

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF LEISURE TASK AND FINISH SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2007
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.20 PM**

Members Present:	Mrs P Brooks (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), M Colling, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs P K Rush, Mrs P Smith and P Turpin
Other members present:	C Whitbread, Leisure Portfolio Holder
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs H Harding, J Markham, S Murray and J M Whitehouse
Officers Present	D Macnab (Head of Leisure Services), Mrs L MacNeill (Assistant Head of Leisure Services), G Kehoe (Marketing & Promotions Manager), D Coates-Reynolds (Arts Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance:

38. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

Noted that there were no substitute members for this meeting.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Panel noted there were no declarations of interest.

40. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING - 21 NOVEMBER 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2006 were agreed as a correct record.

41. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Terms of Reference were noted and agreed.

The Work Programme was altered to accommodate the slippage in the timetable because of the cancelled meeting in January. It was now envisaged that the final report on the Review of Arts Provision, the Future Role of the Council in Community and Outdoor Events and the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve would be put to the 5 April Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and then to Cabinet on 16 April 2007. It was unlikely that that the future Management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre would be resolved in this timescale.

42. FUTURE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT FOR THE RODING VALLEY MEADOWS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

The Panel noted the summary by the Head of Leisure Services on the recent meeting with the Grange Farm Trust and the Director of Essex Wildlife Trust. The Panel also noted the subsequent letter from the Grange Farm Trust, which was

generally supportive of the Task and Finish Panel's recommended way forward, but felt that the Corporation of London should be consulted. For clarification purposes it was advised that Matt Roberts is the Superintendent of Epping Forest and that Jeremy Dagley is their specialist advisor.

The Head of Leisure Services commented that the basis of the new Management Agreement with Essex Wildlife Trust must be absolutely clear. The Director of Essex Wildlife Trust had previously indicated to the Task and Finish Panel that they were able to carry on managing the Reserve at the current rate of £25,000 pa., plus inflation. With respect to other potential financial contributions, the Grange Farm Trust had indicated that they may well be interested in funding or part funding an extra wardens post and undertaking infrastructure improvements, such as water stand pipes.

Members asked where the Chigwell Parish Council fits in. The Head of Leisure Services answered that the Grange Farm Trust has a Section 106 agreement for the Sports Fields and the Sports Pavilion, and of particular relevance an area of land to be brought into Nature Conservation use, which when completed are intended to be managed in the future by Chigwell Parish Council. It may be that there will need to be some sort of formal agreement with the Parish Council to this effect.

The Grange Farm Trust had asked for and been supplied with historical financial figures on Roding Valley Meadows which appeared to meet their requirements.

Agreed that Officers should go ahead and have a meeting with the Grange Farm Trust, Corporation of London and Epping Forest Conservators regarding the management of Roding Valley Meadows Nature reserve, prior to entering into any new Management Agreement with Essex Wildlife Trust.

43. REVIEW OF ARTS DEVELOPMENT IN THE DISTRICT

The Panel noted that at their tour and meeting with the Director of Theatre Resources at the Ongar Arts and Education Centre, Mr Jeff Banks had put forward a notion that perhaps the partnership between EFDC and Theatre Resources could be strengthened by them delivering some aspect, or maybe all, of the work currently undertaken by the Council's Arts Team. Members were asked if they wished officers to explore the feasibility of a third party taking on some or all of the Council's Arts work.

The Council's Arts officer reminded Members that they are an innovative team highly regarded both regionally and nationally. They work both with young and old people, people with disabilities, Town and Parish Councils and other public/local bodies. A presentation on all the work that the Arts Team covers was given to the Panel in June 2006. In response to a question about Arts funding the Head of Leisure Services commented that unlike other districts in Essex, Epping Forest did not own or manage a Theatre, Arts Centre or Gallery but rather had invested in outreach community Arts Development in the district.

Councillor Mrs Rush said that Theatre Resource could offer some things that the Council could not, such as their planned residential centre. Councillor Mrs Rush felt that we needed whilst acknowledging that what our arts team do especially with elderly people, is wonderful, as a Scrutiny Panel we should at least look at the options open to us. Councillor Mrs Grigg agreed but added that we could not limit ourselves to looking exclusively at Theatre Resources and would have to look at a wider field.

The Head of Leisure Services said that Officers could scope a feasibility study/soft market testing exercise, this, using their internal arts expertise to develop terms of reference. He stressed that Members need to discern what outcomes they are seeking to achieve. It was suggested that perhaps some visits to other Districts to observe what they do may be beneficial. Similar to the Leisure Facilities Management Tender the Council could then seek expressions of interest from local arts groups. This would not necessarily be a formal CCT Tendering process, but rather perhaps seeking a best value / partnership arrangement.

Action: A proposal to the effect that the Council should actively explore the feasibility of third party involvement in the delivery of Community Arts Services to be formally put to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have the item added to any future Panel's terms of reference.

44. PRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT IN OUTDOOR AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Gerry Kehoe, the Council's Marketing and Events Manager gave the Panel a presentation on the Value, Role and Benefits of Events. He explained that outdoor community events had long since been a feature of the special character of the Epping Forest District. Historically, Leisure Services has had an important role to play in the facilitation and management of such events.

However, as far back as the Best Value Review of Leisure Management in 2001, it was noted that whilst there was a significant expressed demand for the District Council to assist in the Management of Events (and indeed also to participate in them), due to a lack of dedicated resources, as the Council focused on other aspects of community development work, this was likely to be unsustainable in the longer term.

Therefore, whilst the Council has retained significant expertise in the form of a Leisure Services Marketing and Events Manager, the level of practical involvement in Events Management has been severely curtailed over time, as other staff with the training and experience of Events have not been replaced and the Council's own stock of specialist equipment has been depleted through time.

The Marketing and Events Manager initiated a discussion by the Panel as to why the council should have events, how, as a district council we could capitalise on events to assist its aims and objectives, where the risk/expenditure balance should be and what resources should be used. In order to do this he asked the members present to fill out a questionnaire, asking for their priorities on various aspects events and the risks that should be taken.

The results of this small-scale survey exercise indicated that the Panel regarded that events could promote local identity and pride; that events provide the opportunity to engage directly with the local community to raise awareness of the Council and its services; and this should be valued and promoted.

More specifically from the discussion, it was the view of the Panel that currently the Council is not effectively represented corporately at Events. The image that the Council projects was considered important and it was asked that thought should be given as to how we can improve this situation, enabling the Council's aspirations around consultation, feedback, profiling of services and policy initiatives, to be achieved.

Members also felt that whilst a programme of major Events currently takes place at North Weald Airfield, reflecting the good location and infrastructure, these are predominantly promoted by external organisations. As such, it was considered that the Council were not maximising the opportunity to generate additional usage and income, by not producing its own major Events. Reference was made to firework events and air shows. It was noted that Air Displays are highly specialist presenting complex issues around availability of dates and aircraft, however large scale community events such as fireworks displays and music concerts, could potentially in the future be undertaken by the Council. Notwithstanding, this would involve the Council being exposed to a financial risk, although Members felt that if this was in the range of £50,000 - £100,000 the Council may in future be minded to underwrite such events in lieu of their potential benefits and surpluses.

In reply to a question it was noted that the Council had not explored the establishment of an 'arms length' company to organise Events but this could be looked at later if Members were keen to explore this.

Members also enquired about the current capacity to support local community events. It was explained that advice and guidance was supplied on a largely Goodwill, first come/first served basis, within the current limited resources. Members felt that advice/support around event management to other areas of the Council should be recharged. However, it was also noted that assistance is provided to the current Events Scrutiny Group who deal with major Events at North Weald Airfield, from across the Council, e.g. Estates, Insurance, Legal, Licensing etc. Members were advised that in the future there was likely to be a need and merit in establishing an Events Safety Action Group involving other external agencies such as the emergency services to overview major Event activity.

Agreed: that the Council should review how it is represented corporately at Events generally, in order to raise its profile, promote a positive image, consult, receive feedback and inform our local community about the services the Council provides. The Panel also felt that there was some appetite for the Council to produce more of its own events, albeit they recognised that there be a degree of risk, to maximise opportunities and income at North Weald Airfield. Finally, the Panel considered that further thought should be given as to how to formally advise other small local event organisers on the key principles and considerations in running community events, so as to encourage them to continue against a backdrop of increasing Safety and Legislative requirements. The Panel agreed to report these points back to the main Scrutiny Committee.

45. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Head of Leisure Services advised of the potential need to continue a Leisure Task and Finish Panel into the new municipal year, if Overview and Scrutiny accepted the recommendations with respect to Arts and Community Events, which may need further work, and to finalise the future Management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre.

46. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

A suitable date is to be identified.

Task and Finish Meeting 13th Feb 2007
Committee Room 1

Epping Forest Arts:

- EFA has an innovative and wide range of arts based programming and is able to deliver across the District from urban to rural areas.
- The Epping Forest Arts programme works with all ages and abilities including; young people from 0-19 and the older population.
- EFA are able to deliver projects and programmes relevant to the community. Through well established and developing partnerships such as Arts Council England, Essex County Council, Young Persons Officer, Community Police, Parish Councils, These programmes link with the Council Plan, Every Child Matters, CYPSPs, Play Strategy, County and Nationwide initiatives.
- The Arts programme links directly with the council plan and key themes/areas of delivery:

Green and Unique – Continued partnership with Country Care addressing local awareness of outdoor environments, rural delivery and meeting needs of diverse communities.

Homes and Neighbourhoods – Through various Arts projects and development work EFA integrate people of all abilities. This enables participants to gain confidence, develop skills, interact with others and develops their communication and awareness.

Safe Community – Through Arts projects EFA are able to work with youth groups and engage them in alternative activities. Safer communities are created with increased awareness of others and the quality of life is improved.

Fit For Life – This will ensure that people of all ages and abilities have equal access to arts and cultural activities. This is delivered through a three-year plan of projects in partnership with internal and external groups.

Economic Prosperity – Arts and culture generate tourism opportunities. As audiences increase and develop so does awareness of the District and surrounding areas. This also links with quality of life, opportunities etc.

- EFA reach a diverse client group achieving positive publicity and regularly exceeding Local Performance Indicator Targets.
- Finally if alternative management structures are going to be considered then the expertise and knowledge of the Arts Team should be utilised from the start. This will ensure that the best forms of provision for this innovative and highly regarded service are provided.

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