

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date:	Monday, 29 November 2010
Place:	Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping	Time:	7.30 - 9.40 pm
Members Present:	Councillors R Morgan (Chairman) R Barrett, W Breare-Hall, Ms R Brookes, Mrs A Grigg, D Jacobs, D C Johnson, Mrs S Jones, J Philip, Mrs C Pond and J M Whitehouse		
Other Councillors:	Councillors Mrs D Collins, R Bassett, Mrs M McEwen, D Stallan, C Whitbread and Mrs L Wagland		
Apologies:	Councillors K Angold-Stephens, Mrs R Gadsby and G Mohindra		
Officers Present:	D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services and Customer Relations)), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), G Wallis (Community Development Officer), D Butler (Young Persons Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)		
By Invitation:	D Haslam (Roding Valley High School), A Armitage (Chigwell School), J Patel (St John's School Church of England) and E Spicer (King Harold High School)		

49. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Assistant to the Chief Executive 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.

50. APPOINTMENT OF A VICE CHAIRMAN.

In the absence of the Vice Chairman the Committee appointed Councillor Mrs R Brookes to the position for the duration of the meeting.

51. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Mrs C Pond had substituted for Councillor K Angold-Stephens and Councillor Mrs S Jones for Councillor G Mohindra.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- (i) Councillor J Philip declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 as he was the father of a Youth Councillor.
- (ii) Councillor Mrs L Wagland declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 as she was a member of the West Essex Childrens Trust.

53. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 18 October 2010 be agreed.

54. PRESENTATION FROM YOUTH COUNCIL

The Chairman welcomed four Youth Councillors to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves to the committee. They were Jenkin Patel, Annie Armitage, Duncan Haslan and Ellis Spicer. Also present alongside the Youth 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. In March they organised the 'Epping Forest Promoting Democracy Youth Conference'.
2. They carried out an undercover survey of all the youth projects and clubs in the district. They assessed and rated them out of a five star system. They created a 'tube' style map that listed all the youth projects in the district. They rounded off the project by organising a presentation evening, giving a trophy to the venue that received the only 5 star rating.
3. An online survey was carried out to find out what type of activities young people liked to do in their spare time. They then visited schools, youth groups and various sports clubs to interview young people, on film and put this together into a DVD called "What do you want".
4. In recognition of Local Democracy Week they organised a 'Speed Meeting' event with adult councillors.
5. They bid for and secured £8,440 from the Youth Opportunity Fund.
6. They had successfully launched their new website this year and published a quarterly newsletter.
7. A member of the Youth Council sat on the Council's interview panel for the newly appointed 'Health-works Project Manager'. The Health-works Project was for young people aged 11-19 in Waltham Abbey and seeks a holistic approach to improving the health and wellbeing of young people.
8. They have been active members of the British Youth Council.
9. They took part in various consultations over the past year.
10. And finally, they took part in the Safer Communities Question Time event.

The Youth Council undertook various bits of training over the year including how to make decisions, internet safety, presentation skills, media training, interview skills and equality and diversity awareness.

Subject to the approved funding, they aim to continue consulting with young people and are planning their next project, focusing on personal safety and will continue to give feedback to Councillors and other organisations.

Members of the committee then asked the youth councillors various questions or made comments on their request:

Q: If you did not get the full £12,000 you are asking for, what could be dropped?

A: This money is mainly used for transporting various youth councillors to events and this may have to be cut.

Q: Is this a quarterly or a yearly budget?

A: The £12,000 is for the whole year.

Q: Do you consult with other youth organisations across the country and compare notes?

A: We consult with Harlow Youth Council and the British Youth Council which enables us to get a bigger picture on events.

Q: That was a good presentation you gave. Have you built inflation into your bid for the £12,000?

A: This revenue funding is to keep the Youth Council going. We are very good at securing match funding and have pulled in £9,000 this year to supplement the council. We are considered the best Youth Council in Essex and are getting enquiries from all over Essex and beyond.

Q: £12,000 is good value and you have achieved a lot in a year. How often do you get to get together and discuss issues as a council?

A: It depends; we generally try to have a meeting every week.

Councillor Collins said that it was very pleasing to hear how much the Youth Council had achieved. She was impressed that they had widened their horizons by, for example, embracing webcasting. She realised that it was very time consuming work especially when you put so much effort into it. £12,000 is less (in real terms) than asked for last year and we will do our best to find this money.

Councillor Mrs Wagland endorsed everything that was said and was especially impressed with the mystery shopping exercise. She raised the possibility of introducing a new category at the Civic Awards for youth clubs/projects. She also raised the possibility of the Youth Council lobbying for a Cinema for the district.

Councillor Rolfe commented that the Youth Council had operated on a £12,000 budget for a number of years, so a bid this year for the same amount, especially now that there were more Youth Councillors, was in essence a cut in their budget.

The Chairman thanked the Youth Councillors for their professional presentation and wished them luck in their future endeavours.

RESOLVED:

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

55. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - SIX MONTHLY REVIEW

The Acting Chief Executive, Derek Macnab, took the Committee through the Work Programme.

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted that there were no items in the reserve programme and if members would like to submit a topic for discussion they were welcome to do so.

Councillor Mrs Grigg wondered if the Committee could look at the changed arrangements for PCSO and how the Police would fulfil their duties. Mr Macnab said that the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel would be the appropriate Panel to investigate this.

Item 6 – Review of the Strategic Direction of Epping Forest College

Noted that the Principal of the College was due to give a presentation this evening but had to cancel due to the fact she lived on the Isle of Wight and that there was a proposed ferry strike, which would mean she would be stuck. This will be rearranged to another meeting.

(b) Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel

Noted that item 21 (Housing Strategy on Energy Efficiency) should be for October 2011 and not 2010.

(c) Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel

Item 7 (Member Role Accountability) needed comments on the work programme, to reflect that it had been discussed at the November meeting and would be coming back to the next meeting.

(d) Planning Services Standing Panel

Upcoming items to be added to the Work Programme:

- discussing damage to highways by construction vehicles;
- a consultation on the governments Bonus Homes proposals; and
- letters sent out by Planning Officers are they as understandable as they could be?
- Tree Preservation Order Consultation document.

(e) Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel

Noted that a presentation will be given at the 9 December meeting on proposals to redesign the Finance reception area.

(f) Children Services Task and Finish Panel

Noted that an interim report from the Panel was on the agenda for this meeting.

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with rule 9.3 of the Overview and Scrutiny Rules the Committee reviewed and commented upon their Work Programme for the last six months.

56. INTERIM REPORT ON CHILDREN'S TASK AND FINISH PANEL

The Chairman of the Children Services Task and Finish Panel, Councillor Mrs Wagland introduced the Panel interim report. The Panel was established to inform a decision on whether the Council should sign up to the Memorandum of Understanding with Essex Children's Trust in respect of Safeguarding Children. They were also asked to gather information regarding local provision for Children and Young people.

At their first meeting in September, the Panel were informed that Essex County Council had announced a revision of Children's Trust arrangements including withdrawal of the Memorandum of Agreement. This was partly in response to the County Council's recent Ofsted in August which had again been judged to be 'Unsatisfactory'. This caused the Panel to revise their terms of reference in light of the changes.

They had real concerns to the apparent drive by Essex to commission services on an Essex-wide basis. Concerns of local partners were realised when it was confirmed that Essex had indeed pursued a preferred partner route and Essex-wide approach to commissioning key services for children. This being in complete contrast to the Government's plans for a 'Big Society' and 'Place Based Budgeting'. A group of local partners presented their concerns as a united body at the final commissioning meeting and requested that Essex County consider a local commissioning arrangement within West Essex.

The Committee noted that the first part of the second recommendation of the report has now been overtaken by events, the District Children's Partnership will not now be deleted and the recommendation was now just to note the Panel's concern in respect of the planned Essex-wide preferred partner approach to the commissioning of children's services.

Councillor Jacobs was impressed with the report and agreed that the problem seemed to be Essex County Council once again. We needed to tell them that their attitude and tactics were to the detriment of the children in our area.

Councillor Mrs Collins supported the report, she said that the County was unaware of what was happening in their Children's Services and they needed to be aware of this. The funding that goes to County should come down to us to enable us to continue our good work.

It was noted that the West of the County was the only area with district level Children's Partnership, which are fundamental to the delivery of local children's service and that county should be made aware of this.

Councillor Philip suggested someone from County should be invited to either this Committee, Cabinet, Council or to the Task and Finish Panel so that they could hear our views. Also the Public Relations people should be letting people know how good our systems are and about our excellent Ofsted rating.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the interim report of the Children's Services Task and Finish Panel be noted;
- 2) That the Panel's concerns in regard to Essex County Council's recent amendments to the county structure for Children's Services and their concerns in respect of the planned Essex-wide and preferred partner approach to commissioning children's services be noted; and
- 3) That Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed that a formal response be made to Essex County Council in regard of the above.

57. KEY OBJECTIVES 2010 / 11 - PROGRESS REPORT

Councillor Bassett introduced the six month progress report on the Council's Key Objectives for the year. These were challenging targets and the Council had achieved over 71% of the proposed targets. The most pleasing aspect of this was the improved Benefits Claims targets. The meeting noted that the National Performance Indicators were to be abolished and would to be replaced by something else, unknown as present.

The Committee went through the progress report page by page and satisfied themselves on the progress made.

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the Council's performance for the first six months of 2010/11 on the Council's Key Objectives.

58. SCRUTINY OF CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Collins introduced the Cabinet's Forward Plan for the period covering 1 December 2010 to 31 March 2011. The meeting noted that although the Cabinet were on target, things had changed radically since last year when they were set up. They had to be very careful on what they spent money on in the next year and would have to be prudent whenever they could. They had to make a list of priorities and would need to raise outside funding as it looked as though they would have to make up to 40% cuts over the next four years.

The Committee queried the Cabinet on the Bring Bank Sites, on partnership working and joint working (the Roding Valley agreement needed to be updated). They asked about the proposed review of the 'Mow and Grow' Scheme (Councillor Stallan would find out and report back). It was also noted that the parking review dates needed updating.

The Committee noted that the reason that the Safer Greener Portfolio Holder had no items of their work programme was that no issues had been raised by the Cabinet under that portfolio.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet's priorities for the year ahead and their forward work programme for 2010/11 were noted.

59. STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON DUTY TO RESPOND TO PETITIONS

The Chairman of the Constitution and Members Services Standing Panel, Councillor Mrs McEwen introduced their report on the statutory guidance on duty to respond to petitions. This came out of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and subsequent guidance regarding petitions.

The Committee noted:

- That the new scheme needed to be approved by Full Council;
- That it needed to be published on the Council's website and by other means to bring it to the public's attention;
- A provision for making electronic petitions available and to be in place by 15 December 2010;

- A requirement for a facility to enable responses to petitions;
- The involvement of partner organisations;
- The number of signatures required to trigger a debate at Full Council or for a senior officer to give evidence at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- In September 2010 the new government issued a letter advising Local Authorities that the statutory guidance was to be withdrawn and that authorities were to have more discretion in dealing with local petitions;

The Committee debated the possibility of reducing the requirement of 1,200 signatories (1%) for a senior officer to attend a meeting down to 900, but decided to keep the figure at 1% (1,200 signatories).

RESOLVED:

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

(1) The introduction of a revised petitions scheme incorporating the following elements:

- requirements for and arrangements for responding to petitions;
- involvement of partner organisations in the petitions process;
- a percentage threshold of 2% of the District's population (2,400) in terms of signatories to a petition required to trigger a debate at Full Council;
- a percentage threshold of 1% of the District's population (1,200) in terms of signatories to a petition required to trigger attendance of a 'Senior Officer' at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting to give evidence on a matter;
- publication on the Council's website; and
- provision of a facility for making electronic petitions to be in place by 15 December 2010.

(2) That the required revisions to the Council Procedure Rules, Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, and other necessary amendments to the Constitution be made and reported on by the Assistant to the Chief Executive in due course.

(3) That the operation of the revised petitions scheme and its impact be reviewed in the summer of 2011.

60. NEW HOMES BONUS CONSULTATION

The Committee agreed that the consultation document on 'New Bonus Homes' could be taken directly to the Council meeting on 14 December, due to the time constraints.

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee granted permission for the Planning Services Scrutiny Standing Panel to report directly to the Council meeting scheduled for 14 December 2010 on the Government's consultation document on 'New Homes Bonus'.

61. CABINET REVIEW

It was noted that there was no specific items that the Committee wished to comment on contained in the forthcoming Cabinet Agenda.

CHAIRMAN