

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny 2	Date:	5 April 2005
Place:	Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping	Time:	7.30 – 10.15 pm
Members Present:	Councillors D Stallan (Chairman), M Woollard (Vice-Chairman), D Bateman, Mrs D Borton, Mrs J Davis, K Faulkner, Mrs R Gadsby, L Martin, P McMillan, T Richardson, Ms K Rush, Mrs P Smith, Ms S-A Stavrou		
Other Councillors:	R Glozier, D Jacobs, J Knapman, S Murray, Mrs M Sartin		
Apologies:	Councillors K Angold-Stephens, D Kelly		
Officers Present:	J Scott (Deputy Chief Executive – Community Services), J Gilbert (Head of Environmental Services), S G Hill, Z Folley (Research and Democratic Services)		
Also in attendance:	S Williams (London Underground Limited), T Williams (Essex County Council)		

42. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2005 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

43. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

No substitute members were reported for the meeting.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest announced in accordance with Part 2 of the Council's Code of Conduct.

45. MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman informed the Committee that there were no matters arising for consideration.

46. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no urgent business for consideration at the meeting.

47. LIAISON WITH LONDON UNDERGROUND LIMITED

The Chairman welcomed Mr Simon Williams of LUL to the meeting. He reminded Members that Mr Williams last attended the Committee on 23 November 2004. He reported that at that time discussions focused on several aspects of the service including station enhancements schemes, implications for transport links of regional planning guidance, hours of service and parking facilities at stations. He advised that Members asked the representative to come back to this meeting to give an update on matters raised and to answer new questions.

Mr Williams focused on several issues in relation to services in the District. He reported the research undertaken to identify the merits of extending the hours of operation of the Hainault - Woodford loop. He stated that in view of the low demand for the service and the costs associated with the change compared to the estimated social benefits, LUL had no immediate plans to expand this service. The proposal however would be further investigated and reviewed during 2006-07. He also explained future infrastructure development proposals and in view of regional development plans the possibility of linking Epping Station with Harlow. He stated that a detailed response to the Head of Planning and Economic Development letter on this issue was being prepared and asked Members to consider the Council's approach to the reinstatement and extension of services in the District.

The Committee received a progress report on LUL's station modernisation and refurbishment programme. It was reported that the final design for the Buckhurst Hill scheme would be completed by June 2005. It was anticipated that it would include plans to provide CCTV and strengthen and modernize the existing infrastructure at the station. Members were advised that all stations in the area would be refurbished in the next 4-5 years. A handout on LUL's major projects for the Central Line was circulated.

Attention was drawn to the proposed expansion of Epping Car Park. It was reported that LUL had set aside capital funding for the expansion. Members were also asked to submit their views on the proposals to run services an hour later on Fridays and Saturdays. Mr Williams advised that comments on the exercise could be submitted by completing the form circulated or via the website.

Mr Williams commented specifically on the decision to disable the facility which enabled passengers to open and close doors on trains. He advised that the provision had been taken away due to "dwell time" benefits at stations. He reported that due to the cost of implementing the technology required to reinstate the provision and the problems that the service could present in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour at stations, the decision would probably not be reviewed.

In response to the presentation a Member suggested that the Buckhurst Hill enhancement scheme should include work to improve the safety of the bridge and the condition of platforms. It was stated that further consideration should be given to re-opening the Queens Road Entrance to the station. The Head of Environmental Services stated that he would speak to the Head of Legal, Administration and Estates to consider the lease arrangements for the stations car park. It was noted LUL had set aside expenditure to improve the facility.

A member also suggested that the accessibility of Loughton and Debden Station needed to be reviewed. Mr Williams undertook to investigate this concern as well as the CCTV in parts of Loughton Station, issues surrounding the LUL footpaths around the area and the areas covered by the concessionary fares schemes for pensioners. The Committee explored the case for re-opening the Epping–Ongar Line. It was noted that the recent letter of the Head of Planning and Economic Development to the company about development issues affecting North Weald and Harlow, had not considered this line but an alternative route to service the areas concerned. Options to improve the feasibility of extending the hours of service of Chigwell station was considered and also the efficiency of the services implemented between London and Epping to cover delays.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chairman thanked Mr Williams for his presentation. It was suggested that LUL should come back at an early opportunity to a future overview and scrutiny meeting to make a further presentation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Mr Simon Williams of LUL be thanked for his presentation on services in the District; and
- (2) That LUL be invited to a future scrutiny meeting.

48. HIGHWAYS LOCAL SERVICE AGREEMENT – PRESENTATION

The Chairman welcomed Mr Trevor Williams, the Local Programme Manager for Essex County Council's Highways and Transportation Department who gave a presentation on the Highways' Local Service Agreement (LSA). He reminded Members that the Council had signed up to the agreement in principle earlier this year and as a result from 1 April 2005 existing agency arrangements had finished and the functions that the Council undertook on behalf of Essex County Council had been transferred back to the County.

Mr Williams reported that under the agreement responsibilities for the road network in the District was split into two distinct groups. The County managed the strategic routes in the District in consultation with the Council and other services including traffic calming. The Council and a new West Essex Area Highways office would exercise control over the local road network. To support this service, the Council's former agency staff would transfer to the regional office located in Harlow. Mr Williams advised that the change should improve the service, ensure that resources were more effectively managed and facilitate service delivery. It should also give the District Council more control over local roads.

He reported that protocols had been formulated to facilitate the reporting/monitoring and liaison arrangements for the LSA. He advised that the Manager for the Area Highways office, the County and the Council would liaise on a regular basis to monitor the service. It was noted that a Joint Members' Highways Panel, which would be drawn from the Members of the Councils concerned, would also monitor the new structure. The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group were considering setting up a Scrutiny Committee to exercise the Council's role regarding the arrangements. It was noted that the District Council and the County would also have the opportunity to review the LSA on an annual basis.

Mr Williams reported that the County's Locally Determined Budget would be increased from 2005/06 onwards to support the changes and that the Council would have more control over how the expenditure within the budget was allocated in the area. He stated that the County Council Portfolio Holder for Highways Service had announced that additional expenditure would be made available over the next three years for improvements to the County's carriageways. It was noted that the Council had been asked to submit a list of local priorities to be funded by the expenditure. The view was expressed that the timescale that the County had given the Council for this exercise was too short.

Members were advised that a help line had been established to offer residents advice on highways related services. Several Members stated that the line should be charged at a cheaper rate than the present service charge. The Head of Environmental Services also stated that following the changes, residents would be expected to contact the County to enquire about highways matters. However, in the short-term they could still call the Council to address issues. He advised that resources had been provided by the County to cover the costs that this interim arrangement would require.

The Committee questioned whether residents were aware of the changes and where responsibilities for each Highway services now lay. Concern was also expressed about whether the West Essex Area office would respond effectively to local concerns. Mr Williams reported that the emerging contracts for the LSA would dedicate to each authority a team which would deal with local needs. He outlined the draft contracts and said that additional inspectors would be appointed to monitor their progress.

The Committee asked whether town centre enhancements schemes would be affected by the new agreement. The Head of Environmental Services reported that under the future structure there would be various options available to the Council regarding this matter. The Council could submit proposals to the County and based on the availability of resources, County could deliver the scheme itself. Alternately County could provide the scheme through a third party or ask the Council to provide the scheme directly.

Members also asked about the steps that would be taken to ensure that utility companies carried out reinstatement work. It was noted that future contracts could contain provisions to enable more action to be taken in this area. The Traffic Management Act would also facilitate such action.

In conclusion the Chairman thanked Mr Williams for his informative presentation. It was noted that a copy of his presentation would be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Trevor Williams of Essex County Council be thanked for his presentation on the Local Service Agreement.

49. BEST VALUE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2004/05

The Committee considered the Best Value and Local Performance Indicators for 2004/5 in relation to the Civil Engineering and Maintenance, Environmental Protection and Planning and Economic Development Portfolios.

Members' attention was drawn to the following indicators.

- **Planning and Economic Development**

(i) The percentage of standard searches carried out in 10 working days (BV179)

The Portfolio Holder stated that the service was a member of staff short and as a result performance against the target had decreased. He stated the appointment of an additional full-time member of staff was expected within the next few weeks.

(ii) Percentage of planning applications determined in line with the Government's new development control targets to determine 60% of major applications in 13 weeks. (BV109a).

The Portfolio Holder reported that the ODPM was placing more emphasis on this Indicator and that performance against this target could help determine future Planning Delivery Grants. Therefore, there was a need to identify where any improvements could be made. A member stated that the percentage figure for this indicator was not very informative and asked to receive actual figures instead. It was noted that the Head of Planning and Economic Development and relevant officers would be undertaking a review of the process regarding the determination of major applications.

(iii) Quality of Service Checklist (BV205a)

The Portfolio Holder said that the new integrated Planning/Building Control computer data base should improve performance against this indicator.

RESOLVED

That the Council's performance for the third quarter of 2004/05, in relation to Best Value and Local Performance Indicators for the Civil Engineering and Maintenance, Environmental Protection, and Planning and Economic Development Portfolios, be noted.

50. LAST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

The Chairman reported that this was the last ever meeting of the Committee. He thanked the Committee, Portfolio Holders and officers for their support and attendance at meetings. He thanked the previous Chairman of the Committee and looked forward to next year's new scrutiny arrangements

CHAIRMAN