

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

- Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 24 January 2012
- Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.46 pm
- Members Present:** Councillors R Bassett (Chairman) D Wixley (Vice-Chairman) Ms R Brookes, K Chana, D Jacobs, Mrs S Jones, S Murray, Mrs M Sartin, D Stallan and G Waller
- Other Councillors:** Councillors K Angold-Stephens, Mrs D Collins, C Finn, Ms J Hart, Mrs M McEwen, G Mohindra, J Philip, Mrs L Wagland and Mrs J H Whitehouse
- Apologies:** Councillors
- Officers Present:** D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), R Palmer (Director of Finance and ICT), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), J Houston (Local Strategic Partnership Manager), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation:

64. 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.

65. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members for the meeting.

66. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 29 November 2011 be agreed.

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

68. PRESENTATION FROM THE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

John Houston, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Manager, took the Committee through what the LSP did over the last year, their future challenges and issues around the proposed Locality Boards.

The LSP brought together all the key public agencies, voluntary and private sectors, including Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council, the Primary Care Trust, Police, Fire and Rescue, the Parish and Town Councils, Faith Groups, Voluntary Action Epping Forest, businesses and the Chamber of Commerce. These and other local groups were brought together to identify common problems and develop joined-up solutions by pooling their expertise. They are also able to commission research, identify gaps in provision and opportunities for new ways of working.

They have four theme groups feeding into the main board, one dealing with Healthier Communities, one dealing with Sustainable Communities, another dealing with Safer Communities and lastly, one dealing with Children and Young People.

The LSP will be holding a conference in February, and are hoping to get between 120 to 130 voluntary groups together along with the Chief Constable of Essex.

As part of their review of the year for safer communities the EFDC's Community Safety Team was hailed as one of the best examples in the county; crime was down by 4% in this area, but unfortunately there were increasing numbers of burglary, domestic abuse and car crimes.

Part of the LSP's sustainable communities programme helped set up small businesses and helped employ 70 younger people within our district. They encouraged people to use local businesses and pay their bills promptly and organised local business events to enable them to make contacts etc.

The LSP have just launched a new website "One Shops Local" for local businesses. Having only been going for about five or six weeks they already have 120 businesses signed up and this number was growing weekly. Despite some negative comments by some of the press the speed the system had been brought to the public and the numbers of businesses who have signed up and are offering vouchers to residents to shop locally was impressive.

The status of Locality Boards were fluid at present and they were not sure how it would link into the existing structure. A number of objections have been raised seeking clarification on what local organisations would need to do once the locality boards came into operation. The LSP is still awaiting a response to their questions.

It was noted that Epping Forest already had very good partnership working and really did not need to add extra layers of bureaucracy to this.

Councillor Wagland the Chairman of the LSP, added that it was a shame that the press chose to criticise before they found out what was happening about the support given to local shops. Mr Houston had been travelling around and talking to shopkeepers and local businesses to get them to join up to our new website which had proved most successful and she would like to congratulate all concerned in this enterprise, which so manifestly demonstrated the Council's support for local businesses.

The meeting was then opened out for questions.

Q. Has there been any involvement of local banks as there had been criticism of a lack of investment from them to small businesses.

A. Small businesses need support and the LSP used to have a representative from Lloyds Banks onboard, he has now moved on. The Federation of Small Businesses tends to lead on this now, which we support.

Q. Were the expectations for the 'One Shops Local' too high initially?

A. We did not do a lot of publicity initially, and were looking to the Chamber of Commerce to line up the shops for us. It is up to the shops to help themselves. We started small and will continue to grow and grow. It is not a council scheme; the council was only one element in this. It was unfortunate that the local paper was not on our side, although other papers were more supportive. This site had proved to be popular and successful in a short period of time.

Q. The Local Council Liaison Committee assumed that they would be at the centre of the proposed Locality Boards. Is there any more information about how they would fit in?

A. We are anxious to have something in place and to this end we are having talks with Essex County Council. Unfortunately there is no one answer for this. Officers are currently working on a report for the next Local Councils meeting.

Q. The inability of the banks to lend money is all bound up with them being told to build up their capital. In Germany they have special banks for small businesses, do we have the same?

A. There was an initiative about 18 months ago called the Bank of Essex, but we are unsure how we could access this. We have heard that the take up was not very good.

Councillor Collins said that she had recently met with the Chief Executive of the South Essex Partnership Trust and he had said that they were happy to come and talk to one of the LSP meetings and if wanted supply someone to sit on their board.

Q. One Shop Local - have all shops and Town Centre Partnerships been informed of this?

A. Yes, we have contacted them. We are also working through the trade organisations letting them know that this website is there. Incidentally, we have found out that Epping Forest has the highest business start up rate in the Eastern Region.

Councillor Mohindra urged all Councillors to publicise this site and asked that businesses continued to make offers of vouchers via this site; this should be refreshed every week.

The Chairman thanked Mr Houston for giving his time and for his presentation.

69. BUDGET REPORT 2012/13

The Director of Finance and ICT, Bob Palmer took the committee through the budget report. The Committee considered the recommendations of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee incorporating the members of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Standing Panel, on the Council's budget for 2012/13.

The Chairman of the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel commented that they had scrutinised each Service Directorate and everything had looked reasonable. They recognised that good savings had been made over the

year, but the biggest saving came from our waste contract. Also, the new homes bonus helped. They noted that we were keeping our risks to the banks to a minimum over the next few years, and that localism could turn out to be a double edged sword.

The Committee noted that:

- Concerns were raised over the introduction of universal credits, as whatever we had to do would cost us money;
- The waste contract income was guaranteed and if it went up we would benefit from this;
- Although we were withdrawing our funding for PCSOs, Essex still had an appropriate number of PCSOs for the district; and
- It was unfortunate that £148k had to be found for the PCC elections in November, an election that no one was interested in.

RESOLVED:

That on consideration of the budget report and the deliberations of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee and Scrutiny Standing Panel members, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Budget report.

70. DRAFT KEY OBJECTIVES 2012/13

The Committee noted the draft Key Objectives 2012/13 report. Officers were looking to make them smarter and work them into the 5 key aims as agreed last March. The key objectives were not intended to reflect everything that the Council did, but were intended to focus on national priorities set by the Government and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the district.

The Chairman noted that they had not included the St Johns Road and Langston Road projects and was assured that they would be on the website where you could drill down for up to date information.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's draft key Objectives for 2012/13 be agreed and recommended to the Cabinet.

71. SENIOR RECRUITMENT TASK AND FINISH SCRUTINY PANEL - FINAL REPORT

The Chairman of the Senior Recruitment Task and Finish Panel, Councillor Angold-Stephens introduced the Panel's final report. The Panel had been tasked with reviewing the reporting procedures for the recruitment of the Chief Executive and all Directors. They looked at the reporting of complex and sensitive contracts to members and a procedure to be followed in the event of such contracts being entered into and have agreed written procedures to be put in place in time to inform the outcome of the recruitment to the position of Chief Executive.

The Panel had been set up in September 2011 and had met on three occasions. It should be noted that their remit did not include any involvement in current or forthcoming recruitment exercises except to advise on an appropriate process to be followed. They noted that there was no one process for every circumstances so they came up with a flow chart which gave options for most circumstances and would be useful for a recruitment panel to use.

The Committee asked that a minor amendment be made to a bullet point on page 12 of the report that 'and/or' be added so that it read: "Decide whether vacancy is to be advertised internally and/or externally."

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations of the Senior Recruitment Task and Finish Panel be endorsed and recommended to the Council.

72. PLANNING STANDING PANEL - REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed the Planning Services Standing Panel's report requesting a revision of their Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Terms of Reference and Work Programme for the Planning Services Standing Panel be approved.

73. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING

Work Programme

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted that as they were nearing the end of the municipal year members should start thinking of any topics they would like covered in the following years work programme.

Item 12 – that the British Transport Police (BTP) be taken from the O&S Work Programme and moved on to the Safer Cleaner Greener programme although they were not certain that the BTP would want to share this information.

That an item be added to review the North London Hospital Mergers in a years time to assess their progress and impact.

b) Standing Panels

(i) Housing Standing Panel

It was noted that:

- a special meetings had been scheduled for 31 January and 5 March to enable the Panel to finish its work programme before the end of the year;
- the outcome report on the implementation of new licences for park home sites (item 27) be deferred.

(ii) Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel

It was noted that their last meeting had to be cancelled, but an extra meeting may have to be organised before the end of the year.

(iii) Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel

At their last meeting the Panel considered a consultation document on Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council joint waste development – preferred approach. The Panel were largely happy with most of the responses given by the officers but felt that some of the responses should be more forceful and be in the negative if thought appropriate.

(iv) Planning Services Standing Panel

Noted that their revised Terms of Reference and Work Programme had just been agreed.

74. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(a) The Chairman reported that he had attended the Heads of Scrutiny meeting at Essex County Council the week before. A report of what was discussed is attached.

(b) The Chairman also noted that there was to be joint training sessions on Scrutiny with Harlow Council in March and hoped that all members involved in Scrutiny, either on this Committee or on the Standing Panels, would make an effort to attend at least one of the sessions. Members should inform Simon Hill of their intention to attend.

75. CABINET REVIEW

The Committee went into private session to consider a private Cabinet report.

76. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

(1) That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the item of business set out below as it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act indicated and the exemption was considered to outweigh the potential public interest in disclosing the information:

<u>Agenda Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Exempt Info Paragraph No</u>
20	Licence Fees payable by Hughmark Continental Ltd.	3

77. LICENCE FEES PAYABLE BY HUGHMARK CONTINENTAL LTD. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD MARKET OPERATOR

Councillor Stallan wanted a recommendation added that the unaudited accounts be reviewed before the end of the year. This was agreed.

CHAIRMAN

Report from the Essex Scrutiny Officer and Chairman Network meeting – 13th January 2012

A networking meeting for the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny functions and their officers was held at Chelmsford. The purpose of these meetings is to share information and to create a network for the Scrutiny function and to share best practices or information on how the Scrutiny function can work across district boundaries.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- We all agreed we need to engage in a top down collaboration on scrutiny matters to prevent unnecessary work and to share scrutiny findings. There were a couple of districts that had not yet engaged and these would be encouraged to participate
- It was agreed that the Officer network would share items on Forward Plan and also some information on items where they have completed some investigations or scrutiny. Simon Hill agreed to be the focus to create this.
- It was also agreed that we would share our training for member and officers schedules and if spaces are available be willing to accept people from other districts. We were also reminded that from May we need to provide a return on what members have completed what training.
- We again discussed localism and a couple of districts had done some useful work in this area and they have agreed to share their reports. Thurrock has also had a task and finish panel on Localism and how to get engaged with residents. They will share this.
- We also discussed the new Community Budget and how it will work. It is early days and there are still issues on how this will be managed. Specifically if we work to share resources for example to reduce Anti Social Behaviour this will benefit the police, save hospital time but how will the costs be apportioned?
- We all seem to have issues on Highways and we were informed that work on the new Locality Boards is in progress and an update will be provided in due course.
- Finally there was a question on the new Parking Partnerships and how they would be scrutinised. The representative from Colchester stated they would be reviewed annually. The officer network was asked to look at how this will be done and report back to the group.

Cllr Richard Bassett
EFDC, Chairman Overview and Scrutiny

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