

Report to Council

Date of meeting: 27 September 2011

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny report to Council – September 2011

Contact for further information: Cllr R Bassett

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246



Recommendation:

That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report from July 2011 to the present be noted.

Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 6 September 2011.

1. At our meeting on Tuesday, 6 September, we received a presentation from Chief Superintendant Simon Williams, Essex Police and Councillor Anthony Jackson, Chair of the Essex Police Authority.
2. For this meeting, we had a large number of the public attending to hear what the Police had to say. The Chief Superintendant took the Committee through their 'Blueprint for Essex Policing', this being their blueprint for managing the government cutbacks and the reorganisation of their services. This would enable them to streamline their services while making a £41million savings by 2014/15 as demanded by the Government.
3. The main facts were that even though the plan was to have 388 fewer officers by 2014 with the reorganisation, it was envisaged that there will be about an extra 55 offices in the front line Local Policing Areas (LPAs). There will be three LPAs and we will be in the Western area with Harlow, Brentwood and Thurrock.
4. It was also confirmed that the Neighbourhood Action Panels would still be used and they reiterated the need to work closely with the public and safer communities groups.
5. The meeting was then opened out to a long question and answer session from the committee and other members present. The questions ranged from the number of police officers occupied in backroom duties to the opening hours of policing stations and their potential closures and the operational independence of the Chief Constable. The final question asked if, following the recent unrest, would Essex Police be able to handle such situations with this restructuring. We were assured they would and that the structure would allow greater flexibility in their response.
6. We next considered a consultation report on revising the charges at the

Dartford – Thurrock river crossing. Our preferred preference was that the charges should cease as soon as possible to assist businesses and also to prevent environmental pollution caused by queuing vehicles. However we realise this might not be possible so if a new crossing be established it should be designed with new technology which removes the need for vehicles to stop at barriers. Any new tolls should be used to pay for its construction. It was also suggested that if the charges were to be put up then variable message signs be put in place along all major routes leading to the crossing to indicate what the new charges are and to allow people to choose to use alternative routes.

7. We then received an information item on the Government's consultation on their future plans to introduce single voter registration. We noted the pros and cons of the new proposals noting that it would have a high setting up cost but in the long term be more accurate and help reduce fraud. We were asked to put any comments that we may have directly to the Returning Officer who would feed them back to the Government.

8. We received a report from the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel about tidying up the council procedure rules on reports on Outside Organisations, which we agreed to.

9. The Committee went on to appoint Councillor Chana to attend a meeting on the proposed merger of Barts and the London, Whipps Cross and Newham NHS Trusts as our Council's representative. We have asked him to report back to our next meeting.

10. Following on from a Council resolution from their July 2011 meeting we established a Task and Finish Panel to look at the details of the report from the external auditor on procedures to be followed in any future contract of employment for a Chief Executive. We agreed to appoint Councillor Ken Angold-Stephens as Chairman and Councillors Grigg, Jon Whitehouse, Stallan and myself as panel members.