

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Thursday, 25 May 2006

Place: Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.35 pm

Members Present: Councillors R Morgan (Chairman) Mrs J H Whitehouse (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs P Smith, M Cohen, M Colling, R D'Souza, Mrs H Harding, P House,
G Mohindra, Mrs P Richardson and M Woollard

Other Councillors: Councillors Mrs D Borton, Mrs P Brooks, R Church, Mrs S Clapp,
Mrs A Cooper, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs D Collins, Mrs A Haigh, R Law, Mrs S Perry,
Mrs C Pond, B Sandler, D Stallan, P Turpin, Mrs L Wagland and
C Whitbread

Apologies: Councillors D Bateman

Officers Present: J Scott (Joint Chief Executive), I Willett (Head of Research and Democratic
Services), A Scott (Head of Information, Communications and Technology),
S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), S Dobson (Information
Assistant (Public Relations)) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

By Invitation: D Butler and R Neville

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed members old and new to the first meeting of the Committee for the new municipal year. He then asked Simon Hill to give a brief introduction to the new members on the aims and objectives of the Overview and Scrutiny.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16 March and 6 April 2006 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The meeting noted that Councillor Mrs P Smith was substituting for Councillor D Bateman.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting noted that there was no other business.

6. EPPING FOREST COLLEGE - PRESENTATION BY MR DAVID BUTLER, PRINCIPAL OF COLLEGE.

The Chairman welcomed David Butler, Principal of Epping Forest College and Roger Neville, the Chairman of the College Board. They were there to give a short presentation to the committee on Epping Forest College and its future plans. The invitation had arisen as a result of request made by the collage seeking to develop part of its site to facilitate redevelopment of the College Campus. A copy of their presentation is attached to these minutes for information.

The college is a charity under the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) whose permission was required for them to put their development plans into operation. The LSC also contributed £6.8m to the project. The main objective was to renew the old buildings that are now 60 to 150 years old, provide a new library for Debden, provide a new sports centre for students and the local community, to encourage students not to go to Harlow College (currently 30% of students from Epping District attend Harlow College), to expand their construction/ motor vehicle and hair and beauty facilities and to provide state of the art facilities for the 14 to 19 years olds and the 19+ facilities for local residents. They hoped to open the new facilities in September 2007.

It was noted that the majority of their students were local but they got a lot of interest from Essex County and the London Boroughs. They no longer actively recruited from London Boroughs. The bulk of their business was for the 16-18 year olds, but unfortunately the funding was being withdrawn for their adult education programme. David Butler drew the committee attention to their position in the 'School and College Achievement and attainment tables 2005', where they were placed third, after Harlow and Barnet Colleges.

On completion of their presentation they answered questions from the committee.

Q: We understand that the college has no immediate plans for development of the playing fields opposite the college in Borders Lane. It is regrettable that the proposal for the skateboard facility that was agreed with the Town Council in principle some years ago has not moved forward. Can Mr. Butler assure the Council that these plans will be progressed with due expediency bearing in mind that the youth survey some years ago put this at the top of their youth facilities wish list? Furthermore, does the college have any long-term plans for the development of the playing fields?

A: We are not sure where they currently are with these applications. I am sure the Town Council will come forward with a planning application for the skateboard park soon, and we will make one for a Sports Centre, as in our Development Plan that was submitted to you. We will also make these facilities available to the public/local community, and will include theatre facilities in the main building.

Q: During the recent District Council elections certain persons made much of perceived law and order problems in and associated with, Epping Forest College. These allegations are not new. Can Mr Butler comment on the justification of them and what steps are being taken to minimise criminal activities at the college premises and to discourage anti-social behaviour by students in Loughton outside the college?

A: Lots of teenagers will from time to time will display boisterous behaviour. The college has joined in with the recent knife amnesty, although knife crime is not a problem here. As a college of education we have no significant problems. Our Board of Governors have asked us to be tough with discipline, all students have to wear their identity cards all the time when on the premises and we also have our own security guards and liaise with the Transport Police.

Q: To what extent do you try to educate your students in good behaviour, and what practical things do you do in relation to Debden station?

A: We patrol at the station occasionally and have pastoral care and a tutorial system based on “every child matters” for the 16 to 18 years. The 14 to 16 are provided for at their own schools.

Q: There are a number of students from outside the district and you rely on your income from the LSC. Can you get subscriptions from the areas that the students come from?

A: No, full time students are funded from by the LSC, we also get extra money for students that come from deprived areas.

Q: Are the 14-16 year old students part time?

A: Yes mostly they are. We offer several schemes where we deliver courses from 1 to 3 days a week. We also deliver some courses at school sites.

Q: The 14-16 and the 16-18 year olds figures do they include the LINK scheme?

A: The 14-16 figures are not included as they are not all on site.

Q: The 16-18 year olds taking ‘A’ level courses- why are more from Chingford and not Loughton?

A: The 16-18 year olds cover the whole ability spectrum. Over the past years the North Circular has become more of a barrier. Those students north of the North Circular tends to go north and not cross it southwards into London. The schools that they come from seems to vary year to year, but we do need to attract more students from Loughton.

Q: I have had a look at your OFSTED report, which states the structure of your buildings, are challenging. What else do you do in the college for young people, mainly thinking of the 14-16 year olds and, is your web site a true representation of your college?

A: Our buildings are extremely challenging. We were originally advised that we would be in our new building by this September, it’s now September ’07 and it may yet lapse. The current students will not see these improvements. We lost a lot of students recently when one building had to be closed because of boiler failure. We do a lot to support our students and take it very seriously. We do not use the Web as much as we could; we need to do more marketing.

Q: The provision for 19+ students has decreased over the years because of Government cuts, would you agree?

A: Yes, reluctantly.

Q: What are you doing to attract new tutors?

A: We are making some redundancies this year but this is unlikely to affect the courses.

Q: Why are the police always on site with their CCTV van?

A: You would have to ask the police why. I have offered the police facilities to keep them on site, as it is not possible to keep our large site secure.

Q: How effective are you at monitoring behaviour outside the campus?

A: Less so than on site although we do patrol outside. Young people can appear to be threatening, we try to encourage good behaviour through tutorials and have vigorous discipline procedures for students.

Q: A lot of older residents tend to feel intimidated.

A: We encourage complaints from outside, helps keep us informed.

Q: How do your fees compare to Harlow?

A: There is a different regime for fees between the two colleges.

Q: What percentage of your staff comes from the Epping Forest District?

A: About 45 to 50%, that's about 200 out of 420 staff.

Q: Would you agree that getting better staff is better than getting better buildings?

A: I would agree, but new facilities/buildings help bring people in.

Q: What other ways do you market yourself?

A: We go to local schools etc. we used to actively recruit in over 100 schools, but that was not sustainable, so we now concentrate mainly on local schools.

Q: In your proposed development, how many flats are proposed?

A: The proposals that the developer may apply for are mostly houses and the usual mix of 2,3 and 4 bedroom flats for a development such as this.

Q: Will any of this housing development be built on playing fields?

A: Nearly the entire proposed site is classed as Brownfield land.

Q: Would there be a loss to the college in buildings?

A: We would be slightly down on what we have now. But what we have presently is badly designed, it cost us a lot just keeping them heated and maintained. We will now be in one building.

Q: What sort of recruitment and retention levels do you have for your staff and what sorts of courses do you have?

A: We get about 270 students that go on to higher education each year. As for recruitment and retention in the past it was as low as 2%, now about 11%, which is a natural turnover of staff. This also links in with the change in demand for courses, the types of courses change so the staff has to change. We have an expanding range of curriculum including sport, but do not specialise, as we are a general FE college.

Q: How long has the college been commercially managed?

A: Never, it is a public sector establishment, a charity. It was formed in 1993.

Q: How much of what happens next depends on the LSC?

A: Everything.

Q: You should take more responsibility for what happens outside the college. Everyone in the area is concerned about crime and its links with the college.

A: I do not accept that. Having talked with the Police, they are more concerned about what happens on Friday and Saturday nights.

The Joint Chief Executive for Community Services explained that although there was a problem with youths in the Broadway and Town Centre, police were concerned with youths coming in from London Boroughs and not necessarily from the college. The youths tend to come in from London using the free fares scheme, introduced recently by the Mayor for London.

The Chairman thanked Mr Butler and Mr Neville for their interesting presentation and helpful answers to the questions asked.

7. APPOINTMENT OF STANDING PANELS - 2006/07

The Committee were asked to make appointments to Standing Panels in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny rules. The Committee were reminded that the Council had agreed pro rata applied to Standing Panels and that membership should be kept to a minimum to allow each Group to have representation . It was noted that on this basis it had been calculated that Panels would consist of 11 Members.

It was reported that nominations to Chairman and Vice Chairman to Standing Panels were excluded from the pro rata calculation rules required for such positions contained in the Council's constitution.

RESOLVED:

That the appointments to Standing Panels annexed to these minutes be adopted.

8. APPOINTMENT OF TASKS AND FINISH PANELS - 2006/07

The Committee were asked to consider appointments to Task and Finish Panels. The Committee noted that five new panels were to be set up. A sixth panel on Travellers Issues was to continue to a conclusion from last year.

It was noted that any Member could be appointed to Task and Finish Panels. However Cabinet Members would not be able to serve on panels which bore directly on their Portfolio. In addition no panel could comprise of members of a single political group and restrictions on numbers did not apply.

Members were also asked to appoint a Chairman and Vice Chairman to each Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the appointments to Task and Finish Panels annexed to these minutes be adopted.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE REVIEW PANEL

(a) Councillor D Stallan, Chairman of the newly reconstituted Overview and Scrutiny Review panel took the committee through the recommendations made by the review panel meeting held in April 2006. The panel had been asked to meet to discuss the outcomes from the recent review seminar held in March 2006 and make any recommendations arising from the seminar to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee firstly considered and agreed the recommendations of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

(1) That panel chairmen be asked to report back to the O&S committee only when:

(i) Standing Panels have commented on a current Executive matter; or

(ii) Panels are formally reporting their findings on an issue in their work programme; or

- (iii) They are seeking changes to their memberships, working practices, terms of reference, reporting deadlines or any other significant issue;
- (2) That the Leader of the Council and other Portfolio Holders should be asked to the July Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, to outline their plans for the year ahead (see Overview & Scrutiny Procedure rules 3 (p));
- (3) That Portfolio Holders be asked to attend the O&S meetings prior to the Cabinet meetings on an exception basis – members will need to ask Democratic Services (through the O&S Committee Chairman) to ask Portfolio Holders to attend the O&S committee meeting to discuss any items that relate to their portfolio that the committee would like more information on; and
- (4) That a separate section of the Members Bulletin to be created to update members on the latest work of the O&S panels, Chairmen of the panels are to be requested to supply any updates they think appropriate – also dates of forthcoming meetings should be listed so interested members could attend if they so desired.
- (5) Recommended that no member should chair more than one panel.
- (6) That a list of the various panels and a brief description of their terms of reference be placed in the Members Bulletin to inform members of the proposed programme for next year indicating that they should contact their Group Leader regarding nominations.
- (7) That reports and investigations should include:
 - (a) Details of evidence gathered and reasons for decisions;
 - (b) Conclusions that can demonstrate outcomes for further consideration and the annual report;
- (8) That a common format for reports of Panels be devised by Democratic Services.
- (9) That no later than six months after a Task and Finish panel has finished, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should undertake a review to revisit the outcomes and progression of the recommendations made;
- (10) That Standing panels be asked to review their own recommendations on a six monthly basis;
- (11) That a rolling record of outcomes be established to keep a continuous record of recommendations made and the outcomes of those recommendations; and
- (12) That the Annual Report to be sent out to Town and Parish Councils, local libraries and to each newly elected member.
- (13) That O&S should be more proactive in requesting Public Relations to publicise Scrutiny;

(14) That an item to be added to the end of each agenda to remind chairmen to agree at their meeting if anything covered at that meeting needed to be publicised; and

(15) That Public Relations be requested to produce a draft publicity plan for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny.

(b) ROLLING RECORD OF OUTCOMES

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee then considered the draft Rolling Record of outcome form as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Review Panel and agreed above. It was envisaged that this form would be used to monitor actions taken and highlight areas where actions are required. The form would be sent to Heads of Service and other officers involved in the process and issued in the section to be set up in the Members Bulletin for Scrutiny News.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Rolling Record of Outcomes Form be adopted.

10. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING

(a) Progress Report

Environmental and Planning Standing Panel

Councillor David Stallan, Chairman of the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Panel reported on their last meeting held on 13 April 2006.

The Panel received a presentation from Keith Lawson from Essex County Council who was there to discuss the re-use of buildings in the Green Belt.

The panel had also agreed to set up a sub group to undertake fact finding visits on Neighbourhood and Community Wardens and it would be open to any member who wished to attend. An invitation would be put in the Members Bulletin.

Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel

In the absence of Councillor A Green, the Senior Democratic Services Officer reported that the meeting held on 25 April 2006 had approved the format and structure of the Councils Draft Best Value Performance Plan 2006/07, with the exception that the Customer Charter be placed nearer the front of the document.

(b) Updated Schedule

The Committee noted the updated schedules.

(c) New Request for Consideration

The committee reviewed the new requests for consideration making the following allocations.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Review of Civic Ceremonial be allocated to the Constitutional and Members Services Standing Panel;
- (2) That the size of wheeled bins proposal be allocated to the Environmental and Planning Standing Panel – it was noted that this was not to scrutinise the principle of having wheeled bins, just the size of the bins and the recycling of aluminium foil. Councillor Cohen made a plea that the public be encouraged to shred their paper waste to avoid the possibility of identity theft; and
- (3) That the review of Cabinet Arrangements be allocated to the Constitutional and Members Services Standing Panel.

11. CABINET AGENDA - 5 JUNE 2006

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse expressed concern about item 11 on the Cabinet agenda 'Proposals for Re-tendering the Car Parking Contract', in so far that no members input had been sought and she asked that the Portfolio Holder be asked to attend a future meeting of the Town Centre and Car Parks Task and Finish Panel to discuss the proposed contract.

CHAIRMAN