

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Thursday, 6 March 2008

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.02 pm

Members Present: Councillors K Angold-Stephens (Chairman) K Chana, R Church, M Colling, R D'Souza, D Kelly, Mrs P Richardson and Mrs J H Whitehouse

Other Councillors: Councillors Mrs A Cooper, Mrs A Grigg, D Stallan, Ms S Stavrou and J M Whitehouse

Apologies: Councillors R Morgan, D Bateman, Mrs A Haigh, Mrs H Harding, J Hart and G Mohindra

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), C Wiggins (Crime Reduction Coordinator), Paula Tredgett and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

By Invitation: Supt. S Ashton (Essex Police) and Inspt. N Fox (Essex Police)

69. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor K Chana was substituting for Councillor J Hart, that Councillor Mrs Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor Mrs Haigh and Councillor B Rolfe was substituting for Councillor Mrs Harding.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

71. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillor D Kelly was appointed to Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

72. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2008 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

73. SCRUTINY OF ESSEX POLICE - UPDATE ON THE DISTRICT

The Committee welcomed Superintendent Stuart Ashton and Inspector Neil Fox, they had been invited to address the Committee on the Police's current work and issues of the District. Superintendent Ashton introduced himself to the Committee. He said that he was based at Harlow Police Station and his responsibilities are for the neighborhood and partnership side of policing for Brentwood, Harlow and Epping districts. He is also responsible for all the uniformed Police officers and PCSOs who

deliver Neighborhood Policing across the division - excluding traffic officers, and is also the chair of the Epping Forest District CDRP.

He has been in post for 12 months, prior to this role was the District Commander at Harlow District.

Superintendent Ashton told the Committee that the Neighbourhood Police Initiative was introduced in 2006. All Police forces are required to have this in place by 1 April 2008. The principle of Neighbourhood Policing is to have the right people, in the right place at the right time. The County is broken up into 9 areas and Inspector Harvey heads up the area containing the Epping Forest District. They work with the local Council's Crime and Disorder Unit. All Neighbourhood Specialist Officer are contactable via mobile phones and each one has a website page.

There are nine Neighbourhood Action Panels across the district that get additional support from the Joint Action Groups.

Recent operations carried out:

- Over the last six months, automatic number plate recognition systems has been active in the area.
- Last November they targeted Anti Social behaviour in Loughton and had an anti-knife operation at Epping Forest College.
- A joint operation targeting Housing fraud which had resulted in two arrests.

They can task Police Community Support Officer to take specific initiatives such as targeting theft and pick-pocketing at markets and patrolling Limes Farm after the recent murder.

They also have ride-along schemes where Councillors can ride in a patrol car and experience a working shift with serving officers.

They are proud of their successes and the way they work together with the community to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. The public needs to be re-involved to help in reducing anti-social behaviour in the district to feel safer.

The Superintendent then took questions from members.

Councillor Mrs Richardson asked:

"Why are told that crime is not on the increase, generally (locally & nationwide), when there are indications that this is not the case. It would appear that the goal posts on crime have been moved, giving an increased tolerance of what is and is not a crime. I.e. some crimes now only incur a fixed penalty fine. How long before murder itself will only incur such a penalty.

With the amount of time the police have to spend on paperwork and procedure, despite the use of civilian assistants and CPO's, there is a massive shortage of visible policing in general. Would you agree that a major shake-up of the entire system, to free up officers to do what they are basically intended for, is required?"

Answer: we have to deal with reported crime to the National Crime Recording Standards. The perception on fixed penalties is that we fine people on the street, but the majority of fines are given to people in custody. Yes, we would like to have less paperwork, but we also have to be accountable for our actions, part of which is paperwork. Because of this, it has been said, we have become risk adverse.

Councillor Mrs Richardson replied that recently a councillor went on a ride-along with a patrol car, when they made two arrests. They spent all day on this, which was very time consuming.

Answer: Yes it can be very time consuming. Officers have to write up their notes, wait for the solicitors and if they are juvenile offenders have to wait for an appropriate adult. It is a lengthy process but it has to be done.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked about Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAPs). She had not heard about the ones held in Theydon Bois and Epping.

Answer: Councillors should not Chair NAPs; a small representative group is chosen to represent the community views. We welcome Parish Councillors to attend, we identify one or two local concerns and if we can't provide a solution we can refer it up to the Joint Action Group (JAG) to look at it. They will then take it back to the NAP with a possible solution. It must be said that some NAPs are attended more than others and we are always looking for new members. These should be people who work or reside in the area and can contribute to the Panel.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse replied that the police choose the people to sit on the Panels. They also place their adverts on the website, but not many people look on the website.

Answer: Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) set up the groups initially, the NAPs to be chaired by a members of this group. Different problems raised may necessitate bringing in new people with new knowledge. We do not dictate who sits on these Panels.

Councillor Angold-Stephens commented that he belongs to the Debden NAP, but the attendance is poor and he has not seen a member of the public there yet. They need to be publicised more.

Councillor Colling said that the funeral of the murder victim at Limes Farm was held today, was it a peaceful event?

Answer: Yes it went off well and there will be officers patrolling the estate this evening.

Councillor Colling asked if the Police were consulted on the layout when new housing estates were planned.

Answer: Yes we would normally be consulted as regards to layout etc. The plans would be sent to Police HQ at Chelmsford.

Councillor D'Souza had two questions; one was that the charts tabled were contradictory ; and the other was that if the Police budget were increased over the next financial year what would they spend it on?

Answer: The charts showed a mixed result. Robbery is down to seventy-eight a year, which is low. Domestic burglaries were on the increase but they have had some successes. They have just arrested three suspects in this area (one of whom had committed seventeen burglaries).

As for finance, we are funded by the Police Authority. We do also get money for the CDRP from the Eastern Region Government Office, and we have achieved very good results from this.

Councillor Spencer asked about the non emergency police number which had just come in. He was told that it was up and running and was 0300 333 4444, to be used for non emergencies, but it will take time for people to get used to using it.

Councillor Mrs Grigg commented that a North Weald Area NAP had just been set up, and that residents had reported that incidents have eased a bit. She would like to encourage others to attend these Panels.

Councillor Mrs Cooper said that the Police had recently used the vehicle number plate recognition system in the District, are they looking at extending it to free up police time?

Answer: It cost about £20, 000 to use, but there are plans to use it in other areas of the District.

Councillor Wyatt asked what approach the Police took on Licensing and could they clarify their attitude to cars causing an obstruction, who has responsibility over it?

Answer: There is a Police Licensing Officer for each district, who works with the Council's Licensing Officers and the trading standards. There is also an underage information line for the district. There is a lot of violent crime because of alcohol, we review all licensed premises and take appropriate action on the trouble spots and challenge them at licensing hearings. As for cars, parking enforcement now rests with the Council. For obstructions to the highways, then the Police deal with it.

The Chairman thanked both officers for their presentation and for taking the time to answer the Committee's questions so fully.

74. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007 - LOCAL AUTHORITY EXECUTIVES

Councillor Church introduced the Constitution and Members Services Standing Scrutiny Panel report on Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 – Local Authority Executives. The Panel had considered the Act's requirement for Local Authority Executives. It provided for two types of Executive:

- (a) an elected mayor and Cabinet of two or more Councillors appointed by the mayor; and
- (b) a Councillor elected by the authority as Leader with two or more Councillors appointed to the Executive by the Leader.

The Council could opt to move towards an Elected Mayor and Cabinet Executive which would involve a referendum and widespread consultation. The Council would also have to publish a document which demonstrates how a new form of Cabinet would assist with continuous improvement in the Council's performance. Alternatively, the Council could opt to continue with the Leader and Cabinet Executive.

Having considered the position, the Panel felt that the Council would be best advised to continue with the Leader and Cabinet option. In coming to this conclusion they took into consideration the fact that adjusting the Executive Consultation to the new requirements of the Act would be less time consuming than seeking an Elected Mayor. They also had not seen anything which convinced them that an Elected Mayor was more likely to enable continuous improvement than the present executive. They were not aware of any proposal from the community or elsewhere in favour of the Elected Mayor option and drew attention to the fact that when the Local Government Act 2000 came into being the Council conducted statutory consultation which provided very little support from the community for this idea.

The Panel felt that the Council should take the opportunity to review the operation of the Cabinet and to make changes where this is considered appropriate.

RESOLVED:

That a report be submitted to the Council recommending as follows:

- (a) that this Council continue to operate a Leader and Cabinet Executive and rejects the option contained in the 2007 Act for an Elected Mayor and Cabinet Executive;
- (b) that the existing Executive Constitution be varied in accordance with statutory requirements and reviewed at a later stage once Government regulations have been published so that a public statement regarding changes to the Executive Constitution can be prepared, a timetable set and transitional arrangements agreed;
- (c) that the existing provisions of the Executive Constitution regarding the removal of the Leader of the Council by resolution of the Council be continued as part of any variations in the Constitution subject to further consideration of Government regulations once published.

75. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS - DRAFT STRATEGY 2008 - 2011.

The Committee noted that because of the loss of power to the Civic Offices that day the promised report that for this item that was to be tabled could not be printed and distributed. However the Committee accepted that the the Environment and Planning Standing Panel had already scrutinised this topic and agreed to accept their conclusions. If the Committee members wanted to see the original government report they could see it on the following website:

www.lbro.org/documents/publications/lbro_draft_strategy_0811.pdf

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (i) noted the receipt of the Local Better Regulation Office consultation paper and the Council's response agreed by the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Panel; and
- (ii) endorsed the Councils agreed response as set out in paragraph 9 of the report.

76. DRAFT 2007/08 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT.

The Committee considered the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2007/08.

The following points were noted:

- that examples of where cabinet has been receptive to Overview and Scrutiny's comments, and examples of any outcomes;
- it overstates the "strong" cross party co-operation on most panels;
- there were only 4 Task and Finish Panels this year, not 5; and
- the Chairman of the Provision of value for Money within Planning Services Task and Finish Panel should be Mrs Wagland and not Mrs Harding.

Comments were requested to be sent to Democratic Services by 20 March 2008. It would then be amended and a final version put to the April meeting of the Committee.

77. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING

The Committee reviewed and noted the work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its standing Panels.

It was noted that:

- we still have not had a response on the the North West Essex PCT PCT proposal for a joint scrutiny, the Deputy Chief Executive had a meeting planned with the PCT to ask them to pursue this;
- a report will come back to the Committee on the District Transport in Rural Areas Survey;
- a presentation from Lonica Vanclay will be arranged in the new year on the provision of Youth Services within the District.

78. TO APPOINT A MEMBER TO THE PROVISION OF VALUE FOR MONEY WITHIN PLANNING SERVICES TASK AND FINISH PANEL

The Committee agreed to appoint Councillor B Rolfe to the vacancy in the Provision of Value for Money within Planning Services Task and Finish Panel.

79. CABINET REVIEW

The Committee noted item 22 on the cabinet agenda "Feasibility of Sports Hall Provision and Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool" and were content that this should happen.

CHAIRMAN