

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF LEISURE TASK AND FINISH SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2006
IN THEATRE RESOURCES, ONGAR ARTS AND EDUCATION CENTRE, GREAT
STONE, HIGH STREET, CHIPPING ONGAR
AT 7.00 - 9.05 PM**

Members Present: , , Mrs P Brooks (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), M Colling, Mrs A Grigg (Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder), S Murray, Mrs P K Rush and Mrs P Smith

Other members present: Mrs D Collins and C Whitbread

Apologies for Absence: Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, J Markham and J M Whitehouse

Officers Present D Macnab (Head of Leisure Services), Mrs L MacNeill (Assistant Head of Leisure Services), J Chandler (Sports Development Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance:

29. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

Noted that there were no substitute members for this meeting.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor S Murray declared a general personal but non-prejudicial interest by virtue of being the Council's representative on the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve Management Committee and the nature reserve having a partnership with Roding Valley High School.

Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor Mrs Grigg declared a general personal but non-prejudicial interest by virtue of being the Council's representative on the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve Management Committee.

31. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING - 28 SEPTEMBER 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2006 was agreed as a correct record.

32. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted the Terms of Reference and Work Programme, which they considered still to be relevant and would not require any amendment.

33. FEEDBACK FROM MEETING WITH GRANGE FARM TRUST

The Head of Leisure Services reported on a meeting he had recently undertaken with the head of the Grange Farm Trust about the future management of the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve and the consensus reached by this Panel that the Essex Wildlife Trust should have their contract renewed for a period of twenty years. He noted that the Grange Farm Trust was shortly to sign up to a Section 106 agreement to increase the size of the site and to put in an 'Interpretation Centre'. They had held a dim view of the Essex Wildlife Trust in the past but not anymore. The Head of Leisure Services explained why Epping Forest DC could not take over the managing of the site and that the Corporation of London may not be legally able to do it. The Farm Trust indicated that they would like to provide some improvements to the site and would like a further meeting with EFDC to discuss it.

34. WALTHAM ABBEY SPORTS CENTRE - FUTURE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The Head of Leisure Services reported that he had another meeting with the Head of King Harold's School, the bursar and the head of the Board of Governors. The school showed some interest in what a third party arrangement would mean for the management of the sports centre. They were taken through the key issues on contract specifications and informed on how the contractor might generate profits by increasing usage of the centre. It could be that the Council would run the contractor and the school would not need to get involved. The contract would run up to 2013 and up from 2013 to 2016 the contract would run on a performance basis. EFDC have now sent the school our standard contract specifications for them to study. The Council would need to go through a competitive process for a new contract and would also need to vet any company that puts in a bid. As there was only 10 months left any moves towards competitive tendering would have to be done fairly swiftly.

There was distinct resistance to a direct management approach to the centre.

It was noted that it may be useful to arrange for King Harold School to meet other schools that have a similar partnership arrangement and talk to them.

35. TOUR OF GREAT STONEY, ONGAR ARTS AND EDUCATION CENTRE AND INSIGHT INTO THE WORK OF THEATRE RESOURCE

The Director of Theatre Resources, Jeff Banks welcomed the Panel to the Theatre Resources centre and gave a brief outline the history of the group. It is a registered Educational Charity and Arts organisation that was set up in 1990, and was originally based at Waltham Abbey. The objectives of the organisation is to provide Arts and Education for the community, covering all art forms and to provide a specialist organisation for developing arts and education for disabled and other socially excluded people and groups.

Currently they have 16 staff at the Theatre Resource group and offer about 70 contracts a year to outside/visiting tutors. Their turnover is about £600,000 per annum; mostly raised from commissioning projects, with about 16% coming from local authority grants (including EFDC). Last year they worked with about 60 partners and fundraisers.

The building currently occupied by the group in Chipping Ongar acts as a base for them to run their various projects. They currently have a long-term plan to develop

the centre and provide a studio theatre, and more and better teaching space. They would like to bring together disabled persons in residential courses who would need a high degree of physical accessibility. They currently use Wickens House, for the residential courses, but this facility may close soon.

The group also provides supportive employment opportunities for people with disabilities, a number of staff are disabled, and they would ideally like the building to be run and managed by people with disabilities.

Theatre Resources have a long relationship with EFDC, going back to 1990 and have worked closely with Epping Forest Arts. As there are two arts structures in the District they would like to propose that Theatre Resources support either all or part delivery of the Epping Forest Arts services. They would welcome the chance to talk to EFDC about making their partnership closer. They could provide a specialist service and a range of activities for local people and would welcome the chance to strengthen their ties with the District.

Mr Banks was asked if the group could raise extra money successfully, he replied that they are looking at some big fund-raisers, but firstly they will provide development funding to show what they can do. As for having a solid financial background, 'Future Builders for England' have been scrutinising them for the last two years and are looking to raise £900,000 for them.

When asked if they had worked with Mencap, Mr Banks replied that they work with a lot of local groups and have worked with Mencap, Essex, as they tend to work to a larger catchment area than just district level. They recently did a project with young people from across Essex and Hertfordshire, and tend to work regionally.

Asked if the group was disadvantaged because of the bad public transport routes in the district. Mr Banks agreed that public transport is appalling in the area, they had run courses where the taxi bill to transport the children to the venue equalled all the other costs of the course. This is one of the reasons why they would like to be able to deliver residential courses. They have two types of market for their courses; one for children through to adults and the other is for the people who work with those people. There are also a lot of outside organisations who want to hire their facilities.

Asked if they integrate able-bodied children with disabled children, Mr Banks replied that most groups like to work with people of their own level and ability. But they also run courses where they integrate the abilities of the participants.

At this point the group was taken on a tour of the rooms and facilities of the Theatre Resources building.

36. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was raised.

37. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

A suitable date for the next meeting is to be identified and agreed with the Chairman and lead officer of the Panel.