

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

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee      **Date:** Tuesday, 6 September 2011

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 7.30 - 10.05 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors R Bassett (Chairman) D Wixley (Vice-Chairman) Ms R Brookes, K Chana, D Jacobs, Mrs S Jones, S Murray, Mrs M Sartin, D Stallan and G Waller

**Other Councillors:** Councillors K Angold-Stephens, R Barrett, Mrs D Collins, Ms J Hart, P Keska, Mrs M McEwen, G Mohindra, J Philip, Mrs P Smith, P Spencer, Mrs L Wagland, C Whitbread and Mrs J H Whitehouse

**Apologies:** Councillors D C Johnson

**Officers Present:** T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services and Customer Relations)), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), W MacLeod (Elections Officer), D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), J Nolan (Assistant Director (Environment & Neighbourhoods)), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), C Wiggins (Safer Communities Manager), I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

**By Invitation:** A Jackson (North Weald and Nazeing) and S Williams (Essex Police)

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### **23. 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.

### **24. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no substitute Members for the meeting.

### **25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

### **26. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 12 July 2011 be agreed.

The Chairman promised to add a short report to this set of minutes, updating members on minute item 21, on his meeting with Essex Scrutiny Chairmen, held on 29 July 2011 (attached).

## 27. REFORM OF THE POLICE SERVICE IN ESSEX

The Chairman welcomed Chief Superintendant Simon Williams, Essex Police and County Councillor Anthony Jackson, Chairman of Essex Police Authority. They were there to inform the Committee on their 'Blueprint for Essex Policing', the future of policing in Essex.

The 'Blueprint' was to reconfigure the operational services across the force to improve productivity, increase availability and reduce cost. The changes were to be in place by March 2012.

They are tasked with making reoccurring revenue savings of approximately £41 million per year by 2014/15 and have already made savings of £20 million. The main facts were that even though the plan was to have 388 fewer officers by 2014 with reorganisation it is envisaged that there will be about an extra 55 officers in the front line of the Local Policing Areas. Essex Police are also in collaboration in joint working practices with Kent Police. They have a joint IT department, procurement team, joint head of transport and plans to extend this to other support services. They are looking to make further savings in such area as uniforms and transport. Such a scale of savings would inevitably mean a reduction in the number of police officers and PCSOs and backroom staff.

The 'Blueprint' will put into effect five commands, these will be:

- Territorial Policing (delivering neighbourhood policing and community safety partnership workshops);
- Public protection (responsible for a wide range of area including domestic abuse, child protection, sex offender management and protecting vulnerable victims);
- Investigations (dedicated officers responsible solely for investigations);
- Operational Support (including response & patrol providing 24 hour response to emergency and priority calls); and
- Criminal justice (working with partners on integrated offender management).

Significant improvements can be made by borderless policing, better use of technology, better use of intelligence, better matching of resources to demand and reduced management costs (looking for 25% reduction in senior management costs).

Geographically, they will create three Local Policing Areas (LPAs); LPA North; LPA South and LPA West. Stansted Airport will have its own command. Each will be under the command of a Superintendant who will be responsible for neighbourhood policing, community safety and partnership working. This would provide focus, delivering high quality neighbourhood policing services and excellence in working with local authorities and other community safety partners. They would respond to general policing duty incidents and would create new Community Safety Units. New 'Youth Officers' will replace the Safer Schools Partnership officers and will be given a wider role in making early interventions to prevent costly enforcement later. The LPAs will be proactive in dealing with anti social behaviour in the community. New Community Safety Units will be created, headed by an Inspector with responsibility for the Youth Officers, Licensing, Crime Reduction Officers, Essex Watch, Anti-Social Behaviour Officers and other vital partnership functions.

Under the 'Blueprint' there will be dedicated officers responsible solely for investigations. These officers will be based locally but operate within a single force wide command. They will split into the following teams: Area Investigation Teams will investigate offences such as criminal damage, theft and minor assault. Target Offender Teams will respond to and investigate burglaries and street robberies. Finally, Serious Crime Teams will deal with a range of offences that fall outside the remit of specialist units.

In collaboration with Kent Police they have the Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate leading on Major Crime, serious organised Crime, Forensics, covert human intelligence sources and covert support including surveillance.

Also in collaboration with Kent Police they will share support services such as procurement, a joint IT department, and joint Heads of Transport, Finance, HR and Training for both forces.

Police Officers from PCs to Chief Inspectors will increase by 12%, from 472 to 527, unfortunately PCSOs numbers will drop from 465 to 362, hopefully managed by natural wastage. In total the 'Blueprint' will make a reduction of about 400 officers in Essex.

The meeting was then opened out for questions.

**Q:** It had been said recently that there are too many officers are employed as backroom staff and not enough are on the street. How will this balance out?

**A:** We will make better use of IT for backroom work. Police Officers are required to take statements and examine a crime scene. We are investing in tablets that hold the forms electronically, and has signature capture. We can also put some technology in their cars making it more of a mobile office.

**Q:** Where will the proposed extra officers come from?

**A:** They are changing the job description of the uniformed officers, freeing up their time and putting in special response officers who will not have case work to take forward, making their response times quicker.

**Q:** I note you are looking at 14 to 15% reductions by 2015 and take your word that the proposed structural changes will work. Would be better if you could implement these changes and not make the reductions in staff?

**A:** I agree, but saving have to be made and it has given us the opportunity to examine our working practices.

**Q:** Would the numbers of PCSOs that we partly fund be maintained?

**A:** We need to manage the numbers by natural wastage. If it is a part funded post they will be maintained.

**Q:** Acknowledging that savings had to be made, there seems to be an enormous reduction in officer numbers. This perception will be very difficult to explain to residents and although now the police have an excellent relationship with the public it would be difficult to maintain. The perception is too many backroom officers and not enough front line staff. Forces are now top heavy, how would the new structure improve the service?

**A:** There will be a 12% increase in the lower ranks (PCs to Chief Inspectors). Civilian roles will be examined; we have already slimmed down in this area. Essex Police has saved £20 million by doing this and we have ploughed this money back. The new role of response officers would enable us to work more efficiently.

**Q:** Your best resources are members of the public I hope this will not change.

**A:** As do I.

**Q:** Essex Police is the best performing force in terms of cost per head of population – has this been recognised by the government, in that less efficient forces should take bigger cuts. And, will this 'Blueprint' be reviewed in the future?

**A:** The Government had applied a broad brush cut across all the forces and have not taken into account past spending or savings. As for a review, it is more efficient to review each function as a continuing process. Also a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) will be introduced next year who will be monitoring performance. The Police Authority would set a budget and the PCC will be reviewing it.

**Q:** What guarantee do we have that the PCC will agree this 'Blueprint' outlined here tonight, and will we have to go through this again next year?

**A:** We are not sure how the PCC will work as yet, but there will be no change to the operational independence of the Chief Constable. He is the one who decides how to organise his force. The PCC can say they want to change the priorities but not the organisation.

**Q:** What reassurance would you give on the closures of police stations.

**A:** Any services currently being delivered will still be delivered in another guise, things will just look a bit different.

**Q:** Will Loughton Police Station shut down?

**A:** No, it will not be closing.

**Q:** I understand that you are working with Kent Police, but what about our other boarders, with Hertfordshire and the Metropolitan Police. Will there be a time when we have borderless policing with Herts. and the Met. areas.

**A:** We already have the capacity to cross border police. We have protocols in place where we share intelligence with the Met Police. This will not disappear under the new terms.

**Q:** The police spend a vast amount of time in direct contact with the public, and there is a wish to see more police but they also want a more responsible use of their time. Is there too much form filling nowadays?

**A:** We are constantly reviewing what we need to record. Officers need to record evidence and intelligence; these are elements that we can never get away from.

**Q:** I represent a rural area and I am concerned about your coverage in rural areas. Also, is Stansted Airport fully public funded?

**A:** The BAA pay for Stansted. As for rural areas, we have maintained patrols that have designated patrol areas based on crime hot-spots.

**Q:** Loughton Police Station, it is right to say that it is not closing but it is reducing its opening hours?

**A:** The station will continue to have officers based there 24 hours a day. But the front counter service will be reduced in opening hours, from 12noon to 6pm. Most people tend to report a crime over the phone. They had surveyed and prioritised the use made of front counters and found that very few people use them. We are just responding to this survey and opening when people want to use it. We will always respond to emergency calls.

**Q:** Parking and speeding seem to be low priorities; it would make a difference to see someone doing something about this. Parking on pavements is a police matter.

**A:** This is not just a policing issue, parking has been decriminalised, however if there's a crime or an obstruction to the highway we will act.

**Q:** Traffic Division provision had not been mentioned as yet, what changes will happen to this section?

**A:** This has not gone away; it will fall within our Response Control Command. We are developing more officers to be involved in this specialism.

**Q:** You have told us about front counter closures at Waltham Abbey and Ongar, but what about Limes Farm. Also, how would you measure the success of the reforms?

**A:** As I said Epping and Loughton will continue to operate from 12 to 6pm, however Waltham Abbey and Ongar will close, but we are exploring using other buildings such as fire stations, Libraries, Supermarkets or mobile Police stations. As for Limes Farm, it is not a permanently staffed Police Station, it's an office in a house, and this will not change.

As for measuring success, we will use KPIs and regularly review our Action Plans.

**Q:** Buckhurst Hill currently has a Neighbourhood Action Plan meeting at the Waitrose Store, will it continue?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** I represent a rural area. My fear is that with borderless policing, the police will be drawn to the heavily populated areas. Will these changes be phased in or done all at once.

**A:** Areas will still have their dedicated officers, only the additional support is borderless. We have started the changes in the Thurrock area, with extra support going in as and when necessary, this is being closely monitored. So we are phasing the changes in.

**Q:** Will Essex Police still be in a position to be able to respond in times of civil unrest.

**A:** We have a national commitment around the number of officers that need to be trained around public disorder issues. We already train above this national requirement and will continue to do so and will be able to deal with a variety of unrest.

The Chairman closed this item and thanked Chief Superintendent Simon Williams and Councillor Anthony Jackson for spending quite some time answering questions. It was much appreciated.

## **28. REVISING THE CHARGES AT THE DARTFORD - THURROCK RIVER CROSSING**

The Director of Planning and Economic Development, John Preston, introduced the report on the government consultation on revising charges at the Dartford-Thurrock river crossing.

It was noted that the present bridge and tunnel had been paid for by 2003. The charges were originally set up as a Toll and has since 2003, been designated as a congestion charge.

The consultation concerned proposals for the short, medium and long term. In the short term, charges would be increased in November 2011 and then again in April 2012. Increase use of the Dart Tag would also be encouraged. In the medium term a free flow charging regime would be introduced, where the payment would be made electronically and not manually. In the longer term the Government was considering

additional crossing capacity. Development of these options would be partially funded from the increased charges for the existing crossings.

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership has considered the consultation and objected to the proposals for a number of reasons, that:

- the charges create congestion in their own right and should be dispensed with as soon as possible.
- in any event adjustment to increases charges cause substantial delays at the booths and a two stage increase is therefore twice the problem (very few such journeys are by locals)
- 10 miles of queues before freeing up the booths was too high a threshold representing in the order of 2 hours to get over the river.
- fast track technology was essential before any increase.

On consideration the Committee amended the draft response in the report to read:

- i. It is our preferred preference that all congestion charges in respect of this crossing should be ceased as soon as possible. This would reduce the environmental impacts of queuing traffic, reduce congestion, and assist businesses.
- ii. That, if a new further crossing needs to be designed with new technology, and has new tolls to pay for its construction, then this is acceptable.
- iii. If the Government will not cease charges, then charges should only rise after new technology allowing free flowing use of the crossing is introduced, (which could allow up to 1800 vehicles per lane per hour) and that any further increases in such charges should be introduced infrequently thereafter, and not in such frequent successive stages.
- iv. That variable message signs, rather than fixed signs indicating what the charges are should be introduced.
- v. That, if for any reason the queue associated with the crossing reaches Junction 30 southbound or Junction 2 northbound, that the charges should be suspended until the queue has reduced to Junction 31 southbound and Junction 1 northbound.
- vi. That the three local Members of Parliament, the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Federation of Small Businesses are copied this Council's response.
- vii. That as soon as information is available that there is a problem on the crossing that the variable message signs, in particular on the M11 approaching the M25 southbound, should indicate this so that drivers can choose a different route so that they are better informed to avoid congestion.

**RESOLVED:**

That the above points be relayed to the Government on the Dartford Crossing Charges consultation.

**29. SINGLE INDIVIDUAL VOTER REGISTRATION - GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION**

Ian Willett, the Assistant to the Chief Executive and Returning/Registration Officer introduced the Governments proposals for single voter registration. The White Paper proposes that each elector register to vote individually rather than as households as happens at the moment. It will also mean that voter registration would become a matter of voter's choice, and that it was the responsibility of the voter to let us know of any changes.

The new system will make it easier for voters to register by looking to modernise the system of registration. The current system had not kept pace with technological advances and is largely paper based. It is hoped that the new system will be more accurate and help reduce fraud and it will also give the Police more time to investigate fraud from one year to two years, This system is due to come into effect by 2015 with transitional arrangements in place before the next general election.

In registering, the voter will have to produce identification such as a NI Number and Date of Birth. After registration the NI Number would be deleted from the system, but the Date of Birth would continue to be held.

The annual householder canvas will continue for the time being to capture any changes in households.

The total costs to move to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was estimated at £108million; this had been funded as part of the spending review settlement and includes £85million resource funding in 2014/15 to fund registration officers to make contact with each potential elector to invite them to register in 2014.

After 2015 only IER voters would be on the register, voters who have not registered under IER by 2015 are removed from the register. However, safeguards will be put in place for the General Election in 2015 so that existing electors who fail to register under IER in 2014 are not removed.

The Committee noted that no recommendations had been attached to this report; the government had set out their plans and would get these changes through parliament, as a District Council we have to concentrate on how we implement these changes and leave it to the government to sort out the details.

The Chairman asked how many forms are sent out each year and was told that 54,000 householder forms were sent out annually. He asked if the Government paid for this and was told that that we had to pay for this annual canvass. And, with this extra paperwork for IER coming our way, would we still have to pay, Mr Willett replied that the government had created a 'fighting fund' we could draw on, to help bring these changes in; this would be proportional to our electoral roll. It would cost more for us in the long run, but the costs would come after the transition period.

The Chairman asked if the initial data matching would need people authorised to do it. He was told that it would.

Councillor Sartin asked why the table of figures for international electoral results were only for the year 2000. Mr Willett did not know but noted that a lot of other countries had already moved to individual voter registration.

Other Councillors made the following comments:

- Training would be needed on how this new system worked;
- People disliked form filling, so fewer people would choose to register;
- There was a need for more accuracy to combat fraud.

The Chairman noted that if any other councillor had any comments to make, to let Mr Willett know and he would pass it on to the government.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Single Individual Voter Registration Government Consultation be noted.

### **30. COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES - REPORTS ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

Councillor Stallan the Chairman of the Constitution and Member Services Standing Scrutiny Panel, introduced their report proposing the amendment to Council procedure rules on reports on Outside Organisations and the future work programme for the Panel. The constitution did not stipulate if a report given on outside bodies should be written or oral. The Panel thought that the reports should be in writing and circulated with the Council agenda in advance of the meeting so that other Councillors could ask questions without notice. The Committee agreed; they also noted the Panels additions to their work programme.

#### **RESOLVED:**

(1) That Council Procedure Rule 2 be amended by substituting the existing paragraph (ix) with the following:

“(ix) receive from Council representatives written reports circulated in advance with the agenda for the meeting concerned on the business of joint arrangements and external organisations and to receive answers to any questions on those bodies which may be put without notice “

and by adding the following new rule (to be numbered (x)):

“(x) request written reports from representatives on joint arrangements and external organisations for future meetings;

and that the following sub paragraphs of Rule 2 be renumbered accordingly.

(2) That the Committee noted that the Panel intended to conduct further reviews during the current Council year on:

- (a) outside organisations on which the Council is represented; and
- (b) arrangements for circulation of written material to Councillors.

### **31. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING**

#### **(a) Work Programme**

##### **(i) Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Noted that item 3, Scrutiny of Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership, had been deferred to the October meeting.

##### **(ii) Housing Standing Panel**

Noted their work programme was on target.

##### **(iii) Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel**

Noted that this had been dealt with by the previous agenda item.



**(iv) Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel**

Noted that there was a cross Panel item under section 10 of the Planning Services work programme on 'Environment Agency Consultation'.

**(v) Planning Services Standing Panel**

Noted that the Panel was reviewing their terms of reference and that a report would be brought to a future meeting of the main O&S Committee.

**(vi) Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel**

Noted their work programme.

**32. PROPOSED MERGER OF BARTS AND THE LONDON, WHIPPS CROSS AND NEWHAM NHS TRUSTS**

The Committee noted that the Council had been invited to engage in discussions on the proposed merger of Barts and the London, Whipps Cross and Newham NHS Trusts at a meeting to be held on 15 September. They also noted that a representative had to be appointed to attend on behalf of the Council and that this representative should report back to the next O&S Committee on the outcome and on any future consequences for the District.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor K Chana be appointed the Council representative to the meeting on the proposed merger of Barts and the London, Whipps Cross and Newham NHS trusts.

**33. REPORT OF EXTERNAL AUDITOR - CONTRACT FOR FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

The Committee noted that the Council meeting on 26 July 2011 passed a resolution relating to the contract to the previous Chief Executive saying:

"That the Council refers for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the detail of procedures for reporting such complex and sensitive contacts to Councillors and the procedure to be followed in the event that the Council is considering entering into such contracts."

The Committee agreed that a Task and Finish Panel be set up to review these procedures. They agreed that it should be a small, forward looking Panel, working quickly and reporting back by the end of this year. They noted that the Audit and Governance Committee would also need sight of this report.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That a Task and Finish Panel be established to review the procedures for the granting of a fixed term employment contract for a future Chief Executive;
- (2) That the following Councillors be appointed to the Panel: Councillors K Angold-Stephens (Chairman), A Grigg, Jon Whitehouse, R Bassett and D Stallan; and
- (3) That the Panel should report back to the Committee by the end of 2011 if possible.

**34. CABINET REVIEW**

The Committee reviewed the Cabinets agenda for their 12 September meeting but there were no specific items that the Committee wanted to be brought to their attention.

**CHAIRMAN**

## **Report from the Essex Scrutiny Officer and Chairman Network meeting – 29 July 2011**

A networking meeting for the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny functions and their officers was held at Chelmsford. The purpose was to create a network for the Scrutiny function and to share best practices or information on how the Scrutiny function can work across district boundaries.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- County informed the group that would devolve Local Health issues from County Scrutiny if appropriate.
- We discussed Partnership Scrutiny where councils share functions or services and how this could be achieved.
- The issue of Localism cropped up. There were no clear guidelines issued by the Government as yet. There was likely to be an impact on Greenbelt land if a Council did not have a clear LDF in place, explicitly mentioning Greenbelt land and what could be done with it. Authorities would benefit from sharing their experiences of problems raised by the new Localism Bill.
- Under the proposed 'New Planning Guidance' it was noted that authorities may be asked to go back to or "protect" their old 'Local Plan' instead of developing a new LDF. This was still in flux. A letter from Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation and Cities, dated 25<sup>th</sup> July has subsequently been received and they have asked for views on the draft 52 page policy document which was issued at the same time.
- The issue of Safeguarding Children was raised. Were authorities aware of their responsibilities and were they doing enough to train their Members and Officers in recognising these problems. We drew the attention of the meeting to the recent T&F Children Services Panel just completed at EFDC and promised to send the minute taker a copy so we could include it in the final set of minutes.
- Training for Members: members needed experience, knowledge and education to act as efficient O&S members. Providing an external Trainer was very expensive, but would be manageable if several authorities pooled their resources and had joint training sessions. It was noted the EFDC recorded some of their training sessions and made them available for members who could not attend a particular training session. We have already been approached by Harlow to see if we can run joint O&S training for members which is being progressed.
- It was noted that good Overview and Scrutiny was not party dependant, working better as critical friend without party loyalties.
- The meeting discussed the webcasting of meetings and were they worth the outlay. Noted that EFDC were now getting around 20,000 hits per annum of their webcasts; it was good for transparency and for letting the public view any specific item they wished to. ECC were very interested in this and asked for further information.

- The proposed new Police and Crime Commissioner – the various authorities were still unsure of what this would mean to them and the police service they would get. EFDC noted that Chief Superintendent Simon Williams and Cllr Anthony Jackson would be at the 6 September Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to talk about the new Police Service and the way the proposed budget cuts would affect them. Members from other authorities were welcome to come and listen to the Superintendent or they could watch it on line via the webcast.
- Armchair Auditors – this touched upon community engagement with councils and their publication of any spending on their websites.
- Under Any Other Business, the proposed demise of the Highway Panels was discussed. It was noted that they were not disappearing but would be subsumed into the new Locality Panels. It may be that adjoining Districts would be put together under one meeting to rationalise the work of highway officers, as roads crossed boundaries. The make up of the new Locality Panels would be agreed with County and Districts on how they would be organised. More information would be sent out as and when County had made more detailed plans.

The Chairman asked any feedback be given to County on what the current 'hot' O&S topics were; what problems they faced and any type of good practice that could or should be shared with other authorities.

It was suggested that we arrange these meetings regularly and it was suggested every six months which was agreed.

Cllr Richard Bassett  
EFDC, Chairman Overview and Scrutiny