

## **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES**

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee      **Date:** Thursday, 10 July 2008

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 7.30 - 9.30 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors R Morgan (Chairman), K Chana, M Colling, Ms J Hedges, D Jacobs, G Mohindra, Mrs C Pond, Mrs P Richardson, B Rolfe, Mrs L Wagland and Mrs J H Whitehouse

**Other Councillors:** Councillors Mrs R Brookes, M Cohen, Mrs D Collins, Mrs R Gadsby, Mrs H Harding, J Markham, Mrs M McEwen, S Murray, Mrs M Sartin, P Spencer, D Stallan, C Whitbread and J M Whitehouse

**Apologies:** Councillors K Angold-Stephens, A Green and J Hart

**Officers Present:** D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), P Tredgett (Information Assistant), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

**By Invitation:** Ms L VanClay

---

### **14. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillor Mrs Pond was substituting for Councillor Angold-Stephens, Councillor Mrs Hedges for Councillor Green and Councillor Chana for Councillor Hart.

### **15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were reported pursuant to the Councils Code of Conduct.

### **16. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2008 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **17. PROVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES WITHIN THE DISTRICT**

The Committee welcomed Lonica Vanclay the County officer responsible for youth provision in the District. She explained how the provision of youth services in the district was structured. Essex County Council (ECC) provides a large proportion of the services within the District. They also work along side a number of voluntary organisations and agencies. Currently ECC focus mainly on targeted work programmes and are doing less on open provisions. They are focusing on specific areas of need and on specific groups of younger people. The other voluntary groups and agencies provide more general needs for the youth of the District.

There are two teams in the District, one based in the south and one based in the rural north. They consist of behavioural support teachers, a full time youth worker

and some part time youth workers. They have a 'targeted youth team' based in Harlow that work with teenage parents, run a 'prison no-way' scheme and also operate a mobile bus that focuses on specific projects. They also work with 'Connexions' to provide advice and support.

As for what goes on in the District in terms of Youth provision. Ms Vanclay explained that a couple of nights a week, open centres are operated in Ongar, Loughton and Limes Farm. Also, a couple of nights a week there is a 'Way 2000' in Waltham Abbey. The mobile bus visits Theydon Bois, North Weald and the Nazeing, Roydon areas. There are also specific targeted activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and currently there are about 16 people on that scheme.

ECC are currently reviewing plans to extend services. They are looking where there are particular needs in the district. Although their staffing resources are fixed at present, they are looking at ways to effectively respond to local needs with their current resources. They are working in partnership between EFDC, Tottenham Hotspur and the Police to provide a good quality of service, which no one agency on its own can provide.

Another important provision that they provide is provision for young people in the summer holidays. As always there are budget issues about the provision available. The ECC is developing plans to provide additional activities during the holidays.

As for the Loughton Youth Centre next to Murray Hall, there have been issues with Anti Social Behaviour with some of the youths there. Because of the design of the building, it gets very hot in the summer which exasperates the problems and becomes a hot house in all senses. Adding to this is the fact that they do not have access to the garden. They now close the centre in the summer period, but do some partnership work with the Academy, so at the moment young people are going up to the Academy to undertake a more structured programme of activities there. This happens a couple of nights a week. Some of the youths in the centre have complex needs and one of the benefits of having the youth workers based in the task teams on site is that they are able to make contact with the youths and do some focussed work with them.

Tonight the members of the Loughton Centre are holding a 'granny party' for their elderly neighbours. This came out of a suggestion from the young people when asked for ideas on what they could do to get on with their neighbours.

Ms Vanclay then took questions from the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse was concerned that Murray Hall was not fit for purpose, and asked how the architect was helping with this. She also asked how many youth officers are there? Ms Vanclay replied that there were two full time youth officers and about eight part timers who cover the various sessions. In Harlow there are three full time youth workers plus a team manager. As for the building, once built the architects tend to go on to their next project. ECC are currently in talks with the Town Council and looking at various solutions. Mrs Whitehouse followed up her question by asking how many hours do the session workers do. She was told that they do 2 to 3 hours a week.

Councillor Mrs Pond commented that the youth services were much needed but she was disappointed to hear about Loughton. Will the various activities still go on although stopped temporarily? Ms Vanclay confirmed that it was only temporary. Mrs Pond then asked about value for money and if the best use was being made of Murray Hall; if there were to be more musical events and if there was anything going

on in Buckhurst Hill? Ms Vanclay replied they were working in partnership with various organisations to provide focussed targeted provision at the Hall. The full range of things that operate in Murray Hall continue, such as the nurses at lunchtime, 3 to 4 days a week. The teenage parents group is not operating there at present; it will be provided from September and will visit all the Children Centres in the District. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme also operates there, along with other groups that use the venue. Also a lot of multi agency meetings take place there during the day. But, as for more musical sessions this would come down to staffing and resource priorities.

Councillor Rolfe asked for more information on the Mobile Bus. Ms Vanclay said that inside they had a seating area so that the young people could sit down and talk with the staff or each other. There was always staff there to facilitate a discussion. It holds about 15 people who are welcome to come and get advice and support. Councillor Rolfe asked if the bus went to the villages instead of just the main centres of population. Ms Vanclay replied that they were in discussions about going to Abridge, but there is not enough staff to cover the bus so that it can go out more frequently.

Councillor Mrs Wagland was cheered up by the Spurs example in Limes Farm, and asked if there were there any new partnerships in store; she was also impressed with the extra generational solutions ('granny party') are there any more activities planned? Also Children with responsibilities, who are carers, what these kids need is to have respite from their responsibilities, and this could be managed with relatively little money. Ms Vanclay was not sure what support they currently have for young carers, there might not be very much in the district. She will find out. About the extra generational relations, she thought that Waltham Abbey was another area that this could be brought to and there is a team currently looking at this. And as for the initiative in Limes farm, 'CYPSiP' (Children and Young People Strategic Partnership) are looking at this at present. They are looking at getting physically active and training up parents on the healthy living agenda and reducing obesity. Partnerships are the way forward as ECC does not have the resources to move forward on its own.

Councillor Mrs Richardson asked if the Ongar Youth centre was independently run. She was told that it was. She then went on to ask about the mobile bus, would it not encourage the youths to treat all busses like a club house? Ms Vanclay said that the activities on the bus are about taking care of each other and their surroundings and about respect in general.

Councillor Spencer said that Buckhurst Hill had the Roding Centre, which is currently being refurbished; are there any plans to move back there? Ms Vanclay said not at present as they were very happy with their current bases in Loughton and Epping, and they are also constrained by resources.

Councillor Mrs Harding asked what other examples there were of multi agency work like Limes farm working together with ECC. Ms Vanclay said it was the only way forward; there were lots of positive things about it. There was a good basis for it in Epping Forest at the moment, the question is how we can support and sustain that. There was a good example in Waltham Abbey at present, drawing on charity resources. There was a need to get together with the College and other agencies drawing on the resources of charities where they can and using existing staff. It is the next area they have to look at, it is not something they can sustain at present.

Councillor Cohen asked how does the Epping Forest Youth Council feed into Youth Provision and what provisions are made for that to inform her approach. Ms Vanclay said she was delighted that they are developing well; they need to develop their own

agenda. At present they do not want to burden them too much. They are keen to work with the Youth Council and also with school councils and keen for them to lead us.

Councillor Markham asked what was provided at Loughton Youth Centre in terms of the programme. He was told there were open centre drop-in (different activities) on Tuesday and Thursdays, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme on Wednesday nights, nothing regular on Monday nights, but they do have specific short term projects. Councillor Markham then asked where the academy was, what does it do and why can't the young people not use the garden. Ms Vanclay said it was a 5-a-side football academy down by the business estate area. And they could not use the garden because the Town Council said they could not.

Councillor Whitbread asked how many people used the Murray Hall Centre and do we know what facilities the youths wanted, as he suspected they did not want an old fashioned youth club. It would be interesting to see how they would shape services. Ms Vanclay replied that it was interesting that what they want is not always what we think they need. We need time and space to talk. The Centre often has about 20 to 25 youths there at a time. The building could only take that many comfortably. The Duke of Edinburgh Scheme has about 16 participants and the mobile bus holds about 10 to 15 people.

Councillor Mrs R Brookes as the ward member for the Murray Hall area wanted to say that she was very pleased that the party was going ahead. She hoped that it was not just a one off but part of an ongoing dialogue. There were two things that concerned her; one was the behaviour of the young people when actually inside the building. She knows that there had not been a lot of support recently from the local police. If there was anything she could do as member she would be happy to do that. And secondly, the role of positive male role models was touched upon. It was often the males causing the problems but there were only female youth workers. They need positive male role models. She would also support any voluntary agencies using the site.

The Chairman thanked Ms Vanclay for her professional and interesting presentation.

## **18. 2008/09 CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Collins introduced the Cabinet's forward plan for the coming year ahead. A paper was tabled with the Cabinet Objectives for 2008/09. This plan was based on their Best Value Performance Plan and lists what they are hoping to do this year or, at least review if they are not going to deliver it. They have corporate priorities that cover the whole of the Council, especially with the new Local Area Agreement 2, which they are joining in with the LSP, the voluntary sector and the County Council. Some of Essex County Council money will come down to District level, this will not be new money, just existing money distributed in a different way.

The Council has now signed up to the Nottingham Agreement and will have to work on a sustainable strategy.

The North Weald Airfield is not in the East of England Plan and the Council will need to develop its own strategy for the future.

The Council will be looking to make its services more accessible to residents and will need to communicate with them more and to get them to communicate back.

It was hoped that Council Tax will be kept to 2.5% for the next three years, which will not be easy. In order to do that they will have to keep tight control of the Council's finances and only spend money on new and improved services only when they have identified savings.

Safer Cleaner Greener will be the Council's thrust for the next year. The Council will be working with SITA to improve the waste collections and will be looking at new ways to extend recycling in the District.

There is also the new 'responsible area officers' who will be working to keep the streets clean and tidy.

Under the Community Wellbeing banner the Council will be improving its CCTV coverage and will be appointing officers to cover this increased coverage. Officers and Portfolio Holders will also work to improve graffiti removal and will be working closely with the new Police Inspector for the District.

The Cabinet look forward to working with the Youth Council as well as the PCT to improve things in the District on health and inequalities matters.

The East of England Plan is now out and they will be engaging with partners in Harlow and East Hertfordshire to plan housing growth in Epping Forest and to cause as little harm to the Green Belt as possible.

The Council will continue with the plans for Debden Broadway as the consultation is nearly complete.

Council will facilitate as many affordable homes as possible, and make as many houses available to part rent, part buy. Council houses will be brought up to decent homes standards as soon as possible. The Housing Portfolio Holder will also be looking at parking on Housing Estates and the options for the delivery of the Careline Service.

The Highways Panel for West Essex was now set up and the Council will be liaising with TfL on car parking issues in the District (especially in Debden).

Corporate support will ensure that that the ICT works across all the Council directorates, will take another look at the 'one stop shop' again and will also review the Council's depot facilities.

Community Development at Limes Farm will be considered as well as play provision for teenagers and will look at the opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympics. There is bound to be large car parking problems and the Council will have to consider how to manage it all.

Councillor Whitbread commented that they had made the right decision last year about the budget and is now in a good financial position, but will still need to work hard to keep the Council Tax down.

Councillor Cohen said he would be looking to improve customer services and he had started a project to see how staff uses their telephones and answering facilities.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked about the Epping Parking Review under the Civil Engineering and Maintenance Portfolio and its decision date of 27 June 08. Had this decision been made as yet? Councillor Mrs Collins said that no decision had been made and that the date was inaccurate

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse referred to the Planning and Economic Development and the Carbon Reduction Strategy and asked if the staff would be consulted on carbon reduction. The Deputy Chief Executive replied that he had set up an internal working group on this very subject.

Councillor Jacobs raised the East of England Plan and that he was not any wiser about any developments to be incorporated into 'greater Harlow'. Councillor Mrs Collins said they were still in consultation with Harlow, but with the current housing problems it may cause the developments to be delayed. Harlow did not want to build in the SW of the district, and are working with other districts.

Councillor Mrs Pond asked if the green travel plan would go to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel. She was told that it would.

Councillor Murray wanted to make the general point that the Cabinet was right about the level of the Council tax and that they should keep to that strategy, they may need to find external funding if needed. Councillor Mrs Collins agreed with him, they had to be prudent and careful as they were not going to get any more government funding.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse commented on the budget and the affordability or otherwise as discussed at the budget meeting, that showed that lower Council Tax was affordable this year. There will be a need to look at the other areas where the credit crunch will take effect, like revenues and benefits and benefit take up and to make sure that our residents continue to get the services they need. He went on to comment on Corporate Support. Can the Portfolio Holder also take into consideration the use of emails as sometimes we can wait an age for a reply if the person is away and they forget to put on an 'out of office' reply. And finally what are the options on the future of the North Weald Airfield, just how much of a blank sheet is that. Councillor Mrs Collins replied that they were helping in revenues and benefits as best they can, have set up a helpline for members of the public and are working with the Citizen Advice Bureau. As far as Council Tax it would have been short sighted to spend more money this year, we are now able to hold the line. As for North Weald Airfield we are looking at the review from a few years back and looking at the options available to us. Any decisions will come back to the appropriate committee.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet priorities and the Forward Work Programme for the year ahead were noted.

**19. TERMS OF REFERENCE - TASK AND FINISH PANELS**

The Committee received and approved the terms of reference from the newly formed Leisure Task and Finish and the Customer Transformation Task and Finish Panels.

**RESOLVED:**

That the terms of reference for the Leisure and the Customer Transformation Task and Finish Panels be endorsed.

**20. TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDING PANELS**

The Committee considered and approved the terms of reference for the newly constituted Planning Services and the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panels.

**RESOLVED:**

That the terms of reference for the Planning Services and the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panels be endorsed.

**21. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING**

The Committee noted the work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and for the Standing and Task and Finish Panels.

**Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme:**

1. It was noted that reports for items 6 and 7 (North Weald Essex PCT – proposal for joint scrutiny review and the District Transport in Rural Areas) will come to the committee when they are available.

2. Councillor Stallan asked if it would be possible to ask the County Portfolio Holder to come and talk to the Committee about the rural bus service. It was agreed that this would be an appropriate request to make and would be added to the work programme.

**ACTION:** that the County Portfolio Holder be asked to attend a meeting of the Committee to talk to and answer questions about the rural bus service.

3. It was noted that under item 8 (Scrutiny of Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership), it had an original deadline of summer 2008 to report back to the committee. However, it was reported that the LSP was currently going through some changes and will have a conference in October. It was thought to be more useful to ask them to attend the December 2008 meeting.

**AGREED:** to change the deadline to December 2008.

4. Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked about Councillor Angold-Stephens request about the provision of Youth Services in the District. His submission had asked for a Task and Finish Panel and although Ms Vanclay gave a presentation today, there are some questions that have not been answered. She did hear that County were setting up a Task and Finish Panel on this subject could the district have an observer or get the minutes of that Panel. The Deputy Chief Executive replied that members would recall that we had a Youth Strategy Panel a few years back, which undertook a major review of the youth facilities in the district. Their report went to O&S and then to Cabinet. Currently we have an appropriate forum in the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership, chaired by Councillor Ann Haigh and that is our main form of influence on youth services in the District. If County are setting up some sort of scrutiny, then we will make sure our voice is heard there. Also coming up in September is the Joint Area Review of Young People Services at County level. We are down as consultees for that. So we are active in this area without having to set up another Task and Finish Panel.

5. Councillor Jon Whitehouse referred to the proposed LSP scrutiny; as this was a big area to cover, should the Committee schedule a pre-meeting before hand to discuss what we want them to focus on at their presentation to us and maybe discuss future actions arising from the presentation.

**AGREED:** to hold a pre-meeting before the LSP presentation for the Committee to organise their thoughts and what they would like to focus on.

6. Councillor Mrs Wagland asked about the scrutiny of Essex Police, she would like a survey of how well the Neighbourhood Action Panels were operating, as she

had heard worrying things about them. It was agreed that the police presentation be scheduled for January 2009.

**AGREED:** that the Essex Police Presentation be scheduled for January 2008.

7. Several Councillors asked for pre-meeting meetings before a speaker was due to address the Committee so that they could discuss the possible matters arising, also to ask for pre meeting questions from councillors to be fed to the speaker before they come to a meeting so that they can prepare answers. It was decided that officers would bring back options for the Committee to consider at their next meeting.

**ACTION:** officers to prepare a short paper on how the Committee could hold preparatory meetings for upcoming presentations to the Committee.

8. The Deputy Chief Executive reported to the meeting that the Audit Commission had asked the Council to look at Health and Inequalities, under the Community Wellbeing umbrella. This may be able to be programmed for either August or September. The Committee agreed that because of the holiday period they should try and get this to the September meeting.

**AGREED:** to add a Health and Inequalities presentation to the O&S work programme and try for a September 2008 date either by arranging a separate meeting or putting this on to the scheduled meeting date.

## **22. CABINET REVIEW**

The Committee considered the Cabinet agenda for its meeting on 14 July 2008. No issues were raised for consideration by the Cabinet.

## **23. ESSEX WIDE SCRUTINY**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer informed the committee about an upcoming Essex Wide Scrutiny Conference to be held on 8 October 2008 at Hylands House in Chelmsford. Further information will be put into the Members Bulletin.

**CHAIRMAN**