

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING SERVICES STANDING
SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 26 JUNE 2006
IN CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 10.45 PM

Members Present:	Mrs P Smith (Chairman), D Kelly (Vice-Chairman), D Bateman, Councillor Mrs D Borton, Mrs A Cooper, D Jacobs, A Lee, G Mohindra, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs L Wagland and J Wyatt
Other members present:	K Angold-Stephens, Mrs A Grigg, S Metcalfe, Mrs M Sartin, P Spencer, D Stallan, Ms S Stavrou and Mrs J H Whitehouse
Apologies for Absence:	(none)
Officers Present	J Scott (Joint Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Head of Environmental Services), J Preston (Head of Planning and Economic Development), D Marsh (Principal Team Leader (Waste)) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)
Also in attendance:	Inspector G Mayes (Essex Police), Ms J Brooker - Wood (Eastern Warden Resource Centre), Ms J Hill (Eastern Warden Resource Centre) and Ms E Spencer (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

No substitute Members were reported.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made pursuant to the Council Code of Member Conduct.

3. NOTES OF LAST MEETING - 13 APRIL 2006

Noted.

4. NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS - DISCUSSION WITH POLICE AND EASTERN WARDEN RESOURCE CENTRE

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Glenn Mayes the Project Manager for the Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Programme at Essex Police and the Community Safety Accreditation scheme. She also welcomed Ms J Hill and Ms J Brooker – Wood of the Eastern Neighbourhood Resource Centre.

Noted background information produced by central government.

Councillor Mrs J H Whitehouse outlined the background and reason for her request aimed at achieving a cleaner and safer District possible through the use of wardens or other means if more appropriate. This related to the issue of whether Fixed Penalty Notices should be used by the Council to deal with such issues and if so whether Community Wardens or PCSOs should be used to issue them. Councillor

Mrs Whitehouse also circulated a letter sent to her by a resident identifying issues for consideration and possible solutions.

Inspector Mayes reported the following points:

- (a) the PCSO scheme was funded by the Home Office whereas the Neighbourhood Warden initiative was ODPM supported which complicated funding. In areas where a joint approach between the services had been pursued as in Colchester, Thurrock and Southend the schemes had worked well and could offer a complete service to enhance quality of life and community safety. A part time Parish/ Urban Ranger scheme operated in Braintree, however had suffered from a lack of joint working from the onset;
- (b) wardens could be accredited under the Community Safety Accredited Scheme giving them police powers in addition to those in the Cleaner Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and detailed in a pack circulated and available in the Members Room. Wardens with these powers would receive a badge and must be uniformed. There was no charge for the accreditation process however employees were screened and would not be credited if any issues were identified which could present issues in itself. The Chief Constable at Essex Police had accredited all PCSOs match funded by the Council giving them the available powers including enforcement of by laws etc save three which he listed. The Head of Environmental Services clarified that accredited officers must be uniformed for enforcement action;
- (c) police numbers had risen and further increases were planned;
- (d) the measures available to wardens were aimed at protecting the environment – PCSOs focused on public order. Wardens could demand a name and address. Wardens did not have the ability to detain a suspect for 30 minutes which PSCOs could. It was doubtful whether they would want this provision as it might leave them vulnerable to assault;
- (e) Community Wardens were able to access police resources. The make up of the Essex Police PCSO establishment was 45/55% male female with 257 part time employees. There was no such thing as a standard 'Fixed Penalty Notice' as they were dealt with on a case by case basis;

The meeting consider the costs to the Council attached to employing Community Wardens and the cost of PSCOs. The meeting questioned whether the costs of employing wardens could be recovered by their services or whether it would be more economically to focus on implementing the provisions in the legislation through PSCOs.

It was clarified that parking enforcement was not dealt with by the Police however obstruction was. A Member expressed concern over the police response to obstruction. There were no plans to give Community Wardens powers to deal with this area. Representations on this however were welcomed. A Member expressed concern at the slow police response to an incident in Brook Parade, Chigwell and incidents of anti-social behaviour. Inspector Mayes reported on how intelligence was gathered to tackle these issues often caused by persistent offenders.

Following Inspectors Mayers report, Ms Jane Brooker – Wood from the Eastern Warden Resource Centre set up through a ODPM grant to promote Neighbourhood Wardens initiative across Essex reported the following perspective:

- (a) following initial problems arising from a lack of joint working as mentioned earlier schemes were now working better and benefiting from the new powers given to them through accredited status. Colchester had taken action to publicise their new powers as a deterrent and as a result have not needed to use them.
- (b) Thurrock had created a new team of Environmental Enforcement Officers. This was neither a Warden or a PCSO scheme but an interim arrangement and not accredited. Initially the service was slow to pursue Fixed Penalty Notices as they were not found to be self sustaining, however they had made significant progress with fly tipping which was a significant problem in the area. A 'Community Caretaker' was also being used to deal with problems such as litter abandoned vehicles etc. The teams in Thurrock focused on specific areas within a set radius which helped monitoring.
- (c) there was still money available in the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund within Local Area Agreements for the provision of local wardens. Ms Brooker – Wood undertook to follow this up and report back.
- (d) initial steps should focus on identifying problems and then solutions. If the main issues were say litter, dog fouling then Community Wardens might be more appropriate than additional PCSOs;
- (d) experience suggested it was questionable whether wardens could ever raise sufficient revenue to make them worthwhile financially , however consideration needed to be given to whether this could be offset by the real benefits they could bring in terms of providing a service to the community and a cleaner neighbourhood.
- (e) A good line of support between wardens and police teams was key to a successful team.

The examples demonstrated that there were many alternatives available. Each had been established for different reasons to deal with local circumstances.

The website for the centre was www.thurrock.gov.uk/wardens.

A member raised the possibility of attracting private company sponsorship to help cover the costs of wardens should this be pursued.

ACTION:

The Head of Environmental Services reported that the Council had yet to adopt the relevant provisions in the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act 2005 giving it the ability to issue Fixed Penalty Notices to deal with environmental crime. Consideration still needed to be given to how the Council should deal with the draft list of offences in the act.

Specifically, consideration needed to be given to:

- (a) identifying the problems in the District;

- (c) which if any of the new powers needed to be adopted to solve the above?
- (d) the costs associated with the various measures available?
- (e) should an in-house wardens scheme be recommended to deal with this or more joint funding for further CSPOs?

Agreed that fact finding visits be arranged to explore warden scheme elsewhere. Suggested that Colchester, Thurrock, Chelmer Housing Association and Braintree District Council be visited.

Agreed that a smaller sub-group open to all Members carry out these visits. Councillors Mrs Borton, Mohindra, Mrs Whitehouse, Wyatt and Spencer agreed to be members of the sub group. Noted that the visits would probable take place in the day time in August 2006. Ms Brooker – Wood undertook to help this.

Agreed that an item be put in the Members Bulletin.

5. WEST ESSEX AREA WASTE MANAGEMENT JOINT COMMITTEE - DECISION SUMMARIES

The Panel considered the summaries.

The Head of Environmental Services reported that central government had revised the rules governing bids for PFI in light of two major surveys. This was to open up the market place to smaller providers and asked that Local Authorities adopt a broader view on the collection process. The County had now to determine whether to pursue the PFI option. In relation to collection integration issues, steps continued with other collection Authorities in West Essex to facilitate the disposal process which all remained committed to. It was now unlikely now that one collection contractor would be pursued for West Essex given the diverse mix of issues and geographic size of the areas, however collections authorities were committed to ensuring that their aims and methods were approximately the same. The Panel noted the decision summaries.

6. RE - USE OF BUILDINGS IN GREEN BELT

The Head of Planning and Economic Development reported that due to other pressures on their time, officers had not been able to produce the information requested at the last meeting on cases submitted for change of use in rural areas neither had they been able to obtain the County study on the subject referred to at that meeting. A Member expressed concern over the slow progress being made with the review and stressed the need for a traffic count to inform the review.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered their work programme.

(a) Item 2 (New Local Development Scheme)

The Council had received the Inspectors report. It was anticipated that the information would be finalised in advance of the Cabinet meeting in July 2006 and the Portfolio Holder would sign it off before then beating the 21 June 2006 deadline.

He suggested that further information on the process could be obtained from Ian White in Planning Services.

(b) Item 4 (East of England Plan) Examination in Public Panels report

The Head of Planning and Economic Development reported that the Panel had reported on the examination last week. A full report on this would be submitted to Members for consideration and scrutiny involvement.

He reported that the Leader of the Council, Mrs D Collins and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development gave a media briefing earlier in the day on the proposals. He circulated a copy of the media release produced by planning advising that the Panel had recommended that the house figures for the District be revised down from 18,600 to 6,500. It further indicated that the Stansted – M11 Growth corridor was no longer a named sub-region and that further growth in Harlow should focus on regeneration. The recommendations stated that the Panel had not endorsed North Weald as a suitable location for 6,000 new homes.

The report also indicated that Harlow would be expanded by the Green Belt review which could impact on the District. Furthermore infrastructure issues were still outstanding. It was cautioned that these were not final decisions thus they might be revised upwards at a later date.

Noted that the government was expected to publish its decisions in November 2006 following a further twelve week consultation period during which the Council were able to make a further response. It was emphasised that the Council should submit a response to these proposals before the Secretary of State formulated final decisions to maximise impact **Recommended** that a Member information session be held to consider the Council's response.

Noted that a current position report would be made to the next Panel meeting in August 2006.

(c) Review of Wheeled Bin Policy

Noted that in May 2006 the OSC added to the Panels work programme the task of reviewing the Council's policy on the size of wheeled bins and the recycling of foil. This request was initially raised by Councillor Mrs Whitehouse and in a motion of Council in April 2006. The Head of Environmental Services reported the current criteria for issuing wheeled bins as detailed in this weeks Members Bulletin. The Portfolio Holder for Customer Services Media Communications and ICT, Councillor Metcalfe reported that this more relaxed approach was generating positive results and had relieved some of the pressures on the system. **Agreed** that the policy be reviewed in six months time. The Portfolio Holder requested information on the different streams available for recycling.

The Head of Environmental Services reported that officers had been asked to put together a user guide on the new collection service and were pursuing this. It was intended that the service would be implemented throughout the District by the end of the calendar year and that details of the full schedule was available.

The Panel stated that the new service was an improvement and wished to thank officers for the smooth transition over to the scheme.

ACTION:

Democratic Services to update the work programme.

8. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No reports to be made.

9. FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on 29 August 2006 at 7.30 pm in Committee Room 1.