

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date:	Thursday, 12 November 2009
Place:	Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping	Time:	7.30 - 9.25 pm
Members Present:	Councillors R Morgan (Chairman) K Angold-Stephens (Vice-Chairman) M Colling, Mrs A Grigg, D Jacobs, J Knapman, G Mohindra and J M Whitehouse		
Other Councillors:	Councillors R Bassett, Mrs M McEwen, B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin, Mrs P Smith, D Stallan, Ms S Stavrou and C Whitbread		
Apologies:	Councillors A Green, R Law and Mrs L Wagland		
Officers Present:	D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), K Polyzoides (Assistant Director (Forward Planning)), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), V Loftis (Market Research Consultation Officer), G Wallis (Community Development Officer), Diane Butler (Young Persons Officer), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant) and P Seager (Chairman's Secretary)		
By Invitation:	C Gilbert (Independent Co-opted Member), A Martin (Braeside School) and H Whitbread (Independent Co-opted Member)		

48. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

49. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor J Whitehouse had substituted for Councillor Mrs A Haigh.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor B Rolfe declared a personal interest in Item 11 ECC Consultation – Minerals Development Document by virtue of having taken part in discussions at a parish council meeting.

51. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 8 October 2009 be agreed.

52. PRESENTATION FROM YOUTH COUNCIL

The Chairman welcomed three Youth Councillors to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves to the committee. They were Holly Whitbread, independent member of the Youth Council, aged 16, Claire Gilbert, independent member, aged 17 and Alex Martin aged 17. Also present alongside the councillors were officers Mrs G Wallis, Community Development Officer and Ms D Butler, Young Persons Officer.

The Youth Councillors gave 10 examples of the work that they had undertaken during their second year of office:

1. The Activities Group had lobbied for improvements to the way in which clubs and activities for young people were publicised. Having contacted the Chair of the CYPSP a number of Essex County Council representatives had visited the Activities Group discussing improvements to services.
2. The Environmental Group had concluded its survey on the recycling and environmental practices of secondary schools. Project money was used for purchasing and distributing Energy Saving Devices to all schools that participated.
3. The Safety and Social Group had produced a fantastic DVD called "Do You Want Some?" which focused on raising awareness of the dangers to young people of taking alcohol and drugs. The group had involved local young people and professionals such as the Police Schools Liaison Officer. The DVD would be made available to all local secondary schools for Year 7s and it had been put onto the Council's website.
4. The Transport Group had contacted Essex County Council raising a number of issues about transport generally. As a result of their lobbying they were invited to carry out a "mystery shopping" exercise involving assessing issues such as cleanliness on buses, punctuality, how helpful drivers were and whether the bus number was clearly displayed. The findings were reported to Essex County Council. As a result one particular bus company had improved its cleanliness by introducing a night washing project.
5. Two youth councillors had been interviewed on BBC Radio Essex and 1017FM, promoting the work of the Youth Council.
6. The Youth Council had been part of the working group that had been set up by the Primary Care Trust looking at the possibility of re-opening a Waltham Abbey Young People's Information Service.
7. Some of the Loughton Youth Councillors had been involved with a skate park consultation exercise, they had also been consulted on the development of a new play area in Westall Road.
8. The Youth Councillors had attended a very enjoyable event with Harlow Youth Council, the Big Lunch Day, They shared experiences and debated common issues.
9. The Youth Council supported the District Council "eNgage" dance event at the Playhouse. Young people from all across the district joined together showcasing their dance routines on a professional stage.
10. In September Youth Councillors helped celebrate the special links between Epping Forest and Norway as part of the North Weald Airfield community event. Civic leaders from the City of Bodo and Norwegian World War Two veterans were welcomed at a reception in the Civic offices.

Youth Councillor Holly Whitbread told the committee that October 2009 had seen elections for the Youth Council. Currently there were 33 members of the Council with an age range of 13 – 17. To ensure the continuation of the Youth Council a request was made for a core revenue of £12,000 DDF for funding of transport, training and general costs over the next 12 months.

Youth Councillor Claire Gilbert advised that contrary to perception, there were local resources around the district. However it was often the case that they were not known about. Better promotion was needed for local youth activities.

Councillor K Angold-Stephens knew of a website constructed at Debden Park School which had news on local activities etc. However the website was not updated regularly enough.

RECOMMENDATION:

That a £12,000 DDF for Youth Council provision be recommended to the Cabinet for approval.

53. EERA CONSULTATION - 2031 SCENARIOS FOR HOUSING AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Assistant Director of Planning Services, Ms K Polyzoides, presented a report to the Committee regarding the EERA Consultation 2031 Scenarios for Housing and Economic Growth. The Government asked the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) to carry out an immediate review of the East of England Plan (EEP) to address development needs for the period 2011 to 2031. Growth in the range of 30,000 to 40,000 new homes every year in the region was being tested. The review was intended to contribute to the increased national target of 240,000 additional homes per year by 2016.

A consultation exercise had been prepared by the Regional Assembly with 4 growth scenarios covering the period 2011 to 2031. There were 3 questions directly about these scenarios and on the regional impacts of the scenarios. The results of the consultation would enable the Regional Assembly to prepare a draft plan in 2010 for full public consultation.

The Committee were advised that the report before them had previously been discussed by the Planning Services Scrutiny Standing Panel on 10 November 2009, and following this evening's discussion would go before the Cabinet on 16 November 2009.

Although there was recognition that Harlow had a significant existing infrastructure deficit, none of the four growth scenarios appeared to address this in a meaningful sense. Officers therefore believed that a "fifth scenario" should be tested and examined, which was titled along the lines of "Realistic Assessment of Infrastructure Provision." The "fifth scenario" should therefore have provision of major infrastructure and should include a new Junction 7A of the M11 north-east of Harlow with a direct link to the town, a northern bypass to Harlow from the A414 to the new motorway junction, capacity improvements to the West Anglia Main Line and the Central Line, and addressing the commuter parking problems at the London Underground stations in the district.

Additionally officers were disappointed at the lack of detail in the consultation document key aspects of this being (a) the lack of information about how the

proposed growth in Harlow and (b) no assessment of a housing/jobs balance. The EEP indicated that longer term growth should be concentrated to the north of Harlow, but the growth scenarios did not address this.

Essex Local Authorities' Joint Policy Response

It was noted that the County Council had proposed that, in addition to the individual responses from Essex authorities to the EERA consultation, a joint response from the Greater Essex authorities should be sent. While a final Joint Policy Response had not yet been prepared, officers believed that the District Council should sign up to such a statement as it would simply reinforce the recommendations of this report.

Councillor J Knapman thought that the "fifth scenario" was the best option. The scenarios had no infrastructure and inadequate provision. It was important for District Council members to see the Essex Local Authorities' Joint Policy Response before drafting a response. Councillor Mrs A Grigg was also concerned about the lack of infrastructure. She advised that it was important for pressure groups and local councils to respond to the consultation as well. Ms K Polyzoides advised that the consultation was probably the best time to respond.

Councillor D Stallan was concerned that members did not have access to the Essex Local Authorities' Joint Policy Response, there had been a promise at the earlier Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee that the response would be provided before the forthcoming Cabinet meeting on 16 November. The Deputy Chief Executive, Mr D Macnab, promised that the document would be made available in the members' dispatch the next day.

Councillor R Bassett suggested that members could respond on their own to the consultation as well as collectively.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the proposed response to the EERA Consultation – 2031 Scenarios for Housing and Economic Growth be supported and referred to the Cabinet.

54. KEY FINDINGS PLACE SURVEY REPORT

The Committee received a report from Mrs V Loftis, Market Research Consultation Officer, regarding the Key Findings Place Survey Report. The Government's Strong and prosperous Communities White Paper contained National Indicator measures about improving quality of life and providing better public services.

The "Place Survey" contained 18 National Indicator questions within the new National Indicator set and was intended to replicate much of the survey methodology of the Best Value Performance Indicator surveys.

BMG Research carried out the survey jointly with other District Councils in Essex on behalf of Epping Forest District Council and its partners One Epping Forest (Local Strategic Partnership).

The survey took place from September to December 2008 and was a postal questionnaire delivered to a random sample of over 1,350 residents who were asked questions about where they lived, public services and feelings about social cohesion.

The majority of National Indicator scores for performance were average and the following section highlighted some of the higher and lower scores in customer satisfaction and opinion:

- The top three factors making the area a good place to live were low levels of crime, health services and clean streets;
- The highest priority for improvement was road and pavement repairs, activities for teenagers and traffic congestion;
- Overall satisfaction with the area was up by 10% to 87% from 2006. The majority of residents were satisfied with their own homes (91%);
- Most people felt they belonged to their neighbourhood and felt safe in the area during the day and after dark;
- Overall satisfaction with council administration was down by 1% to 49% from 2006;
- Older people were more satisfied with public services and this increased with age. Satisfaction with public service performance had been at its best with doorstep recycling but worst with local bus services and sport/leisure facilities;
- The majority of residents felt they would like more involvement in local decision making depending on the issues.

RESOLVED:

That the Epping Forest Place Survey 2008 Research Report be noted.

55. REPORT OF THE DEBT MANAGEMENT REVIEW SUB-GROUP

The Committee received a report from the Debt Management Review Sub-Group. At the request of Council on 16 December 2008 and Overview and Scrutiny on 29 January 2009, a Sub-Committee had been created reviewing current debt/money advice provision and support given to the Epping Forest Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) by the District Council. The Sub-Committee met on four occasions with four members being present.

The Citizen's Advice Bureau provided free information and advice, it was reliant on trained volunteers and funds and currently received a grant from the District Council of £113,840 for 2009/10. The CAB had seen a dramatic increase in its work, during the first nine months of 2008 Epping Forest CAB dealt with 2,708 cases compared with 2,390 for the whole of 2007. A significant proportion of this was attributable to the large increase in the number of debt cases. This had led to longer waiting times before clients had an appointment. The difficulties had been exacerbated as a consequence of the limited amount of accommodation available to interview clients at the various branches of the CAB throughout the District.

There were numerous groups in the voluntary and community sectors whose role involved provision of welfare, benefits or debt advice. The District Council offered advice on entitlement and had a benefits service. It was noted that people were coming forward in greater numbers seeking advice with newcomers increasing dramatically. Credit Unions were non-profit organisations created by people who lived or worked in the same area. Individuals became members before borrowing or saving. Membership across Essex had grown by over 25% in 2008. In September

2009 the Epping branch of Essex Savers was launched. There was concern amongst members that the current facilities for the Credit Union were insufficient.

Immediate Action Undertaken

(a) The District Council became a signatory to the Small Business Engagement Accord on 3 November 2009.

(b) Local banks and building societies were asked to ascertain their current arrangements when customers had their property repossessed or there was a threat of repossession. However, no responses were received.

(c) A Direct Link on the District Council website to Benefits Information was established and set up.

Members supported the Sub-Group's report, the recommendations were being put before the Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the following recommendations be supported and referred to the Cabinet:

(i) That the significant impact of the recession on the number of cases dealt with by Epping Forest CAB and the CAB's excellent response to the increased workload be recognised and, in giving its support, the District Council continues to work alongside the CAB as it seeks additional resources, be they finance, staff, volunteers or premises, to ease the effects of that additional workload.

(ii) That the District Council foster an interest in volunteering and voluntary work by encouraging employees to become volunteers in their spare time (e.g. as part of the induction programme), through publicity in The Forester magazine and encouraging other major employers in the District to promote the benefits of voluntary work.

(iii) That voluntary work also be promoted through the use of information available at suitable locations, including Council Offices and Job Centre Plus.

(iv) That the need for more spacious facilities, also providing greater confidentiality, for interviewing benefits claimants be addressed as a matter of urgency through the Customer Transformation Programme or another Civic Offices work programme.

(v) That the District Council recognises and supports the vital role being carried out by Credit Unions in general during the economic recession.

(vi) That the District Council also supports the work being carried out by Essex Savers in the District and, in giving encouragement to the extension of its operation to the more outlying rural areas, assists in publicising the role of Essex Savers generally, internally and through other major employers in the District.

(vii) That the LSP be supported in its bid through the Future Job Fund for the creation of jobs in the District.

(viii) That reports reviewing progress on the implementation of the recommendations of this Sub Committee and those of the LSP Task and Finish Team on the Credit Crunch be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.

56. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - SIX MONTHLY REVIEW

The Senior Democratic Services Officer, Mr S Hill, took the Committee through the Work Programme.

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

(i) Item 5 West Essex PCT – Proposal for Joint Scrutiny Review.

The members were advised that proposals would come from Essex County Council in December 2009 – January 2010.

(ii) Item 6 District Transport in Rural Areas

Officers were currently awaiting a response from the County Council.

(iii) Item 10 review of strategic direction of Epping Forest College.

This item was linked to 15 – review of Secondary and Primary education in the District and focus on the link between education deprivation in the district. The January 2010 meeting was heavy with items. It was proposed that the education item was deferred to later in 2010.

(iv) Item 14 Debt Management review.

A report on the Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee was on the agenda for this meeting. A report reviewing progress on implementation of recommendations of Sub-Committee and LSP Task and Finish Panel should be added to the Work Programme for review in 6 months.

Members asked for the Valuation Officer to be invited to the Committee to discuss business rates as requested by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Valuation Officer be invited to the 17 December 2009 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

(b) Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel

Councillor D Stallan, Portfolio Holder for Housing, had asked the Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel to invite the lead petitioner and one other person to the 15 December 2009 meeting of the Panel to discuss fire escape routes in flats.

(c) Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Standing Panel

The Committee was advised that the Panel had completed its review of Overview and Scrutiny and Financial Regulations.

(d) Safer, Cleaner, Greener Standing Panel

Members requested that there should be an item regarding Introduction of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes and Neighbourhood Action Panels.

RESOLVED:

That an item regarding Neighbourhood Watch Schemes and Neighbourhood Action Panels be placed on February 2010 meeting of the Panel.

Councillor Ms S Stavrou, Community Safety and Transport Portfolio Holder, advised the Committee that there was a Safer Communities public event at Waltham Abbey Town Hall on 17 November 2009.

(e) Planning Services Scrutiny Standing Panel

Items on work programmes were noted.

(f) Finance and performance Management Scrutiny Standing Panel

The Chairman of the Panel, Councillor D Jacobs, advised that the forthcoming meeting of the panel was next week. They were discussing Key Performance Indicators, Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring and fees and Charges.

Task and Finish Panels

(g) Pitt review on Flooding

The Panel had not met since September 2009.

(h) Sustainable Communities Act 2007

The next meeting of the panel was on 3 December 2009.

57. ECC CONSULTATION - MINERALS DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENTS

The Assistant Director of Planning Services, Ms K Polyzoides, presented a report to the Committee regarding the Essex County Council Consultation – Minerals Development document.

Essex County Council had published a consultation document as part of the process of considering sites for mineral extraction across the county. Two potential sites in Epping Forest had been identified, they were Shellow Cross, Willingale and Patch Park Farm, Abridge. The sites were both considered unsuitable by officers for a number of reasons including impact on the Green belt, local landscape, local road network and flooding implications. The current consultation ran from 17 September to 12 November 2009. The consultation documents made clear that neither Essex County Council nor the British Geological Survey held sufficient detailed geological data for the county to identify all potential extraction sites themselves. The document suggested that the process for identifying potential sites was flawed.

Members agreed with the officers' report about the vagueness and the unsustainability of the Essex County Council consultation. There was a great deal of concern regarding the road haulage problems these excavations would generate on local roads. The Deputy Chief Executive, Mr D Macnab, advised that there was no indication of where the local industry demand was for these excavations, the material presumably would be taken elsewhere.

RECOMMENDED:

That the following recommendations be supported and referred to the Cabinet:

- (1) That the "Minerals Development Document: Site Allocations – Issues and Options Paper" issued by Essex County Council be responded to by stating that the sites for mineral extraction identified at Shellow Cross, Willingale and Patch Park Farm, Abridge were considered unsuitable for sand and gravel extraction for the following reasons:
 - (a) impact on the Green Belt;
 - (b) impact on the local landscape;
 - (c) impact on the local road network;
 - (d) potential risk of flooding at both sites; and
 - (e) the existence of a high pressure gas main in close proximity to the Abridge site.

58. STAFFING IN THE PLANNING DIRECTORATE

The Assistant Director of Planning and Economic Development, Mr K Polyzoides, presented a report to the Committee regarding changes to Staffing in the Planning Directorate. The proposals sought to make changes to staffing within Planning Services in particular enhancing the Enforcement Team and making provision for preserving protected trees within existing CSB budgets.

The Planning Services Scrutiny Standing Panel on 18 June 2009 had considered replacing the Compliance Officer post within the Planning Enforcement Team. It was proposed that the Compliance Officer post PEF06 and the Administration Supervisor post PST 02 be deleted, and that a new Senior Enforcement Officer post be added to the establishment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the following recommendations be supported and referred to the Cabinet:

- (1) That posts PEF06 and PST02 be deleted from the Establishment;
- (2) That the hours for post PPC16F be increased from 0.8 FTE to 1.0 FTE; and
- (3) That a new Senior Enforcement Officer post be added to the Establishment.

59. CABINET REVIEW

The following items were being raised Cabinet meeting on 16 November 2009, they were:

- EERA Consultation – 2031 Scenarios for Housing and Economic Growth

- Essex County Council Consultation – Minerals Development Document: Site Allocations – Issues and Options Paper; and
- Staffing Resources in the Directorate of Planning and Economic Development

CHAIRMAN