

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Thursday, 1 February 2007

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.15 pm

Members Present: R Morgan (Chairman), Mrs J H Whitehouse (Vice-Chairman), D Bateman, M Cohen, M Colling, R D'Souza, Mrs H Harding, P House, Mrs P Richardson and J M Whitehouse

Other Councillors: Ms L VanClay and Ms J Mann

Apologies: G Mohindra and M Woollard

Officers Present: John Scott (Joint Chief Executive), Bob Palmer (Director of Finance and ICT), Tom Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), Simon Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Zoe Folley (Democratic Services Assistant), Adrian Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and Sue Dobson (Information Assistant (Public Relations))

65. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor J M Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor M Woollard.

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor Mrs J H Whitehouse declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 (Development of Services for Children and Young People in the District) by virtue of being a member of the Children's and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership's (CYPSP) Parenting Sub – Group. She declared that her interests were not prejudicial and indicated that she would remain in the meeting during the consideration and voting on the item.

b) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, the Joint Chief Executive (Community) declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 (Development of Services for Children and Young People in the District) by virtue of being a member of CYPSP's Management Board. He declared that his interests were not prejudicial and indicated that he would remain in the meeting during the consideration and voting on the item.

67. MINUTES

(a) That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 November be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record

(b) That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 December 2006 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to :

(i) the substitution of the word 'increase' with 'secure' in the sixth paragraph of minute 58 (Review of Area Plans Sub – Committees)

(ii) The inclusion of Councillor Mrs A Cooper in the list of Councillors Present

(c) That the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 9 January 2007 be taken and read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendments to minute 64 (Free Saturday Parking Call – In) :

(iii) the substitution of the words ‘Town Councils’ with Town Centres (first paragraph of page 34)

(iv) the replacement of Councillor Woollards comments with the following statement:

“ Councillor Woollard was in principle in favour of the free parking scheme, but this should be considered in the light of the nature of the area under consideration, with parking arrangements to that area. For example Buckhurst Hill has 16 or more boutiques in Queens Road and not so many traditional retail shops as a consequence he did not believe Saturday shopping had more of an increase in parking than any other day of the week. Whilst approving the intentions of the scheme there was poor consultation and even poorer computation. There seemed to be insufficient thought given to the fall in income”.

68. Development of Services for Children and Young People Within the Epping Forest District - Presentation.

The Committee were reminded that at its meeting on 31 August 2006, the Committee had received an initial presentation from Ms Lonica Vanclay, the Local Commissioner for Children’s and Young Peoples’ Services, on the development and commissioning of children’s and young persons services in the District. She referred to the visions set out in the Green Paper ‘Every Child Matters’, published in September 2003, and that the government had produced non statutory guidance on the role of District Council’s in improving outcomes for children. She set out the County’s proposed response to the paper, the role of CYPSP, proposed changes to the structure and its links to the wider community especially the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

At its 19 December 2006 meeting, the Council appointed two Members to serve as its Member level representatives on CYPSP which was also supported by the Joint Chief Executive (Community) who served on its Co-ordinating Group.

The Chairman welcomed back Ms Vanclay and also Ms Gillian Mann, the Children’s Commissioning Manager for the West Essex Primary Care Trust (PCT) to update the Committee on progress with these issues and outcomes.

Ms Vanclay reminded Members that Epping Forest CYPSP was a strategic partnership of agencies which commissioned and provided services to improve the wellbeing of all children in the District.

She reported that the Partnership had recently been restructured and as a result, was now lead by a Management Board which determined action to facilitate its key priorities and comprised representatives of agencies such as the PCT, the Police, this Council, the County Council and the LSP. The Board had held its first meeting in January 2007 and would meet on a monthly basis. She advised that the Partnership also comprised a Coordinating Group, a Stakeholder Forum which was open to all agencies involved in children services and a series of themed Sub – Groups on parenting, play, mental health, the Common Assessment Framework and the various

age groups. The Committee heard about the role of the Sub – Groups and funding streams.

The Partnership was responsible to the County CYPSP and to the Epping Forest LSP for the children's sub bloc of the Local Area Agreement.

Ms Vanclay reminded Members that during her last presentation, Members had asked to receive more specific details on the partnerships achievements and how it had improved the wellbeing of young people. Thus, she drew attention to the partnerships key performance targets and reported on progress made with delivering them. The Committee paid particular attention to the following:

(a) Reduce the percentage of obese children under 11 years of age.

It was noted that the rate in Epping Forest for the above was 10.6% compared to the Essex average of 10.6%.

It was reported that the Partnership supported the West Essex Healthy Weight Strategy Partnership who was of the view that 'family orientated solutions' should be identified to deal with the problem of childhood obesity. The Partnership undertook measures to promote healthy lifestyles and training for partner agencies. The meeting stressed the need for education for parents to reduce childhood obesity.

It clarified that the data was gathered on an annual basis by the PCT who were required to record the weight of children between the ages of five to eleven. The information before Members had been collated during the course of last year.

(c) Reduce the number of teenage pregnancies under 18 years of age compared to 1998 by 50% by 2010

The rate in Epping Forest for this was 4% in 2003 compared to 8.3% in 2000. The rate of improvement was now below the Essex average of 17%.

It was reported that the Partnership promoted and supported teenage parents groups and workshops. Consideration was being given to training up and arranging for teenage parents to go into schools to provide first hand advice. Work was also being undertaken with parents, teachers and youth workers to improve the effectiveness of education in this area. More research would be undertaken on the figures for elucidation.

(d) Reduce substance misuse.

A Member referred to the new government white paper on public health which sought to ban smoking in most public places. Ms Vanclay reported that CYSYP had not yet given any thought to the role they could play in delivering the aims but expressed support for them becoming involved in the work. It was noted that the paper would require a considerable amount of joint working between the key local agencies including this Council.

(e) Reduce the number of children under 16 killed in road traffic accidents

It was noted that work was being carried out with relevant agencies to breakdown the figures according to age. A Member stressed the need for this and for the education in this area to be tailored to suite the target age group to maximise the effect.

(f) Raise Educational attainment

It was reported that the Partnership supported projects to improve self esteem, reduce absence and the provision of extended services in all schools by 2010. They also supported sporting and home work clubs and other out of school hours activities specifically to help those who struggled during the day. The Parenting Sub – Group provided basic skills courses for parents to enable them to provide educational support to their children. The Partnership was in the process of putting together a whole training plan on this support work and sought to raise the attainment of children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. There had been discussion about the merits of establishing a new Sub- Group for special needs children. No decision had been made on this.

It was clarified that CYSYP did not deliver services or determine the scope of education and the content of lessons which was determined by the Local Education Authority (LEA).

A member asked for clarification on whether the data covered independent schools given the number of them in the District. He requested that this information be added to the statistics.

(g) Increase the confidence and Community Participation of Young Children through positive leisure and cultural, recreational, volunteering and community activities.

It was reported that CYSYP did not receive a high level of direct funding but concentrated on securing bids for local youth projects and additional resources for local projects and avoiding duplication in work.

(h) Increase number of young people living care who have accommodation that meets their particular needs.

It was noted that CYSYP worked with the Councils Housing Service to provide advise on young persons accommodation needs. The Portfolio Holder for Housing requested further information on this work.

Ms Vanclay thought that the Partnership performed well in some areas but in others areas there was room for improvement. She acknowledged that some of the issues required complex types of support and solutions which sill needed to be developed. Resources were prioritised according to need.

The Committee thanked Ms Vanclay and Ms Mann for their presentation.

RESOLVED:

That Ms Vanclay, the Local Commissioner for Children's Services and Ms G Mann the Children's Commissioning Manager for the West Essex PCT be thanked for their presentation on Children and Young Persons Services in the District.

69. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING

The Committee considered the current work plan.

Standing Panels**(a) Housing**

In the absence of the Chairman of the Panel, the Senior Democratic Services Officer reported that the Panel had last met on 30 January 2007 and considered reports on the Housing Business Action Plan, Housemark Benchmarking, the Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the Leaseholder Services for Major Works and Improvements.

He also advised that the Conservative Group were seeking permission to make a change to their membership of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor D Bateman be replaced by Councillor K Chana as a member of the Housing Panel.

(b) Constitution and Member Services

It was reported the Panel had agreed to devise a protocol for the new question time at Council meetings. The Committee were asked to add this task to the Panels work plan with a reporting deadline of April 2007.

RESOLVED:

That the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel be tasked with devising a protocol for the new question time at Council meetings by April 2007.

(c) Environmental and Planning Services

The Chairman of the Panel, Councillor Mrs P Smith reported that the Panel had last met on 16 January 2007 to consider the Secretary of State's Proposed changes to the Draft East of England Plan. The Panel noted that Harlow's housing target had been increased by 2,500 to a minimum of 16,000. The Panel welcomed the deletion of proposals for development at North Weald, but noted that development South, East and West of Harlow could include significant Housing numbers within the EFDC boundary. The Panel noted that these were minimum figures and could be exceeded. The Panel noted the indicative employment target of 14,000 for Epping Forest and Brentwood but felt that the proposals were likely to lead to more out commuting and car usage. The Panel pressed the case for sufficient infrastructure and funding for the work. The Panel also noted that a focus day had been arranged for Saturday 10 March 2007 to explore issues surrounding heavy goods vehicles using the rural roads in the Nazeing area. The Panel heard about government thinking on traveller issues and the need for action to deal with this pressure.

(d) Finance and Performance Management

The Chairman of the Panel, Councillor J M Whitehouse reported that the Panel had last met on 15 January 2007. The Panel had commented on the draft budget forecasts for 2007/08 (as detailed in minute 70 2007/08 Budget). The Panel had also

expressed a wish to review performance for Land Assets. . The Committee were asked to add this task to the Panels work plan.

RESOLVED:

That the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel be tasked with reviewing performance in respect of the Councils Land Assets .

Task and Finish Panels

(e) Leisure

The Panels last meeting had been cancelled due to bad weather. A meeting had been arranged for 17 February 2007.

Members were reminded that the Panel had investigated the future management of the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve and also Waltham Abbey Sports Centre. Regarding the latter, consideration would now be given to the type of contract that should be use for any future agreement.

(f) Car Parks and Town Centres

The Panel was awaiting a report on Anti-Social Behaviour in car parks. Once this had been produced a date for their next meeting would be arranged.

(g) Crime and Disorder Task and Panel

The next meeting was to hear from the Youth Offenders Services and Drugs Intervention Team. The Joint Chief Executive reported on problems with arranging this presentation but assured the Committee that steps had been taken to find a suitable date.

(h) Local Strategic Partnership/Older and Disabled Persons

Both Panels had reached report formulation stage and would be holding one last meeting to finalise their recommendations for submission to the March 2007 meeting.

(i) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was reported that the next OSC would be asked to start preparing next years OS plan to enable officers to put a draft programme to the April 2007 meeting for implementation in the new year. The meeting would be invited to review progress against existing items and consider any new proposals from officers, Members, including this Committee and Cabinet and make requests for new Task and Finish Panels. The Committee were asked to give some early thought to this process. The next Committee would also receive a draft of their annual report for consideration and submission to the Council in April 2007.

70. Budget 2007/08

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee on the Council budgets for 2007/08. The Committee also received the recommendations of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee on the forecasts.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel, Councillor J M Whitehouse reported that at its 15 January 2007 meeting, the Panel considered an updated four year budget forecast which was before the Committee.

The data indicated that CSB growth had been restricted in 2007/08 to keep the forecasts below £17 million. It was also explained that growth items of £354,000 had been identified for 2008/09 but further saving would be sought over the course of this year to minimise any net growth. It was too early to identify how this would be achieved but it was likely that some saving would be generated by the review of the Top Management Structure.

The forecasts included that all known DDF items and indicated that at the end of the period a balance of £809,000 was still available. They included estimates for the LABGI income which could be spent on local priorities determined by Members. The Panel had supported the commitment to keep Council Tax increases in line with inflation and, welcomed the proposed increase of 3.5% for 2007/08 and the use of 2.5% for future increases. The Committee noted a table indicating that reserves as a percentage of NBR would fall to the guideline by 2009/10. The Panel had raised the need to monitor the reserve levels and the costs of the waste management contract. The Panel also intended to question each Portfolio Holder about their individual budgets.

The Head of Finance referred to the Capitalisation Directions recently issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government for 2006/07. The Committee considered the shortfalls that this would create and that an urgent report on measures for dealing with this would be submitted to the Cabinet on 5 February 2007.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel and the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee be endorsed and reported to the Cabinet on 5 February 2007.

71. Constitutional and Members Services Standing Panel - Review of Contract Standing Orders and Financial Delegation.

It was reported that the Constitution and Members Services Standing Panel would be completing its review of Contract Standing Orders and Financial Delegation at its meeting on 8 February 2007. It would assist the Council from the point of view of inspection by the Audit Commission if the review was completed by the financial year 2006/07. This would mean adoption by the Council on 20 February 2007. To achieve this deadline, authority was sought for the Panel to report direct to the February 2007 Council meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Constitution and Members Services Standing Panel be authorised to report direct to the Council in February 2007 on its review of Contract Standing Orders and Financial Delegation.

72. CABINET REVIEW

The Committee considered the Cabinet agenda for its next meeting on 5 February 2007. No new issues were raised.

73. Any Other Business

A Member asked if there was any plans to widen the concessionary fares scheme for older persons to allow the pass holders to travel outside the existing boundaries for the scheme. It was clarified that Transport for London had no immediate plans to expand the scheme. Officers undertook to keep a watchful eye over the situation and report back any developments .

Members were reminded that London Underground Ltd would be attending the April 2007 meeting which would provide an opportunity for Members to put any questions directly to them about the scheme.
