

FINANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY PANEL
30 JUNE 2009

Present :- Councillor Dennis Willetts (Chairman)
Councillors Wyn Foster, Martin Goss,
Dave Harris, Jackie Maclean, Jon Manning,
Gerard Oxford and Nick Taylor

Substitute Members :- Councillor Ray Gamble
for Councillor Theresa Higgins
Councillor Nick Barlow for Councillor Lesley Scott-
Boutell

3. Minutes

The minute of the meeting of the 20 May 2009 was confirmed as a correct record.

The minute of the meeting of the 28 April 2009 was confirmed as a correct record.

The minute of the meeting of the 19 May 2009 was confirmed as a correct record.

4. Decisions taken under special urgency provisions

Councillor Willetts confirmed to the panel that he had authorised a decision taken under the special urgency provisions, decision COM-001-09 "Replacement of Existing Roof Structure and Upgrading Building Fabric – Fitness Pool Building, Colchester Leisure World".

Councillor Willetts confirmed that he had been satisfied with the reasons given for the need to invoke the special urgency provision, an imperative need, due to health and safety reasons, to complete this work as soon as possible.

5. Financial Monitor 2008-09

Mr. Plummer, Finance Manager attended the meeting for this item and introduced the Finance Monitor 2008-09 report.

Councillor Willetts commented that the variance of £272,000, representing less than 1 per cent of the overall budget, was a very acceptable position and applauded the Administration's focus for bringing the year end position in

almost on budget.

In response to Councillor Willetts and Barlow, Mr. Plummer said the net underspend for the Council for 2008-09 was £272,000, a broadly similar amount to previous years after taking account of contributions to reserves, but due to the economic downturn there was not as much scope for strengthening reserves as had been the case in previous years.

Mr. Plummer explained that the large net variance for parking services was in the main due to the downturn in car park income of £300,000. Given that this was such a key area, financially, to the Council, Councillor Willetts believed consideration by the panel in 2009-10 of Car Parking would be a worthwhile review.

Councillor Manning said the panel should consider a task and finish group to complete this review and report back to the panel in due course.

Mr. Plummer confirmed to Councillor Foster that in reference to Planning Services, the mitigating action to offset some of the reduced income was reflected in the position against the corporate salaries target, but this initiative had been about redeployment and freezing vacant posts, not redundancy.

Mr. Warboys confirmed to Councillor Manning that the Estates Asset Management Plan was to be refreshed in 2009, and that a report on the Layer Road site would be reported to the next Cabinet meeting.

RESOLVED that the panel noted the financial performance of General Fund Services and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the year 2008-09.

6. Capital Monitor 2008-09

Mr. Steve Heath, Finance Manager, attended the meeting for this item and presented the Capital Monitor pre audit outturn 2008-09 report.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Mr. Heath said the value of capital spending undertaken during 2008-09 at Colchester, £24,900,000, was considerably higher than other Essex districts and gave some comparative figures.

Councillor Taylor congratulated officers for bringing the project on the Town Hall DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) Measures lift project almost to completion and almost within budget.

Councillor Oxford, whilst concurred with Councillor Taylor concerning the Town Hall Lift project, that opened up the Town Hall to many people with mobility impairment, but commented that to suggest that the Old Library was now DDA

compliant was not correct, given the inappropriate route within the Town Hall that visitors need to take (via the Town Hall gaol) to enter the Old Library, until this building's ramp is built under phase II of the overall scheme.

RESOLVED that the panel:

- i) Noted the level of capital spending during 2008-09 and the forecasts for future years.
- ii) The Head of Resource Management request that Colchester Borough Homes respond to the panel members by providing a note on the impact of the 2010-11 Decent Homes and Upgrades budget of £4,297,500 on Adaptations and Housing ICT.
- iii) The Head of Corporate Management provides a note to panel members on the future plans during phase II of the Town Hall DDA project up to the completion of works.
- iv) The Head of Resource Management to request the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration to provide members with a note on the future plans (a timeline) of the Park and Ride Scheme at the new junction onto the A12 dual carriageway.

7. Work Programme

The panel considered the work programme for 2009-10.

RESOLVED that the panel:

- i) Noted the work programme for 2009-10.
- ii) Requested that the Head of Street Services would provide the panel with a short report on Parking Services (Car Parking), provisionally agreed for the meeting on the 28 July, for the panel to consider if any further work is required.
- iii) Requested that the Head of Life Opportunities would provide the panel with a short report on the Grounds Maintenance Contract(s), given that members have questions around the contract, to be presented to the panel at the earliest convenient meeting.
- iv) Agreed for the Work Programme to be considered as the last item for review on all future agendas.