

## **STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **10 FEBRUARY 2009**

*Present :-* Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)  
Councillors Nick Barlow, Mark Cory, Pauline Hazell,  
Peter Higgins, Mike Hogg, Margaret Kimberley,  
Kim Naish, Gaye Pyman, Nick Taylor and Julie Young

### **36. Minutes**

The minute of the meeting held on 16 December 2008 was confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendment;

The resolution to minute 29 Performance Related Pay for Cabinet Members to read "RESOLVED that the panel would not recommend the introduction of a scheme to provide for an apportionment of the Cabinet Member Special Responsibility Allowance to be linked to performance".

The minute of the meeting held on 6 January 2009 was confirmed as a correct record.

**Councillor Julie Young (in respect of being a Member of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

**Councillor Peter Higgins (in respect of his wife being a Member of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

### **37. Greenways Care Home**

Councillor David Finch, Portfolio Holder for Adults, Health and Community Well Being, Essex County Council and Ms. Liz Chidgey, Deputy Director, Adults, Health and Community Well Being, Essex County Council attended the meeting for this item.

Councillor J Young addressed the panel to explain the reason for the Council motion, that was unanimously passed, subject to an agreed amendment. There were concerns that individuals at the Greenways Care Home were receiving poor treatment, a view shared at Essex County Council, and the motion asked for the current situation to be reviewed to ensure individuals were being adequately cared for, whether the daytime care services are to continue and what was the long term future for the site.

In response to Councillor J Young, Councillor Finch addressed the panel, thanking them for inviting him to attend the meeting. Councillor Finch said he considered all residential care homes in Essex to be very important and of equal importance. Councillor Finch explained that his portfolio was responsible for an annual budget of £500 million, and included 400 care homes looking after the well being of 10,000 residents. Essex County Council had its own Quality Assurance Team responsible for inspecting and assessing all Essex care homes (completing 150 inspections last year),

and a Protection of Vulnerable Adults Team (PVA).

In regards to Greenways, Councillor Finch said there had been a closure and sensible relocation of residents to other homes and he was pleased to advise the panel that to his knowledge, everyone that was moved is pleased with their new residence. Councillor Finch pointed out that ten Essex homes previously owned by Essex County Council, such as Greenways, had moved to private ownership, and generally the quality of care was higher at these homes than had previously been experienced, and he was pleased with the care provided at these homes.

Councillor Finch said his intention was a desire to see Greenways reopened, once it had been substantially refurbished, on the understanding that Greenways management had confirmed that they can run to strict standards of care expected. The county's Quality Assurance Team was there to ensure the high standards required are upheld. Councillor Finch confirmed that Essex County Council's responsibility for the contractual arrangements of care homes in Colchester was complicit with Colchester Borough Council's Planning approval.

Councillor Finch, aided by Ms. Chidgey, responded to questions from councillors.

In response to Councillor Smith, Ward Councillor for St John's, Councillor Finch said Councillor J Young was briefed about what was to happen at Greenways, as unfortunately, Councillor Young was mistakenly believed to be County Councillor for Parsons Heath and East Gates. Councillor Finch apologised for this error, saying this was rectified with an apology going to Councillor T Higgins. Councillor Finch said in situations like this it would be the County Councillor who would be advised, and it would be expected that the County Councillor would advise their ward councillors accordingly.

Councillor J Young confirmed that she had been advised of the situation, but believing this information to be sensitive and given to her in confidence, did not think at the time it was her responsibility to share this information.

Councillor Arnold said given ward councillors are advised by the Highways Agency on highways work, there was no consistency with this issue where it was considered appropriate to only advise the County Councillor. Councillor Arnold asked that Councillor Finch considers that in the future advice on local issues was given to all locally elected representatives.

Councillor Finch said the intention of the Greenways refurbishment was to bring the care home up to a much higher and proper standard, compliant with all regulations, and it was envisaged that the home would reopen in between 9 to 12 months time. Councillor Finch later confirmed to Councillor Kimberley that by refurbishment he meant the site was to be rebuilt, not to be redeveloped, and to Councillor T Higgins, that it was intended that Greenways would be a '70 bed' model.

In regards to Councillor Smith's comment that the management at Greenways have done much to obstruct the work of ward councillors, Councillor Finch said this was a matter for councillors and Greenways, and for the councillors to make the appropriate representations to the home. Councillor Finch was happy to endorse a good

neighbourly approach and confirmed that it was illegal to withhold mail from residents. Councillor Finch also confirmed that whilst Greenways owned the site of the Greenways Care Home, Essex County Council held a covenant on the property, and any breach in the provision and quality of the services provided would be a breach of contract.

In response to Councillor Kimberley, Councillor Finch said whilst he was mindful of the standard of care being provided by the staff and the physical state of the building, there was no facts to support recent press articles. It was confirmed that the new Greenways Care Home would be commissioned by Essex County Council, with the service delivery undertaken by Greenways.

In response to Councillor Hogg, Councillor Finch said the cost of the new build would be born by Greenways, not Essex County Council, and given the economic downturn and builders prepared to prune prices, the cost of the rebuild should not be an issue.

In response to Councillor J Young, Councillor Finch said once Greenways reopens, the level of dementia care would remain the same but with a better standard of dementia nursing. It was confirmed that the tribunal for the 'Serious Case Review' would be reaching a conclusion in late April, early May. Councillor Finch said that if evidence could be produced that suggested mail was not going to the recipients, Essex County Council would take this issue up with the Greenways management. Councillor Finch's advice to families who believed mail was not going to their relatives in care should talk to their local County Councillor who could write to the Portfolio Holder on the family's behalf, and who would in turn explore the concerns raised.

Councillor Arnold said he would like to see the Portfolio Holder consider enforcing local care homes to display in the care home's entrance, a list of contacts for resident's families to contact when the need arises.

Councillor Finch concluded the discussion by saying he would be happy to return to the panel to brief members on the progress of the Greenways Care Home at the end of 2009.

Councillor Arnold thanked Councillor Finch and Ms. Chidgey for attending the meeting.

*RESOLVED* that the panel;

- i) Considered and noted the responses from County Councillor Finch, Portfolio Holder for Adults, Health and Community Well Being.
- ii) Asked Councillor Finch to consider that in the future advice from Essex County Council on local issues was given to both County and ward Councillors.
- iii) Asked Councillor Finch to consider enforcing local care homes to display in the care home's entrance, a list of specific contacts for resident's families to contact when the need arises.
- iv) Welcomed an update from Councillor Finch on the progress of the Greenways Care Home at the end of 2009.

### **38. Decisions taken under special urgency provisions**

*RESOLVED* that the panel noted the decision taken under special urgency provisions, decision 'Review of key issues relating to the visual arts facility capital project – COM-001-08'

### **39. Work Programme**

Mr. Robert Judd, Scrutiny Officer, presented the Work Programme to the panel.

*RESOLVED* that the panel agreed;

- i) To note the 2008-09 rolling Work Programme
- ii) That the final report on the New Build Nuclear Power Station at Bradwell would be presented to the panel at the meeting of 7 April 2009.
- iii) To an extra meeting of the panel on 28 April 2009, to discuss the partnership arrangements with Firstsite.
- iv) That the responsibilities of a portfolio holder under review, would be published in the agenda of the meeting prior to review date.
- v) That in future the portfolio holders under review would be asked, for expediency, and for the panel to retain control of the process, to keep their presentations within a timeframe of ten minutes.

### **40. Scrutiny Report**

Mr. Robert Judd, Scrutiny Officer presented the Scrutiny Report to the panel, explaining that this was the panel's opportunity to comment on the report to go to Council, for Council to form an opinion of the effectiveness of the scrutiny function at Colchester.

Councillor J Young said the report was comprehensive and a good reflection of the work of both scrutiny panels in the period May 2007 to December 2008.

*RESOLVED* that the panel considered and noted the Scrutiny report.

**Councillor Julie Young (in respect of her husband being the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

#### **41. Review of the work of the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services**

Councillor T Young, Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services attended the meeting for this item and addressed the panel.

Councillor Young explained the progress and successes in the work of the services that fall within the remit of his portfolio, such as, the improvements to waste collection, such as average amount of kilograms of waste per home down from last year, an increase in garden waste collected, up to 4,700 tonnes, and an overall improvement in the collection of recyclables by 11%, and all in waste collection vehicles with new livery.

Street Cleaners uniforms now advertised the slogan to 'Keep Colchester Clean', priority would now be given to provide additional waste litter bins to the town centre, and town centre food outlets are now being instructed on their responsibilities for disposing of litter and waste. In and around the borough, abandoned vehicles are now removed immediately, cleaning blitzes have now been resurrected for 'hot spot' areas, and the Lion Walk Toilets have now been refurbished and recently won a 'Loo of the year award'

Funding was now secure to refurbish the Dedham Toilets and for the resources needed to improve the collection of recycling waste from blocks of flats.

As a member of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Councillor Young said the aims of the partnership's strategy are on track, and improvements have been made to the High Street Taxi Rank at night time, in an effort to avoid disorder.

Councillor Young confirmed that there are 50 new dog bins being provided for the borough, and improvements to the stray dog scheme are being considered, as well as improved training and instruction on food safety and hygiene to all food outlets.

In response to Councillor P Higgins, Councillor Young confirmed that ward councillors would be informed about the change programme for the collection of recyclable waste from blocks of flats, with £200,000 allocated to this in the 2009-10 Budget, that would allow for the provision of a special collection vehicle. There was a potential for this new scheme to increase the Council's overall recycling rate by 5%, and therefore meet the overall Government recycling target.

In response to Councillor Kimberley, Councillor Young said all the staff associated with the waste service have been pulling out all the stops to deliver the new waste programme, and he paid tribute to these staff who he said are doing an excellent job. Councillor Young confirmed that the new recycling option appraisal report would be presented to a scrutiny panel for review prior to the decision taken at Cabinet. Councillor Young also assured members that whilst the sale costs for recyclable materials had dropped due to the economic downturn, he was not concerned that this would have a too greater impact on the waste service revenues.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Councillor Young said that the collection of recyclable materials in plastic sacks had helped increase Colchester's recycling rates by 4-5 per cent, but this was only a short term solution. This had helped get the message to

residents that Colchester was committed to recycling, but a long term solution was still needed. Councillor Young said the three year plan within the Strategic Plan, to increase recycling rates from a current figure of 39.3% to 50% in three years time would be challenging, but he hoped the budget decisions to be made would allow the investment to be needed for Colchester's results to improve to a level only achieved by the best local authorities. Councillor Young believed a 70% recycling rate was an aspiration, but would not be achievable in the short term.

Councillor Young confirmed to Councillor Arnold that the money set aside in the Budget would be for the procurement of the new dog bins only, that the servicing of these bins would come from within existing resources, with enforcement on litter picking hopefully reducing the amount of litter to be cleared up, and thereby freeing resources.

Councillor Young confirmed to Councillor Naish that the Council had been successful in the enforcement on fly tipping, with a number of successful prosecutions, and agreed to share this information with members of the panel.

Councillor Young confirmed to Councillor Hogg that an agreed definitive list of where the new dog bins are to be sited would be provided to all ward councillors once available. Councillor Young said he was surprised as other councillors concerning an article in a ward letter confirming that that ward would be receiving two new dog bins, when as he stated previously, the definitive list would be made available to all councillors in approximately two weeks time. Councillor Young said he would take up the issue of the newsletter article with Cabinet members.

In response to Councillor Barlow, Councillor Young said people's perception of what is and what is not clean are different, but his perception of the Town Centre was that it was now cleaner than it had been for several years. Councillor Young also said he understood the issues still being raised by councillors in respect of the problems in the town centre during the period of the night time economy, and stating this was not a political issue but something that effected everyone, he hoped the task and finish group set up to review the night time economy would provide radical proposals that would make the town centre an attractive and safe place to visit for visitors and local people.

*RESOLVED* that the panel;

- i) Noted the responses from the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services and thanked him for attending the meeting.
- ii) Requested the Portfolio Holder provide information on the number of successful littering and fly tipping notices and prosecutions made for 2007-08 and 2008-09.

#### **42. Review of the work of the Portfolio Holder for Communications and Customers**

Councillor Hunt, Portfolio Holder for Communications and Customers attended the meeting for this item and addressed the panel.

Councillor Hunt gave a presentation on the progress and successes in the work of the services that fall within the remit of his portfolio.

Councillor Hunt spoke about the 'Jewel in the Crown' of Customer Excellence, the Customer Services Centre, placing customers at the heart of what we do, but who due to the economic downturn had seen an increase and change in the mix of enquiries at the Centre, for example, with Council Tax and Housing Rent benefits up by 76% and Planning enquiries down by 35%.

In regards to Communication, Councillor Hunt said the SOS Bus was to be used to take information on the 'Credit Crunch' out to the wards, especially those wards with greater need and suffering deprivation, and articles are to appear in the Courier giving advice and contacts for people in need.

Councillor Hunt said the Courier, that went out to 91% of households was to continue into 2009-10 with a four monthly publication, at a cost of £11,000, though it was to return to its original A3 format, and the publication 'Common Ground' that keeps in touch with the parishes was also to continue into 2009-10 at a cost of £579 per issue, with forthcoming discussions to ensure the content provides what the parishes want.

In reference to the Council's culture of change, Councillor Hunt spoke about the 'Way We Work Programme', about the staff's relocation from Angel Court to Rowan House, where discussions and progress are running smoothly and on target. Improvements to ICT (Information Communication Technology) was progressing that would ultimately only require 30% of floor space currently needed for 'Server' rooms. It was confirmed that the 'shared desk' scheme was progressing well, with the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) aiding those in a flexible and transient working environment.

Councillor Hunt said a new look Council Website was to be introduced in the summer of 2009, with a state of the art customer enquiry service, for example, for the planning service.

In response to Councillor Barlow, Councillor Hunt said it was planned for all staff at Angel Court to be relocated to Rowan House by the Christmas 2009, and all staff issues concerning this move and the overall office changes are being discussed between staff and the Executive Management Team, and fed into the Monthly Accommodation Board meetings.

In regards to the Visual Arts Facility, Councillor Hunt, in response to Councillor Higgins, said as a Member of the Firstsite:Newsite Partnership Board, there are regular monthly meetings with involvement from all the partners, Arts Council East, East of England Development Agency, The Council and Essex County Council, to discuss progress and strategy, and regular meetings with Townsend and Turner, The Council, the architects and contractor about progress of on-site work. Councillor Hunt believed the outstanding work could be done more reasonably than the quoted figure of £7.5 million, and was confident the project would be completed by the deadline, though there are penalty clauses in place should the deadline not be met.

In response to Councillor Naish, it was confirmed that the SOS Bus information service

would be communicated to local residents via The Courier, press statements and local radio. In later response to Councillor Taylor, Councillor Hunt said the SOS Bus visits would be planned based on need, determined through statistical data, and a schedule of the timetable would be produced.

Councillor Hunt said he could see the attraction in Councillor J Young's suggestion of sharing publications with other organisations that would still get the message across but with shared costs had the potential to save money. Councillor Hunt said he would ask the Communications Team to investigate this suggestion.

Councillor Hunt concurred with the comment of Councillor Arnold that for interested partner organisations and bodies to be read about the cutting of the post concerning the work of the Braintree / Colchester partnership within the Cabinet budget papers was an example of poor communication to our partners. Councillor Hunt said he would take these comments away and consider ways of improving the communication of decisions to be made, where it has a direct impact on the partner organisations.

In response to Councillor Taylor, Councillor Hunt said he did not know why the IT Partnership Board, of which he was a member, had ceased to have meetings, though he was aware that Ms. Ann Wain, Executive Director was in the process of resurrecting these meetings. Councillor Hunt said there was a possibility that the new moves will result in two smaller 'Server' rooms, one in each of Angel Court and Rowan House. In reference to the Customer Services Centre, Councillor Hunt said the Council will continue to operate a front-line service within the town centre, whereas the backroom staff could relocate to Rowan House or another organisation.

*RESOLVED* that the panel:

- i) Noted the responses from the Portfolio Holder for Communication and Customers and thanked him for attending the meeting.
- ii) Asked the portfolio holder to consider the suggestion of sharing publications with other organisations that would still get the message across but with shared costs had the potential to save money.
- iii) Asked the portfolio holder to consider ways of improving the communication of decisions to be made, where it has a direct impact on the partner organisations.