

Minutes

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee Tuesday, 15th September, 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 Morrissey
Cllr Mrs Murphy
Cllr Mynott
Cllr Ms Rowlands
Cllr Ms Sanders
Cllr Tee
Cllr Wiles

Officers Present

Greg Campbell	- Project Manager - Customer Transformation
Ashley Culverwell	- Head of Borough Health Safety and Localism
Chris Leslie	- Finance Director
Adam Rulewski	- Barrister – BDT Legal
Jean Sharp	- Governance and Member Support Officer

138. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

139. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee held on 30th June 2015 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

140. Draft Vision for Brentwood and Outcome of Consultation

The purpose of the report before Members was to provide an update on the results of the Vision for Brentwood consultation to help inform discussion on the draft corporate plan document.

The consultation was now complete and the draft corporate plan – to be referred to as the ‘Vision for Brentwood’ - had been developed. The draft would cover a three year period, 2016 to 2019, and would refresh the previous plan, setting out clear strategic direction.

Overall the summary of results indicated the following:

- A preference towards Council ran services although not against alternative delivery methods,
- Cleanliness and safety of the Borough took priority over events and support for community organisations with mixed views on the provision of affordable housing.
- A focus on getting the basics right was seen as key to a good town centre; having attractive surroundings with the ability to park were respondents top priorities.
- Of less concern is the evening economy, restaurants and café culture. Keeping the council tax low was important as was a clean and green environment.
- Further it appears that respondents to the survey are ‘tech-savvy’ using different online methods to contact the Council and have benefitted from the enhanced level of customer service afforded by the Contact Centre.

Members received a short presentation on the consultation results and the Chair thanked officers for the work undertaken in relation to the consultation.

It was proposed that the draft ‘Vision for Brentwood’ document would be placed on deposit until the end of September 2015 to enable comments from the public and Members to be made which would be considered alongside the consultation results.

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

RESOLVED:

- 1. To agree the new draft corporate plan ‘Vision for Brentwood’ 2016-2019 and place on deposit for public comment until the end of September 2015.**

2. That the development of work programmes to deliver the 'Vision for Brentwood' 2016-2019 be agreed with details coming back to a future committee for decision.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

1. The recommendations were based on the returns from the consultation, political priorities need to be ever more efficient, develop a modern thinking and delivering council.

2. That further work was required to identify the programmes of work in which the vision could be delivered.

141. Unauthorised Incursions

Members were reminded that a significant increase in the number of unauthorised incursions had occurred across the Borough over the past year, a significant number of which had been on Council-owned land. In order to minimise the number and impact of these incursions approval was sought for additional funding of £150k to secure key sites, proposed as follows:

- King George's Playing Field
- Hutton Recreation Ground
- Brentwood Centre Field
- Larkins Playing Field
- Entrance to Brentwood Centre
- Warley Playing fields

Members noted that security improvements on other sites would be considered where appropriate.

Cllr Faragher MOVED and Cllr Hossack SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands. It was

RESOLVED

That expenditure of up to £150K be added to the capital programme for security improvements to sites across the Borough, funded from capital receipts.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To reduce the number of unauthorised incursions across the Borough.

142. Income Generation

Members were advised that, in light of the significant budget pressures that would be facing the Council in the coming years, ways of generating additional income and reducing costs were being explored.

The report set out the current activities being undertaken by the Council in relation to this, summarized as follows:

- Ensuring the best use being made of the Council's existing property assets and acquiring and managing income generating property assets if appropriate
- Updating the Council's asset register to maximize potential revenue streams
- Maximising returns from property assets through reviewing existing leases, triggering rent review clauses or negotiating new agreements. A central list of leased properties and rent review dates was being compiled
- The identification and sale of redundant property assets
- Acquisition of income generating property assets
- Establishing a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) to enable the Council to undertake commercial activity
- Minimising borrowing costs
- Procurement challenge through the East of England Local Government Association
- Reduction in the cost of provision of homelessness accommodation, possibly providing accommodation directly by the Council
- Investigating the possibility of reclaiming VAT through engagement of specialist VAT consultants

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

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

- 1. To approve the areas identified for a draft "Income Generation Programme" to cover the areas identified in 4.1-4.10 of the report.**
- 2. To agree that such activities as outlined in 4.1-4.10 of the report be developed into full business cases with reports to come back to Policy, Finance and Resource Committee, once details were complete.**
- 3. That opportunities be explored for the Council to maintain its own trees and possibly generate an income through undertaking other tree-works.**

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To provide Members with an update on the activities taking place regarding income generation and cost savings.

143. Brentwood Town Hall Room Hire

The report before Members considered the proposal for a scheme of charges for the hire of meeting rooms within the Town Hall by commercial organisations.

The Town Hall meeting rooms were used for a range of purposes for Council business and a variety of external organisations, from the commercial and voluntary sectors but the Council did not have clear guidance on charging for their use.

External bookings had exceeded 100 per quarter and it was proposed that the Council should introduce a charging regime for commercial organisations to bring it into line with other providers.

Cllr Russell MOVED and Cllr Hossack SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a dull discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

- 1. That a charging regime be introduced to charge commercial organisations and wedding parties in accordance with the charging regime as set out in the appendix to the report, agreement of details regarding deposits etc. being delegated to the Head of Paid Service.**
- 2. That no charge be introduced for community groups directly benefiting the Borough of Brentwood in accordance with the appendix to this report but that details be published of community room bookings and use and the fee that could have been charged to ensure transparency for the benefits given to community groups using the Town Hall meeting rooms.**
- 3. Charges will come into effect from 1st November 2015.**

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To create a scheme of charges for the hire of meeting rooms within the Town Hall by commercial organisations.

144. Termination of Meeting

In accordance with Rule 28 of the Council's Procedure Rules, the business of the meeting not having been concluded by two hours after its start, at 9.00pm, the Committee voted to continue with the meeting for 30 minutes.

145. Fron Cottage, Alexander Lane

The report before Members considered the request from the owner of Fron Cottage, Alexander Lane, Shenfield to acquire land adjacent to his property as 'garden land' to increase the size of the available garden.

Members were aware that the Asset, Infrastructure and Localism Panel held on 12 February 2012 resolved to accept the Asset Strategy reported which included the sale of minor strips of land of no value to the Council.

A number of residents declared an interest in this initiative including the owners of Fron Cottage.

Cllr Parker MOVED and Cllr Faragher SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a full discussion and a vote was taken by a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED

- 1. That the valuation of the Council's agent in the sum of £15,000 for a 99 year lease be accepted or**
- 2. That the valuation of the Council's agent in the sum of £1,500 p.a. for the provision of a license to occupy the land as garden land be accepted**
- 3. That should the owner of the property not accept the terms offered by the Council the land be returned to form part of the Alexander Lane playing fields**

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To consider the request from the owner of Fron Cottage, Alexander Lane Shenfield to acquire land adjacent to the property as 'garden land' to increase the size of the available garden.

146. 2 Harewood Road, Pilgrims Hatch - Shop Refurbishment

The report before Members considered the cost of refurbishing the shop at 2 Harewood Road, Pilgrims Hatch so that the property could be let.

The shop at 2 Harewood Road, Pilgrims Hatch had been vacant for some time and works were required to make the shop safe to let. Initially the property was under offer to a party 'as seen' although they pulled out whilst the matter was in solicitors' hands and offers had been invited from interested parties. Firm interest had now been received from a party but on the basis that the property was refurbished ready to receive their fitting out works.

Officers recommended that the shop was properly refurbished by the Council's contractors (rather than an ingoing tenant) to ensure that the job was done thoroughly to enable the letting the shop for the foreseeable future.

Quotations had therefore been sought for these works which were split into the cost of the electrical works and the general refurbishment and removal of the previous tenants' redundant fitting out. The quotations were provided for Members' information.

Cllr Hossack MOVED and Cllr Parker SECONDED the recommendations in the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken on a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That the shop unit is refurbished to meet current electrical and health and safety standards to put the shop into a lettable condition ready to receive a prospective tenant's shop fitting.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To ensure the shop is brought up to a lettable standard that complied with current health and safety regulations.

147. 4 The Keys, Warley

The report before Members considered the renewal of the lease at 4 The Keys, Warley, which was currently occupied by 'Martin The Newsagent' as a convenience store. The current lease on 4 The Keys, Warley would expire in September 2016

It was proposed that Martin surrendered their current lease and took a new lease from September 2015 at an increased rent and widened user clause to incorporate the selling of alcohol. This was subject to the tenant at 3 The Keys (currently holding over on their lease) who sold alcohol terminating their lease, for which 3 months notice needed to be given. Martins had been in

discussions with the tenant of 3 The Keys regarding purchasing the goodwill of his business.

Cllr Russell MOVED and by Cllr Hirst SECONDED the recommendation in the report and following a full discussion a vote was taken by a show of hands and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That a new lease would be agreed with Martins on the above outline basis to increase the income to the Council approximately a year earlier than expected and secure a key tenant in the Keys shopping parade for the immediate future.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To ensure that this key tenant that generated footfall in The Keys was retained for at least another five years.

148. Termination of Meeting

In accordance with Rule 28 of the Council's Procedure Rules, the business of the meeting not having been concluded by two hours after its start, the Committee voted to continue with the meeting for 30 minutes.. Since the business of the meeting had not been concluded by 9.30pm the Committee voted to continue with the meeting for an additional 30 minutes.

149. Corporate Asset Management Plan Update - Asset Challenge

Members were reminded that the Asset Management Strategy 2014/15 was approved by the Asset & Enterprise Committee on 15 July 2014 and an update on progress was noted by the Asset & Enterprise Committee on 27 March 2015.

The Strategy highlighted the entrepreneurial approach to the Council's management of its assets and the 27 March Committee report provided an update on progress. Since March the Council's Strategic Asset Manager had moved on and a temporary resource had been brought in for a short time to work with the asset management team to provide support and mentoring to the team as they continued to deliver the Asset Management Strategy.

An updated Asset Management Action Plan was provided for Members' consideration and a full discussion took place regarding the information contained within the Plan.

Members noted that a key project for the remainder of 2015/16 would be to complete the Asset Challenge Review to inform a refresh of the Asset Management Strategy for 2016/17.

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

RESOLVED:

To agree an update review to the current Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan to ensure it remains in line with Council needs.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To provide Members with an update on progress delivering the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan.

150. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting concluded at 10.00pm.