

## EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee      **Date:** Tuesday, 18 October 2011

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 7.30 - 9.49 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors R Bassett (Chairman) D Wixley (Vice-Chairman) K Angold-Stephens, K Chana, D Jacobs, D C Johnson, Mrs S Jones, S Murray, Mrs M Sartin, D Stallan and G Waller

**Other Councillors:** Councillors Mrs D Collins, Ms J Hart, Mrs M McEwen, J Philip, Mrs P Smith, Mrs L Wagland, C Whitbread and Mrs J H Whitehouse

**Apologies:** Councillors Ms R Brookes

**Officers Present:** D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services and Customer Relations)), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

**By Invitation:** G Mangan (Education Delivery Group)

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### 35. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman 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.

### 36. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor K Angold-Stephens had substituted for Councillor Mrs R Brookes.

### 37. MINUTES

#### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 6 September 2011 be agreed.

The Chairman noted that following the meeting of the Essex Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen in July, the Chairman of the Essex Overview and Scrutiny Committee had visited EFDC to view our webcasting facilities.

It was also noted that joint Scrutiny training had been arranged with Harlow Council to share the cost. Two provisional dates had been identified in March 2012, with two evening courses being developed. One would be held at Harlow and the other at Epping.

**38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S Murray declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 as he was a teacher in Roding Valley High school.

Councillor D Collins declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 as she was the Chairman at Epping Forest College.

**39. REVIEW OF SECONDARY AND PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE DISTRICT**

The Chairman welcomed Geoff Mangan, the Epping Forest Schools 14-19 Co-ordinator for Epping Forest Secondary Schools and also the West Essex Secondary Schools Facilitator with the West Children's Commissioning and Delivery Board for Essex County Council.

Mr Mangan said that many people were misinformed about what schools did and was here to give his (informed) personal opinion after a long career in the education system and as the ex head of Roding Valley High School.

He wanted to talk about the impact of any Epping Forest schools changing status; if they were in danger of falling below the "floor targets"; how well did they deal with the vulnerable pupils and how they would be affected by the funding changes; and, was there appropriate progression for every Epping Forest learner to post 16 study.

The Committee noted that there were 35 Primary Schools, 6 Secondary Schools and 1 College in the district. The district itself was very diverse with small pockets of deprivation spread out. This meant that it tended to lose out on Government money as they were not concentrated in one identifiable area. It was hoped that these areas would eventually receive some funding in the future.

A lot of schools were in the process of, or thinking about, changing their status to Academy Schools, which are having money thrown at them. Government policy was looking to get outstanding schools to become academies, putting them in direct competition with the lower achieving schools. Schools would have to start working together as Local Education Authorities were practically non-existent nowadays. As the 14-19 co-ordinator Mr Mangan linked the 6 secondary schools helping them to collaborate services etc. schools are now sharing good practice, such as that on attendance, which successfully improved all their attendance records. To help this, the Local Development Group (LDG) holds money in a central pot to help tie schools together and have been very successful in this. Other groups have also been established to help, such as the Area Planning Group (14-19) and the Association of Secondary Heads in Essex, who meet every half term. It was all a bit confusing.

Education was a political football and in order to improve it you had to measure it first. Schools had to respond to the changes to keep their funding. It was all part of a process of continuous changes. The Government had set 'floor targets' for schools. 'Floor targets' being a generic term for targets set by the government for minimum standards for disadvantaged groups or areas. The floor target for primary schools was currently 60%, rising to 65% of children to reach level 4 in English and Maths. The target for Secondary schools was for 35% of students to reach 5 A to C grades in English and Maths (rising to 50% by 2015). Schools were getting enough results at grade 'C' to enable them to keep (or get) their money and improve their standing on the league tables. However, he stated this was not very good for the Children as 'C' grades were not good enough to enable them to study at 'A' level. Pupils were not being sustainably coached at English and Maths, but intensively coached to pass the

exams; but they could not sustain the knowledge. Schools categorised as 'Outstanding' were being sustained by their English and Maths results only, although 'outstanding' was an unclear and ill defined term. They seemed to be moving towards measuring a narrow range of intelligence, where as society needed people who could move around and had a wide range of intelligence.

Mr Mangan went on to define his meaning of vulnerable pupils as children who were falling out of the education system.

Fortunately Epping Forest had the best "Not in Education, Employment or Training" (NEET) figures in the County. EFDC schools were good at keeping children inside the system and it was important that was done, as once outside the educational system they seldom made it back.

He was concerned that if, or when, schools became academies or stand alone schools they would lose sight of these vulnerable pupils as they would only be interested in improving their results.

Presently there was support for vulnerable pupils up to age 16; however they were looking at mentoring students from year 7 up to college age. There were more challenges ahead for schools and students since the loss of Connexions, the Work Experience Placement Scheme and the EMA. The EMA was used to finance travel to and from school/college and to pay for text books. The Work Experience Scheme was also a major loss as most employers favoured someone with work experience. Schools were trying to plug this hole by using their own resources.

The rebirth of the Epping Forest College was a significant change for the better for this district; it has made a big difference over the last three years. The retention of pupils was up from 82% to 93% since 2007; with course completion up from 50% to 85% since 2007; the recruitment from three local schools had also increased for 2011-12 along with the 'A' level success rate, up from 67% to 75% during 2007-10.

On the whole Epping Forest was doing well by its children, although it was struggling with government changes; the best thing it could do was to keep the kids at school increasing their knowledge base.

The meeting was then opened out for questions.

**Q.** How significant was the role of the family and parenting for children and the part it played in poor schooling.

**A.** A lot of parents want to care but do not know how to. Parental support was crucial and this was an issue across all types of families and not just those financially disadvantaged.

**Q.** Part of the problem was that people coming straight from school were not ready for the work environment.

**A.** We need to decide what education was for; businesses want people who can learn and are adaptable and creative. However, there also needs to be a big push on English and Maths.

**Q.** We were promised that front line services would not be cut, but we have lost Connexions and the EMA. What was the impact of these losses? Secondary schools have lost about £300,000 each in the financial year, what would this mean to them?

**A.** When financial constraints occur this tends to impact on the vulnerable children first. However, in the end schools will have to take only the best pupils and

lose the vulnerable ones as they will not have the finances to provide the support that is needed. It was all about commissioning by the schools nowadays.

**Q.** I get the impression that you do not think that Maths and English was the right way to go in education. However, businesses want this. Also, how was the funding crisis affecting the gifted and talented children, as we need them to go progress as well.

**A.** English and maths are very important subjects to get, but most schools just tend to stop at grade 'C' level; it must be a sustainable knowledge set. As for gifted and talented children, they do not really require extra funding, just a lot of activities to stretch them.

**Q.** We must start improving reading and writing at Primary Schools, it was too late at age 11. The College helps children who are not suited to go on to 'A' levels, by doing a lot of apprenticeships. We should use IT to help vulnerable children; this must be the way forward. I would like to note that the College has not had so much of a problem with the loss of the EMA as yet.

**A.** Primary schools now work very hard on English and Maths and teach it well and intensively; and all kids have very good IT knowledge. However some children don't try, mainly because they do not want to fail. The biggest influence on children is genetics and their family.

**Q.** It was generally thought there should be more family support workers; was this a financial problem?

**A.** There used to be a lot of work with families. A lot of low level, early intervention family support was needed, it was not however expensive and Mr Mangan hoped it would be developed further.

**Q.** A recent West Essex Alliance meeting identified problems for the skill sets for the semi skilled. We provide a lot of the high end skills and are able to meet the lower end skill sets; the problem was in the middle area such as lab technicians or warehouse managers. A lot of future employment will come into those categories; do the schools have any thought of what they could contribute to this level.

**A.** There was no easy answer to this; there needed to be a lot more employment engagement. Apprenticeships are set at level 2; however we can cater to pre-apprenticeships and some kind of work experience to supply a lot more of what local businesses want.

The Chairman thanked Mr Mangan for his interesting talk, giving members a better understanding of the issues facing the education establishment.

#### **40. SCRUTINY OF CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Cabinet's Forward Plan for the period covering 1 October 2011 to 31 January 2012. they went through the Portfolio Holders' work programmes one by one, making the following comments.

**Planning and Technology** - this work programme was thought to be a little light, there was a need to look at houses in the greenbelt, greenhouses and affordable housing and the rules governing developers. The Planning and Technology Portfolio Holder, Councillor Philips, said that all that would be contained within the Local Plan. They were looking at an infrastructure levy and getting their core strategies right, and to speed up the production of the Local Plan. This work programme was only up to 31 January 2012. After all, all matters that relate to planning relate to the Local Plan. The Cabinet was also determined to improve the S106 agreements for local residents.

**Finance and Economic Development** – the Committee wanted to know when would a rent increase be considered? They were told early in the next calendar year. The Committee wanted it noted that frontline services should be safeguarded.

**Environment** - the Committee asked what was the new review for the Waste Management Depot for? They were told that they were looking at various possibilities, such as North Weald Airfield or the T11 site; they were in further discussion with Essex CC and would report back on this. Councillor Stallan asked if the Portfolio Holder could make a statement to the next Council meeting to update the situation, and was told a statement would be forthcoming.

**Housing** – has there been an updating report on Leader Lodge (North Weald) from Hastoe. The Portfolio Holder said that there had been no reports so far and she would inform the council when there was one.

**Leisure and Wellbeing** – was the Lowewood Museum proposal, to enter into an agreement with Broxbourne BC, theirs or ours? Broxbourne BC approached us, asking if we would be interested in running their museum as they would be losing their two key staff to retirement. They asked us to run it on a joint management, service level basis; initially for a three year period. There will be a Cabinet report.

**Safer, Greener and Highways** – if the Community Transport Scheme was no longer to be funded by EFDC, how would it be funded. The Portfolio Holder said that this was a change in arrangements with the Community Transport people. Customers would not notice any change in the service. It was a move from Voluntary Action Epping Forest, to a trust operated by Essex CC. The funding was guaranteed for this year. Any matters affecting their finance would be brought to the Cabinet. Councillor Bassett was a trustee for this new organisation and said they had their first meeting a few weeks ago. A report would be coming forward shortly.

The Committee noted that the work on Car Washes and other businesses in Council Car Parks had been deferred pending the Price Waterhouse review.

Off Street Parking enforcement take over by NEPP - could the Portfolio Holder provide a report on how Councillors could communicate with them, as there seems to be some difficulty in doing so. The Portfolio Holder said that her next report to Council had some information on this and that we would not transfer complete responsibility on enforcement until September next year.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Cabinet's priorities for the year ahead and their forward work programme for 2011/12 were noted.

**41. PROPOSED MERGER OF BARTS AND THE LONDON, WHIPPS CROSS AND NEWHAM NHS TRUSTS**

Councillor Chana spoke to his written report in the agenda on his attendance at a recent presentation on the proposed merger of Barts and the London NHS trust, Whipps Cross and Newham NHS Trusts. He reported that this was going forward and would soon become a reality. They would become a super hospital, with the three hospitals sharing services. Each hospital would specialise in one clinical area. He noted that there was to be a second meeting in two days time about financing and he would be attending. A third event in a couple of weeks time would focus on the

clinical aspects. However he would not be able to attend this event. Any background papers would be made available in the Members Room.

Councillor Murray noted that this merger would be better for highly technical procedures but how about the routine operations; where would people go for these? Councillor Chana replied that the routine services would stay where they were. However, each hospital would specialise in one aspect of medicine. Just what these would be, have yet to be decided.

Councillor Angold-Stephens asked if the A&E services at Whipps Cross would still continue. He was told that they would be unaffected.

Councillor Wixley said that someone should attend the proposed meeting in a couple of weeks time. He would speak to Councillor Chana after the meeting about attending this meeting.

#### **42. CHILDREN'S SERVICES TASK AND FINISH PANEL**

The Committee received a report resulting from the recent Children Service's Task and Finish Review Panel. The Panel investigated the effectiveness of children's and young people's services and safeguarding arrangements, provided through Essex County Council (ECC) and EFDC's own services and partners. In the end the Panel identified 10 key recommendations, half of which related directly to ECC and these were forwarded directly to the Director of Children's Services Commissioning (Wendi Ogle-Welbourn) at Essex County Council for their comments. This report set out their response.

The Committee thought Essex County Council's response was quite vague and noted that Wendi Ogle-Welbourn was due to attend an O&S meeting in the new year, when the Committee could question her more closely about the response made. The Committee also asked that the relevant county Portfolio Holder be invited to the same meeting.

**AGREED:** that the Portfolio Holder also be invited along with Wendi Ogle-Welbourn.

Councillor Angold-Stephens said that a lot of jargon was used, which was not helpful. At a recent meeting he had attended, a lot of complaints had been made about the withdrawal of various mental health services; an area which EFDC would like some answers. The Acting Chief Executive said this would be possible if the question concerned only the young people of the district but if it affected adults as well, it would be better to add a separate item to the Work Programme to consider this.

**AGREED:** that a separate item be added to the Work Programme to consider the state of Mental Health Services in the District.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Committee noted the Essex County Council response to the recommendations of the Children's Services Task and Finish Panel;
- (2) That the relevant County Portfolio Holder be asked to attend the meeting with Wendi Ogle-Welbourn; and
- (3) A separate item be added to the O&S work programme to consider the state of mental health services in the district.

#### **43. REPORT OF DISTRICT REMUNERATION PANEL**

Councillor Stellan the Chairman of the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Standing Panel introduced their report on the recent report of the Remuneration Panel on members' allowances. The only substantive recommendation was recommendation 1, which was inline with the officer scheme for reimbursement of rail fares and that in the current climate; the option for first class rail should not be available to members.

Recommendation 2 reflected other matters discussed which they would like to be considered as part of their next review. Recommendation 2(a) was to be altered to delete the word 'recent' and replace it with 'proposed'.

It was noted that Councillors had been very prudent in their allowances and had only taken the 2002 allowance recommendation.

**RESOLVED:**

(1) That the following recommendation (numbered (11) in the report of the Remuneration Panel) be adopted and submitted to the Council for approval:

"That the reference to first class rail return fare in the current scheme in relation to travel to meetings outside the District or by members resident outside the District be removed from the scheme"; and

(2) That for the purposes of the next review of member remuneration, the Panel be requested to review the following:

(a) the SRA payable to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the light of proposed changes to reporting at Council meetings;

(b) the IT Connectivity Allowance: eligibility and payment levels; and

(c) review of wording in respect of an assessment of hours worked by Councillors as a basis for calculating the Basic Allowance by reference to the national minimum wage.

**44. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

Councillor Stellan the Chairman of the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Standing Panel introduced their report on the review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations. The District had a duty to review all polling places at least every four years. A review had to be completed by the end of 2011 and approved by full Council.

A polling district is the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors. A polling place is the building or area to which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling station is the room or building chosen by the Returning Officer where the poll takes place.

Local authorities are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections, designate polling places for these polling districts and keep these under review. Polling districts and places for local government elections are not automatically part of the review. However, the polling districts and places for parliamentary and local government elections should always be the same.

As part of the review a consultation exercise was undertaken between May 25 and June 25, 2011. Members, local MPs, agents, interest groups and the public were consulted.

**RESOLVED:**

That a report be submitted to the Council recommending that:

- (a) the proposals for polling districts and places as set out in the Appendix to the report be approved; and
- (b) the proposals be published and copies made available for inspection by the public at the Civic Offices, in at least one place in each parliamentary constituency covering the Epping Forest District and on the Council's website.

**45. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING**

**a) Work Programme**

**(i) Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Item 15, review of the PCT/West Essex Health Service. The Parliamentary Bill was still going through Parliament and the Lords. This item to be moved back to the next calendar year once the details of the Bill are finalised.

To add a new item to the work programme to consider the state of Mental Health Services in the District.

**b) Standing Panels**

**(i) Housing Standing Panel**

Noted that there would be a meeting on the HRA at the end of November. The members of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel to be specially invited to attend this meeting.

**(ii) Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel**

Noted that item 18 'Report of the External Auditor' – was to be deleted from the programme.

Items 19 and 20 – 'Housing Appeal Review Panel' - Order of business and Council accommodation banding were agreed by the O&S Committee as new items to be added to the work programme.

**(iii) Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel**

Noted that the Panel had just completed a special meeting looking at the Environmental Agency Consultation on managing flood risk in the Roding catchment area; when they agreed to object to the proposals.



To add to the work programme the scrutiny of the new SITA contact and to receive an updating report on wider implications, once known, of the Environmental agency strategy on flood management in the Roding catchment area.

**(iv) Planning Services Standing Panel**

Noted that the proposals for the new terms of reference should be brought to the December 2011 meeting of the Panel.

**(v) Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel**

The Chairman reported that they had just reviewed the first quarter KPI results, not all were up to their target figures.

**c) Task and Finish Panel**

**(i) Senior Recruitment Task and Finish Panel**

Noted that the first meeting of the Panel was scheduled for 10 November 2011. They were hoping to have it finished by the end of this municipal year or earlier.

**46. CABINET REVIEW**

The Committee reviewed the Cabinet agenda for their 24 October meeting but there were no specific items that they wanted to be brought to the Cabinet's attention, except to note their concern about the unnecessary expense to be incurred by holding separate elections, in November 2012, for the Police and Crime Commissioner.

**CHAIRMAN**

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