

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW TASK AND FINISH
PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 20 MAY 2013
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.45 PM

Members Present: K Angold-Stephens (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A Grigg, Mrs M Sartin, D Stallan and Mrs J H Whitehouse

Other members present: A Lion

Apologies for Absence:

Officers Present I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), P Maddock (Assistant Director (Accountancy)), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

28. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted there were no substitute members.

29. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The notes from the 25 March 2013 meeting were agreed as a correct record.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

31. CHANGE TO AGENDA

The Panel agreed to take items 8 (Budget Monitoring by O&S) and 7 (Scrutiny of KPIs), (in that order) first.

32. BUDGET MONITORING BY O&S

The Panel noted the draft outline Budget Timetable for the 2014/15 budget, that:

- The Financial Issues paper to be published in September;
- In November the draft Growth and Savings list;
- In January an update of the Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- At the beginning of February, Cabinet to recommend next years budget to Council; and,
- At the end of February the Budget and Council Tax setting meeting to full Council.

Agreed that these steps to go to the Overview and Scrutiny meetings in the months concerned.

Councillor Lion noted that there was a link between the budget and the business plan, one drives the other. It was noted that each directorate has its own Business Plan which were put in the Members Room.

Councillor Stallan noted that the Housing Business Plan went to the Housing Scrutiny Panel. He was not sure if the other plans went to their relevant standing panels and if so, did they need to go to the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel as well. He was told that it was a statutory requirement for the Housing Business Plan to be scrutinised. The other business plans did not go to their relevant standing panels. He noted that the business plan was driven by the Cabinet forward plan. Nowadays, the Cabinet sets their key objectives in February instead of June as in previous years. At present the business plan did not drive the budget process.

The Panel thought that the F&PM Standing Panel should in the future concentrate on the targets that were not being met and the problem areas rather than the areas that were doing well and on target. The red, green and amber light system was proving useful in enabling them to do this more effectively.

Agreed that the F&PM Standing Panel consider the timing and use of the Business Plans over the next year and how this would feed into the Financial Issues Paper that came out in September.

Agreed that:

- The Finance and Performance Management Standing Scrutiny Panel should have sight of an executive summary of each of the Directorates' Business Plans; and
- The Panel should also have sight of the Financial Issues paper in September as this was the start of the budget process.

Agreed that the F&PM Standing Panel to only consider the items that were not going so well and ignore the items that were on track and doing well.

33. SCRUTINY OF KPIS

Mr Willett noted that there was not a lot of dissatisfaction with the current system of scrutinising the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at present. It was noted that:

- as part of the Best Value Duty to secure continuous improvement, KPIs relevant to the Council's services and key objectives, are adopted each year;
- KPIs are important to the improved delivery of the Council's services, should reflect the achievement of key priorities, and must be quantifiable;
- the suite of KPIs for the year ahead was agreed by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee each March, in consultation with the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel;
- detailed definitions and reporting calculations were developed for each KPI, as it had to be possible to accurately define and measure performance; and
- regular KPI reporting also provide an opportunity for members and Management Board to ensure the continued relevance of each KPI.

The Performance Improvement Manager, Mr S Tautz, noted that at present, benchmarking was not possible as it was in previous years due to the lack of the prescribed indicators. Officers did exchange data with other Essex authorities, although not all the information was gathered the same way. Target setting was somewhat difficult, but officers based their targets on previous results. The current

set of indicators had not really changed over the last few years. It was also noted that very few were statutory indicators; the council tended to use its own indicators to measure its progress.

Councillor Lion noted that they did not want too many indicators to monitor and that they had about the right amount now. He asked if the KPIs should go to the relevant Standing Panels. Councillor Stallan said that this was done at the Housing Standing Panel, where they chased up unsatisfactory KPIs and challenged the figures presented. If KPIs were to go to the relevant Standing Panels, then there was a need to educate the membership on them. Councillor Angold-Stephens added that out of the 30 or so KPIs each Panel would only have a few KPIs to monitor. Councillor Whitehouse thought that the Finance Scrutiny Panel did not scrutinise the Housing KPIs effectively as they did not have the background knowledge. She added it would be more useful if only those KPIs that were red or amber warnings should go to the relevant Standing Panel as this would be more useful.

The Panel noted that not all directorates were covered by a Standing Panel; these directorates could be covered by the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel. Other Panels could look at their own directorates KPIs and cover them in detail. The F&PM Standing Panel should have an overview of all the KPIs referring the problem ones to the relevant Panel for deeper scrutiny. It may be that red or amber KPIs may have a clear cut explanation as to why they were failing. The ones that did not have such clear cut reasons should be the ones that were carefully scrutinised by the relevant Standing Panel. It was also noted that any Standing Panel could always ask to look at individual KPIs.

Agreed that:

- The F&PM Standing Panel consider all KPIs and then refer any problem ones to the relevant Standing Panel for deeper scrutiny;
- The F&PM Standing Panel to consider all KPIs that do not naturally fall under a current Standing Panel; and
- The above are to be reviewed in a year's time by the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel.

34. PUBLIC PROFILE AND QUESTIONS

It was noted that Overview and Scrutiny at Epping has a low public profile, the public needed to be told it was there; although the webcasts of the meetings did have a good following. At a recent member consultation exercise the following was noted, that:

- The public should be involved in important issues and call-ins;
- Scrutiny of outside organisations should combine member and public questions;
- Outside venues should be used to increase public participation; and
- OS should keep alert on issues of public interest, using a 'tabloid' approach to encourage this engagement.

Nothing new came out of this consultation, as previous reviews had made these points before. What was needed now was to consider ways to do this.

It was noted that the public could address the O&S Committee at present, but only on matters that were on the agenda.

Councillor Sartin noted that the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel had tried to engage the public by holding meetings in outside venues, but the public had failed to engage with them.

Councillor Stallan said that if the matter was contentious then the public would attend. It had happened before when they had attended an O&S meeting on the Park Homes issues. It had happened although the rules for this were not enshrined in the O&S rules. It would be interesting to know who they would ask questions of at an O&S Committee meeting and if they would they be allowed to put questions to outside bodies.

Should we be more proactive and ask organisations who may have an interest in asking questions on upcoming topics, maybe draw up a list of organisations and contacts.

Would it be better to invite comments rather than questions. It may also be that members of the public were able to suggest valid topics that had not been considered by the Committee.

The Chairman invited the member of the public who attended this meeting to comment on how he saw public participation and scrutiny. He commented that he was unsure why O&S had its own logo, within the council. He noted that the public could find a large amount of information on the Council's website, although the answers that they wanted were not always on there. He thought that what people were really interested in were the basics, such as car parking charges and shops in the area. He would not expect members of the public to sit through the examination of 30 KPIs. They were more likely to be interested in the building of Council Houses, the population increase in London and how it would affect them and the changes in the national planning policy and how it was likely to affect them.

Councillor Whitehouse said that this was what she was hearing from her residents, asking about local shops and meetings on the St John's Road site.

Councillor Stallan commented that these types of request had not been referred to the O&S Committee by members. The system was there, but members were not using it. It might be a good idea for members of the public to put up topics to be discussed by O&S if they agreed. Councillor Angold-Stephens said that we may get a lot of requests about things that we could not do anything about. Councillor Stallan replied that they could use a filter system for questions that were not appropriate for O&S. The Senior Democratic Services Officer, Simon Hill, commented that they could open up the request system to a wider (public) group and they could always contact the appropriate officers or organisations even if we do not have control of the issues raised. Public requests may not always go to O&S but to the most relevant part of the Council to answer.

The Panel agreed that members of the public should have the right to attend meetings and ask questions, and not just by invitation. They also agreed that the PICK system should be used for all requests as it set out the members thoughts. Also, annual presentations, such as London Underground, should be avoided as a routine unless there have been or expected to be, new developments. They also noted that there was a need to synchronise the Council's rules about members of the public speaking across the Committees, Cabinet and Council meetings. Members of the public should be allowed to ask questions to guest speakers but not make a statement to them. The Panel also noted that Chairmen have a lot of discretion to

deal with these things and there was no real need for any new rules. Mr Willett said he would have a look at how County handled things like this.

Agreed that:

- There should not be annual presentations, just because they had it last year;
- There was a need to tell the public what they were doing by publicising meetings via the website, by the Forester and local papers;
- The public should be asked for suggestions of topics to be looked at, the PICK system should be used (?) and they should be relevant to the District Council;
- Members of the public should have the right to attend the O&S Committee, the Standing Panels and the Task and Finish Panels to ask questions and make statements;
- They should be allowed to ask questions of guest speakers but not make a statement to them;
- Chairmen already have wide discretion to enable the public to speak at their meetings; and
- There was a need to synchronise the Council's rules about members of the public speaking across the Committees, Cabinet and Council meetings.

35. WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING

The Panel considered a mechanism for approving the Overview & Scrutiny work programme each year. They considered looking at the business plan for each directorate. There was a need to set up a small steering group to look at matters before they go to O&S. They could constitute a group comprising the Standing Panel Chairmen and the Chair of O&S Committee and any T&F Panel that were extant at the time. This process should start in March or April and stop over the election period, in readiness for the new municipal year.

Agreed:

- To set up a small steering group to look at topics before they go on the work programme – this steering group to be comprised of the Chairman of the O&S Committee, the Chairmen of the Standing Panels and the Chairmen of any Task and Finish Panels that were currently extant.
- The steering group to meet in February and carry on through to the new year, stopping for the election period.

36. TRAINING

The Senior Democratic Services Officer, Simon Hill reported that he had discussed the training with Tim Young, the external trainer that would be providing the training asked for. He noted that the fundamentals of scrutiny training should be a days training and that Finance and Budget training was more appropriately held in the autumn just before the budget setting round.

Councillor Angold-Stephens commented that it was more appropriate have these on a Saturday and do it all in one go.

Mr Hill said he could include other authorities in the training on a fee basis. It could also be opened up to the newly created Tenants Scrutiny Panel and it may be that Housing could help with the cost of the training.

Financial Scrutiny and Chairing meetings to be conducted later in the year.

The Panel were happy with the training programme proposed. They thought that members should be asked about Saturday training via the Members Bulletin. This training should be offered each year that there was a district election.

Agreed that:

- the fundamentals of Scrutiny training should be held over a day;
- that it should ideally be held on a Saturday, but members should be consulted about Saturday training via the Members Bulletin;
- the members of the newly created Tenants Scrutiny Panel should be invited to this training and if there was room, the training to be opened out to other authorities on a fee paying basis;
- Finance and Budget training be held in the autumn just before the start of the budget setting round; and
- the training should be offered every year that there was a district election.

37. FURTHER CONSULTATION AND DECISION SUMMARY

The Panel thought that members should be brought up to date on the deliberations of the Panel so far. The Chairman had reported verbally to full council and would put in a holding report to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Once the Panel had finalised their recommendations, these would be put out to consultation with the members.

Other topics still to be covered by the Panel were crime and disorder and NHS scrutiny. The NHS was a County function but we could ask them if we wished to look at something specifically to do with local health issues. Crime and Disorder was presently in flux and should be sorted out within the next few months. It should be reviewed again in a year's time.

The Panel needed to refine its recommendations and how they were to consult about them. Councillor Stallan thought they should put the consultation on the website and send it to the Town and Parish Councils. They also need to give the public an opportunity to be involved in this.

Agreed that once the Panel had finalised their proposals they would go out to consultation to members and the Town and Parish Councils.

38. FUTURE MEETING

The Panel were minded to have their next meeting on 27 June 2013 (subsequent to the meeting this was moved to the 8th July at the request of the Chairman).