

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Sustainable Communities Task and Finish Panel **Date:** Thursday, 4 February 2010

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 8.31 pm

Members Present: J Philip (Chairman), A Boyce, Mrs R Brookes, Mrs R Gadsby, R Morgan, Mrs P Smith and D Wixley

Other Councillors:

Apologies: - A Clark and A Lion

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), G Wallis (Community Development Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance: J Paterson

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

7. NOTES FROM LAST MEETING

The notes from the last meeting were agreed subject to the following amendment. That Councillor Mrs Smith had said that the roof tax was being developed by the government, who were looking to replace the current section 106 agreements. Officers from County were giving out information on these proposals.

8. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel's Terms of Reference were noted.

9. THE LONDON BOROUGH OF REDBRIDGE EXPERIENCE

The Panel welcomed Judith Paterson from the London Borough of Redbridge. She was there to relay her borough's experience in soliciting bids and then submitting proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act (SCA).

The provisions of the Act were launched in October 2008. This provided a process by which councils, communities, organisations and public bodies could put forward new ideas through their council. The process involves an invitation to submit proposals outlining new ideas for further enhancement of economic, social and environmental sustainability, either at local or national level.

Policy officers at Redbridge submitted information reports up to Cabinet to draw their attention to the SCA. Early in 2009 the Council had endorsed proposals for the scheme. The Council then placed information on their website and in their Council's newsletter about the Act and how to submit a proposal. No relevant proposals were received, although a lot of general enquiries were made. The three proposals that

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were submitted in the end were generated from within the Council. A Panel of representatives from the voluntary sector was set up to consider the proposals which were agreed with some amendments. As it turned out, one of the proposals on shop user class was in the legislative pipeline and was withdrawn, leaving two. One was about Redbridge Council not to put notices in the London Gazette and instead publish notices on its website, council magazine and local newspapers. The other was about making more use of reflective technology for highway signage. These proposals have now been submitted to the Local Government Association (LGA) who is acting as the 'selector' of submitted proposals. This would involve them:

- Receiving and collating proposals from councils;
- Drawing up a shortlist from the submissions; and
- Seeking an agreement with the Secretary of State on which proposals to implement.

Redbridge are still awaiting the outcome of this stage of the proceedings.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked how this scheme fitted in with the Council. She was told that the lead was taken from the Corporate Centre and the Policy unit co-ordinated it. Once successful the proposal would be handed over to the relevant directorate to deal with, such as the proposals on road signs to Highways.

Councillor Wixley asked what were the practical benefits of not putting notices in the London Gazette. Ms Paterson replied that they would save roughly £9,000 per annum. This money could be redirected into other areas. Savings from the Highway signage were more diverse and have not been fully calculated as yet.

Councillor Philips asked how much of officers time was taken up by this scheme. He was told that at the start not much, and they did not get a lot of queries once the scheme was advertised as it was not heavily promoted. The queries came in mostly from Community groups. However, if heavily promoted, it would take a lot capacity and officer's time. The setting up of the Panel could be onerous as it involved speaking to a number of representative community groups and getting volunteers to sit on the deciding Panel. As the proposals were generated internally, they were easier to get off the ground.

Asked what were the Panels reactions to the proposals made; were they passive. Ms Paterson replied that they were not and they needed an officer there to answer technical questions. In the end the proposals needed to be tweaked to reflect their concerns before they went on to Cabinet.

Councillor Wixley commented that there was some interest shown from local groups; what sort of groups? Ms Paterson said the groups were local resident groups, environmental interest groups and few queries from individuals.

Councillor Philip asked how long did the Panel take to get through the proposals? He was told that it took only one meeting; eight people were on the Panel.

Asked what the communication was like between the Council and the LGA the Panel were told that it was not very good. They submitted their proposals and nothing would be heard until they were told that they were shortlisted, no feedback was offered.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked if they had a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in Redbridge and were they consulted. She was told that they did and they had sent them information which went into their newsletter. They did not give them a presentation etc. as it would need a lot of resourcing. Councillor Mrs Smith remarked

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that the scheme seemed to cut across a lot of thematic areas that the LSP was involved in.

Councillor Philip asked how her members felt about the process. Ms Paterson said that they had endorsed the use of the Act and that the Cabinet had agreed the three proposals. They had organised a Q&A session for members as well.

Councillor Philip then asked how long after getting the suggestions was it to moving them on. Ms Paterson replied that they had asked for suggestions in February and they went to the Cabinet with final proposals in June.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked what was the one thing they would do differently with hindsight. Ms Paterson said she would have liked to make the opportunity as widely available as possible and encourage members to take it to their wards. But, to do it fully would be very resource hungry. She added that any 'whacky' ideas should not be discarded at the start as they may have some merit to them once fully considered.

Councillor Wixley asked when all this effort would come to fruition. He was told that the LGA had submitted a shortlist to the Department for Communities and Local Government. It is now down to Whitehall to make a final decision.

Ms Paterson continued that there was now an Amendment Act to comment on and one of the questions was if there should be a timetable or just to have a rolling process. Redbridge officers thought there should be a timetable so that work could be done to definite timeline and have deadlines to work to.

Mr Macnab said that Maldon D.C. had similar views, they also would have like to have started earlier.

Councillor Mrs Smith commented that communities are becoming less engaged as everything takes a long time to bear fruit, especially community projects. Gill Wallis, the Community Development Officer, said that the situation could be managed to some extent by keeping the parties informed of the process and why it was taking so long.

Councillor Philip thanked Ms Paterson for an informative and constructive discussion.

The Panel noted the information paper sent in by Maldon District Council about their proposals and the analysis of the proposals by the LGA.

The Panel discussed the next steps that should be taken. They had learnt from other Local Authorities on how this could be taken forward. They noted that resources needed to be put behind it if they were to take it up fully. The Council also needed to engage with the LSP. There were no urgent or outstanding issues to be addressed at present. They decided that a report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee detailing the background to the SCA and containing an outline of procedures to be followed if a second round was to be announced, so that the Council had some sort of action plan to follow.

RESOLVED:

A final report to be brought to the next Panel meeting summing up the background of the Sustainable Communities Act and outlining an action plan to be followed when (if) a second round was announced.

10. FUTURE MEETINGS

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The Panel decided that their next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 9th March 2010, starting at 7.30pm.

CHAIRMAN