business

Cllr Mrs McKinlay requested that names of those Members nominated to form part of the Planning Process Review Group (see Minute 201) be submitted to her by 4 November 2015.

The meeting ended at 9.50pm.