

Report to Council

Date of meeting: 17 December 2013

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny report to Council – December 2013

Contact for further information: Councillor R Morgan



Recommendation:

That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report from November 2013 to the present be noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 26 November 2013

1. At our meeting on Tuesday, 26 November 2013 we received a consultation document from Essex County Council on the future of their Children's Centres. To aid us in our deliberations we had Stav Yiannou, the ECC Lead Strategic Commissioner on Early Years Education and Learning; and Stacy Randall, Spurgeon's Regional Manager. They gave us a short talk on the background to these cuts and the rationale to their proposals. We noted that this consultation ends on 5 December and was about making £2.5m of savings from the Children Centres Budget from 2014/15.
2. We also unusually, had two public speakers on this topic who helpfully gave us their views on the proposals.
3. After a long debate and cross questioning of the two officers the Committee endorsed the draft response prepared by our officers. We also noted that members could respond individually to the consultation.
4. We then received a presentation from some members of the Youth Council who took us through their last year's activities, giving us an overview of the things that they had got up to in their time as a Youth Councillor. We noted that the Councillors were elected for a two year period and that they were all now in their second year of office. Youth Volunteering had been a big theme for them during the year and as young volunteers themselves they were passionate about encouraging other young people to volunteer.
5. We then considered the Cabinet Agenda for their meeting held on 2 December 2013. Councillor Murray commented on agenda item 9 the sale of Church Hill Car Park. He was surprised that the report said that it was an un-kept site that would benefit from a tidy up, as he noted that we were the owners of the site. He also wanted assurance that 40% of affordable housing be maintained and that it would also be helpful to have a meaningful definition of what was meant by affordable housing.
6. Councillor Angold-Stephens commented in relation to agenda item 10 on the Cabinet agenda, the potential strategy options for council property assets. He wanted an assurance that the ward councillors would be consulted on this before it went to the Cabinet Committee.

7. Councillor Chambers commented on agenda item 17 – Safeguarding Audit and Resource Requirements. He thought that the recommendations were slightly too rigid and wondered if the Council could look at sharing services, such as sharing safeguarding officers with other authorities.

8. We next considered the report reviewing the new Licensing procedures. We noted that this had initially gone to the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel the week before, where they agreed that:

- evening meetings should be discontinued;
- scrap metal dealers licence be heard at the daytime meetings;
- the chairman should decide if an evening meeting was needed in conjunction with the relevant ward members; and
- the report to Cabinet for the increase in the budget for extra Licensing and Democratic Services staff b e endorsed.

On consideration the Committee agreed this report and the amended recommendations.

9. We then considered the Corporate Plan Key Objectives for 2013/14 and the quarter 2 progress made, which we noted. We also considered the final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Panel which recommended lots of small and some major amendments to the Overview and Scrutiny procedures and consequently to the Council's Constitution. We agreed the report with some amendments. This report is on this agenda for consideration and approval. Some adjustment to the dates of the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will alter the Calendar of Meetings may be needed.

10. Finally we noted the 'Allocations of Costs' report produced by a sub-group of the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel and noted that it would be making its way to an appropriate meeting of the Finance Cabinet Committee. We reviewed our work programme for the last six months and appointed a new member to the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel, Councillor Mann to replace the late Councillor Finn.