

Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Grand Jury Room, Town Hall
10 January 2012 at 6.00pm**

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel look at policies and strategies from a borough-wide perspective and ensure the actions of the Cabinet accord with the policies and budget of the Council. The Panel reviews corporate strategies within the Council's Strategic Plan, overviews Council partnerships, considers the Council's budgetary guidelines for the forthcoming year, and scrutinises Cabinet decisions or Cabinet Member decisions (with delegated power) which have been called in.

Information for Members of the Public

Access to information and meetings

You have the right to attend all meetings of the Council, its Committees and Cabinet. You also have the right to see the agenda, which is usually published 5 working days before the meeting, and minutes once they are published. Dates of the meetings are available at www.colchester.gov.uk or from Democratic Services.

Have Your Say!

The Council values contributions from members of the public. Under the Council's Have Your Say! policy you can ask questions or express a view to meetings, with the exception of Standards Committee meetings. If you wish to speak at a meeting or wish to find out more, please refer to Attending Meetings and "Have Your Say" at www.colchester.gov.uk

Private Sessions

Occasionally meetings will need to discuss issues in private. This can only happen on a limited range of issues, which are set by law. When a committee does so, you will be asked to leave the meeting.

Mobile phones, pagers, cameras, audio recorders

Please ensure that all mobile phones and pagers are turned off or switched to silent before the meeting begins and note that photography or audio recording is not permitted.

Access

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Terms of Reference (but not limited to)

1. To review corporate strategies and strategic partnerships to ensure the actions of the Cabinet and Portfolio Holders accord with the policies and budget of the Council.
2. To monitor and scrutinise the financial performance of the Council, and make recommendations to the Cabinet particularly in relation to annual revenue and capital guidelines, bids and submissions.
3. To link the Council's spending proposals to the policy priorities and review progress towards achieving those priorities against the Strategic / Action Plans.
4. To scrutinise executive decisions made by Cabinet or Cabinet Member, the East Essex Area Waste Management Joint Committee, the Colchester and Ipswich Joint Museums Committee and the North Essex Parking Partnership (decisions relating to off-street parking only) which have been made but not implemented, and referred to the Panel through call-in.
5. To monitor the Council's operational performance in relation to the Strategic Plan and Performance Indicators, and the Cabinet's performance in relation to the Forward Plan.
7. The panel will be the appropriate route for any member to refer a 'local government matter' in the context of Councillor Call for Action.

Process for Councillor Call for Action

Councillors have the ability to call for debate and discussion a topic of neighbourhood concern, limited to issues affecting a single ward, in an attempt to bring about specific solutions for local problems, without going through the Council's executive decision making process.

Members may not call for debate matters relating to a planning or licensing decision, an individual complaint or where a right of recourse to a review or right of appeal is already provided for in law. Examples of where a member can bring an action to the panel's attention are poor service performance or increased anti-social behaviour.

The panel may reject a request as not within the guidance or where they consider the usual channels have not been exhausted, or accept that an investigation is the appropriate action.

The panel may conduct an investigation in the usual scrutiny manner and a report with recommendations will be compiled and brought to the Council or partners attention, with the Council or partners having a duty to respond. The panel will consider and publish the responses to their recommendations and feed back this information to the Councillor requesting the action.

COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL
STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
10 January 2012 at 6:00pm

Members

Chairman : Councillor Andrew Ellis.
Deputy Chairman : Councillor Dennis Willetts.
Councillors Kim Naish, Gerard Oxford, Colin Sykes,
Nigel Chapman, Nick Cope, Bill Frame, Theresa Higgins and
Will Quince.

Substitute Members : All members of the Council who are not Cabinet members or members of this Panel.

Agenda - Part A

(open to the public including the media)

Members of the public may wish to note that agenda items 1 to 5 are normally brief and agenda items 6 to 9 are standard items for which there may be no business to consider.

Pages

1. Welcome and Announcements

- (a) The Chairman to welcome members of the public and Councillors and to remind all speakers of the requirement for microphones to be used at all times.
- (b) At the Chairman's discretion, to announce information on:
 - i) action in the event of an emergency;
 - ii) mobile phones switched off or to silent;
 - iii) location of toilets;
 - iv) introduction of members of the meeting.

2. Substitutions

Members may arrange for a substitute councillor to attend a meeting on their behalf, subject to prior notice being given. The attendance of substitute councillors must be recorded.

3. Urgent Items

To announce any items not on the agenda which the Chairman has agreed to consider because they are urgent and to give reasons for the urgency.

4. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman to invite Councillors to declare individually any personal interests they may have in the items on the agenda.

If the personal interest arises because of a Councillor's membership of or position of control or management on:

- any body to which the Councillor has been appointed or nominated by the Council; or
- another public body

then the interest need only be declared if the Councillor intends to speak on that item.

If a Councillor declares a personal interest they must also consider whether they have a prejudicial interest. If they have a prejudicial interest they must leave the room for that item.

If a Councillor wishes to make representations on an item on which they have a prejudicial interest they may do so if members of the public are allowed to make representations. In such circumstances a Councillor must leave the room immediately once they have finished speaking.

An interest is considered to be prejudicial if a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard it as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest.

Councillors should consult paragraph 7 of the Meetings General Procedure Rules for further guidance.

5. Minutes

1 - 7

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2011.

6. Have Your Say!

(a) The Chairman to invite members of the public to indicate if they wish to speak or present a petition at this meeting – either on an item on the agenda or on a general matter not on this agenda. You should indicate your wish to speak at this point if your name has not been noted by Council staff.

(b) The Chairman to invite contributions from members of the public who wish to Have Your Say! on a general matter not on this agenda.

7. Items requested by members of the Panel and other Members

(a) To evaluate requests by members of the Panel for an item relevant to the Panel's functions to be considered.

(b) To evaluate requests by other members of the Council for an item relevant to the Panel's functions to be considered.

Members of the panel may use agenda item 'a' (all other members will use agenda item 'b') as the appropriate route for referring a 'local government matter' in the context of the Councillor Call for Action to the panel. Please refer to the panel's terms of reference for further procedural arrangements.

8. Referred items under the Call in Procedure

To consider any decisions taken under the Call in Procedure.
The panel may a) confirm the decision, which may then be implemented immediately, b) refer the decision back to the decision taker for further consideration setting out in writing the nature of its concerns, or c) refer the matter to full Council in the event that the panel considers the decision to be contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council or contrary to, or not wholly in accordance with the Budget.

9. Decisions taken under special urgency provisions

To consider any Portfolio Holder decisions taken under the special urgency provisions.

10. A review of the current Public Transport provision in the Borough

8 - 17

See Scoping Report from the Scrutiny Officer.
The supporting report from the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration to follow.

11. Work Programme

18 - 19

See report from the Scrutiny Officer.

12. Exclusion of the public

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and in accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended) to exclude the public, including the press, from the meeting so that any items containing exempt information (for example confidential personal, financial or legal advice), in Part B of this agenda (printed on yellow paper) can be decided. (Exempt information is defined in Section 100I and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

13 DECEMBER 2011

- Present :-* Councillor Dennis Willetts (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Nick Cope, Bill Frame,
Theresa Higgins, Gerard Oxford and Will Quince
- Substitute Members :-* Councillor Mike Hardy for Councillor Andrew Ellis
Councillor Michael Lilley for Councillor Kim Naish
Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell
for Councillor Colin Sykes
- Also in Attendance :-* Councillor Tina Dopson
Councillor Beverley Oxford
Councillor Paul Smith
Councillor Anne Turrell
Councillor Tim Young

23. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on the 29 November were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Anne Turrell and Councillor Theresa Higgins (in respect of her membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

24. 2011-12 6-Monthly Performance report

Councillor Anne Turrell, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Performance and Ms. Lucie Breadman, Head of Corporate Management attended the meeting for this item, a review of the 2011-12 6-monthly Performance Report.

Ms. Breadman gave an overview of the performance update for the period April to September 2011.

In terms of performance summary, 65% of performance indicators are forecast to meet year end targets, 17.5% are showing amber, and 17.5% are showing red, or forecast to not meet the year end expectation.

Ms. Breadman said there are some very positive results, with the number of affordable homes far exceeding the target and planning performance in all areas also exceeding the targets set.

Sickness absence continued to be challenging, though the problems are not universal across all services, with some areas recording a reduction in sickness levels. Sickness levels are being hindered by an increase in long term sickness and inherited sickness by staff from shared services, but that said, the Council are actively managing every case and ill health capability action has resulted in 11 individual cases of dismissal.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Ms. Breadman said whilst it was unlikely that the Council would reach the sickness rate target of 8 days per person per year, it would continue to strive to do so and, while it is a challenging target it is so important that we need to keep working hard towards that aim.. Ms. Breadman also said that it is harder to compare performance to other local authorities or the private sector as there is no set agreed way of recording and calculating sickness absence but where we can compare our performance is good. Councillor Turrell said the Cabinet wished the challenging target of 8 days per person per year to continue.

In response to Councillor Frame, Ms. Breadman said the implementation of the new sickness policy was now complete, and all managers have been trained. Sickness record statistics are provided to managers on a monthly basis. Ill health capability dismissals in Street Services were treated individually, non-related cases not connected to FSR changes implemented and she was not aware of any negative impact on sickness levels as a result of the four day collection changes.

In response to Councillor Oxford's request for further breakdown's on sickness statistics, Councillor Willetts said it was the responsibility of the Panel to ensure the Council is managing the performance strategy correctly, but any further detail should be for those Councillors who request the information. Ms. Breadman agreed to provide Councillor G. Oxford with the monthly manager's report on sickness levels.

In response to Councillor Cope, Ms. Breadman clarified target KI R4 Reduce CO2 emissions from local authority operations, saying the target was "to reduce emissions by 25% by December 2012", and while the formally recorded reduction to September was 14% performance is actually ahead of this and agreed to provide Councillor Cope with a breakdown of how the 25% reduction is projected to be achieved.

Mr. Mark Wright, Director of Property Services at Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) responded to Councillor Frame in regards to hard to let properties and how is this problem being tackled, saying the main problem was with Sheltered Accommodation, skewing the overall result of 24 days, due to an average re-let time of 66 days. Mr. Wright said a finance strategy to refurbish sheltered housing has been approved and will go some way to improving the 66 day re-let time. In response to Councillor Quince, Mr. Wright said the different schemes (general, sheltered and temporary) each have a different impact on the overall performance, with some individual properties skewing results, for example, a property marketed through Choice Based Lettings had remained vacant for 2 years. Mr. Wright confirmed that CBH are working closely with the Council to implement a strategy to improve the overall results whilst also looking to set challenging but realistic housing targets.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Ms. Breadman confirmed that the drop in performance to the number of weekly missed waste collections was in the main due to the implementation of the major changes to working practices as a result of the Street Services Fundamental Service Review. The changes have now settled in and performance has already improved in this area. Ms. Breadman said that as a result of new technology and process changes the targets in this area are likely to be revised for next year.

Responding to Councillor Quince, Councillor Turrell said in regards to the Council's LEXCEL accreditation, whilst it is accepted that many law firms do not use this accreditation that can be costly to retain, the cost will be considered in terms of value for money as part of the ongoing 2012-13 budget process, though as commented by Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Heritage, this accreditation may be a requirement for Legal Services to complete external work.

Ms. Breadman agreed to arrange for Councillor T. Higgins to be provided with further information in regards to the delivery of a number of projects with looked after children, children and young people with disabilities and young people from hard to reach groups, work done in association with Essex and Suffolk County Councils.

Councillor Turrell confirmed to Councillor Chapman that the securing of additional burial land will be concluded shortly and agreed to provide confirmation details to Councillor Chapman once known.

Councillor Turrell concurred with Councillor Scott-Boutell that local residents would welcome the implementation of the new Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy and confirmed to Councillor Scott-Boutell that she would ask Councillor Hunt, Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services to provide Councillor Scott-Boutell with details of the new Strategy. Councillor Quince was saddened by the need to put-down around 50 abandoned dogs a year, mainly Staffordshire Bull Terriers, and hoped the strategy would go some way to addressing the problem of abandoned dogs. Councillor Turrell said she would ask Councillor Hunt to contact Councillor Scott-Boutell to obtain volunteer contact details of people or groups who would be prepared to support this work.

Responding to Councillor Frame on the SP action on Air Quality, Councillor Turrell said Cabinet Members understood the issues around poor air quality in the Brook Street area, acknowledging that heavy traffic congestion was responsible for this. Councillor Turrell agreed to ask Councillor Hunt to provide further information on the joint working on this initiative between Essex County Council and Colchester.

Ms. Breadman confirmed to Councillor Willetts that the Council had hoped to acquire additional land from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to provide more allotments. However, this had not come to fruition. Councillor Tina Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Diversity said this initiative was a specific target, and had been progressing to a satisfactory conclusion, but the MoD is now reluctant to release this land so it will be necessary to remove this specific target from the new SP Action Plan.

Councillor Turrell informed Councillor Quince that he should contact Street Services for advice on determining how rogue opportunists can be prevented from putting recycling bins at recycling sites to the detriment of voluntary organisation's bins.

RESOLVED that the Panel:-

i) Thanked Councillor Turrell, Councillor Smith, Ms. Breadman and Mr. Wright for attending the meeting and responding to questions from the Panel.

ii) Considered and commented upon the combined performance update for the period up to the end of September 2011 in relation to the Council's key performance measures, and noted the progress update on the Strategic Plan Action Plan.

25. 2012/13 Revenue Budget and Financial Reserves

Councillor Anne Turrell, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Performance and Mrs. Ann Hedges, Executive Director attended the meeting for this item, a review of the 2012/13 Revenue Budget and Financial Reserves.

Mrs. Hedges said the 2012/13 Revenue Budget was a precursor to the Budget Report to be reported to the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet in the New Year, though unfortunately due to the timing, it was not possible to provide the impact of the budget on the Strategic Plan, though this could be provided, if requested, in the New Year.

Mrs. Hedges spoke about the Formula Grant and New Homes Bonus. It has been confirmed that there will be, for 2012/13, a cash reduction of 9% on the 2011/12 grant level, as expected, and a New Homes Bonus in 2012/13 that will be very slightly less than the reported estimate of £1.5m.

Mrs. Hedges said the initial 2012/13 budget forecast presented to Cabinet on 12 October showed a budget gap of £742k, but now showed a broadly balanced budget position, though there remains a number of budget pressures.

Mrs. Hedges said the Council continues to look for efficiencies that will address the budget pressures, through Fundamental Service Reviews, looking at innovative ways of generating income through e.g. legal services / payroll services, Joint Partnerships and cuts and reductions to services.

In response to Councillor Quince, Mrs. Hedges confirmed that the new grant to authorities that do not increase Council Tax in 2012/13 would be equivalent in value to an increase in Council Tax of 2.5%, estimated at c£269k, was for a period on one year only, and from year two onwards this money will need to be found from other efficiencies.

Mrs. Hedges said the cost pressures caused by Insurance Premiums was due to the retendering process whereby the resulting overall cost, three years on from the previous retendering process, is greater due to the large increase in insurance premiums. Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Heritage confirmed that Essex County Council's change of rules on second homes rebates had been rolled out to all local authorities in Essex.

RESOLVED that the Panel:-

i) Thanked Councillor Turrell and Mrs. Hedges for attending the meeting and responding to questions from the Panel.

ii) Considered and noted the 2012/13 Revenue Budget and Financial Reserves prior to their consideration by the Cabinet on 25 January 2012.

26. Strategic Plan 2012-2015

Have Your Say

Mr. Nick Chilvers addressed the Panel concerning the new draft Strategic Plan (SP).

Mr. Chilvers said the SP lacked information on the local economy, and asked that as Essex fared better than other areas of Britain in terms of employment, will it cope when the impact of the potential housing growth kicks in? Mr. Chilvers didn't believe supporting culture and creativity was the correct way forward, that there needed to be more emphasis towards male related jobs in light industry, trades and apprenticeships. Whilst affordable housing was being built, for example, at the Garrison, Mr. Chilvers feared many homes would be occupied by unemployed people that itself would create a further social problem.

Mr. Chilvers believed the Council needed to be more pro-active in trying to create an industrial trading area(s) suitable for light industry, creating jobs / apprenticeships for the young. Mr. Chilvers asked that the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel asked the relevant Portfolio Holder to report to the Panel twice yearly with an update on local job creation with invitations going to large local employers, other public sector organisations, the JobCentre Plus and local small businesses.

Councillor Willetts thanked Mr. Chilvers for his comments, saying whilst some comments were valid, with job creation initiatives already in place, the criticisms were a bit harsh.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Heritage said manufacturing jobs only for males was a dated view, though the principal of pro-active job creation he very much endorsed. Councillor Smith said the Council had a strong record in job creation, for example, working with J Sainsbury on the new Colchester Superstore. Councillor Smith said when considering job creation it had to be in context with the position nationally, where manufacturing accounts for only 10% of national gross domestic product (GDP), with banking now accounting for 9% of GDP. Colchester now employed twice the national average of people in 'creative' industries, and this was an important element of the Council's strategic approach reflected in the SP, e.g. supporting firstsite and the new business incubation centre at Severalls. Sadly, the days of producing manufacturing jobs have gone and the Council are looking to new initiatives to create jobs in Colchester for Colchester people.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Councillor Smith said if the Panel so wished, a report to the Panel on Job Creation, the strategy and where the Council fits in with this work could be presented to the Panel in 2012.

Presentation

Councillor Anne Turrell, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Performance and Mrs. Ann Hedges, Executive Director, attended the meeting for this item, a review of the Strategic Plan 2012-15.

Mrs. Hedges introduced the report, explaining the Strategic Plan sets the framework for the Council's three-year Medium Term Financial Forecast and its Capital Programme, and both the Plan and the Budget will be debated at the same full Council meeting in February 2012. Mrs. Hedges welcomed comments from the Panel on the content of the SP.

Councillor Turrell said the SP had been changed from the previous plan, to provide wording in Plain English, a 'puzzle' format that provided interlinking with partnership working and the delivery of high quality, accessible services.

Discussions

Councillor Willetts doubted the statistical significance of the public consultation, with 243 responses representing a 0.13% / 0.32% return from borough residents / households respectively, saying it was hard to accept this work was useful given there was no assurance it was representative of the views of local people. Councillor Willetts said more information stored in the Council's data-bases should be used to get a better summary and more accurate steer on the aspirations of local people. Councillor Willetts later stated this was not a criticism but merely that a greater depth of results accumulated over the years would provide more meaningful information. Councillor Turrell said the Council undertakes many consultations every year and recognising this information and the need to demonstrate value for money, this information and that from the consultation for the Strategic Plan and the Budget Strategy for 2012/13 had been combined. Councillor Turrell said the main piece of consultation has been a survey, available on line and in hard copy, and a press release that was sent to all local media and a number of key organisations including Parish Councils. Councillor Turrell said she would be happy to arrange for all the responses to be provided to Panel members on request. Mrs. Hedges responded to Councillor Frame later in the discussions saying to undertake a consultation that included organising meetings to speak directly to focus groups and hard to reach communities would be very expensive work, only to ensure the Council has engaged with a small cross section of the community, and would not be considered value for money. Focus groups are consulted for more specific areas of work but not for the broader SP. Accepting this was a very important document, Mrs. Hedges said a lot of consultation evidence had been fed into the SP and the issues raised in the survey reinforced previous knowledge.

Whilst Councillor G. Oxford believed the new SP was visually a great improvement, he was concerned about the effects of the Localism Bill on the aspirations. Councillor Turrell said the Council would need to listen and respond accordingly, that a balance was needed on how we might deliver the services beyond the vision.

Councillor Cope commented that future graphical presentations of survey data would be better represented through histograms rather than pie charts.

In response to Councillor Scott-Boutell who felt the aspirations and direct services listed needed to be more specific, and Councillor Quince who felt the SP spelt out broad aims but generally was too woolly, Councillor Turrell and Mrs. Hedges said it was easier to generalise with the SP, given that more specific detailed information within the Action Plan would underpin the aspirations and provide a way to judge the performance of the SP. Councillor T. Higgins said these criticisms were similar to those mentioned with the draft 2009-12 SP. Councillor Higgins believed the SP needed to educate local people on the work of the Council and what the Council can share with partners, to show transparency and something simple enough for the public to understand and note.

In regards to future consultation Councillor T. Higgins said the Council would need to consider other forms of engagement, to think outside the box e.g. tweets and aps. In regards to the new SP Councillor Higgins it would be nice if less Council jargon and more plain english was used, and more contact details given than just the website.

Mrs. Hedges thanked Panel Members for their comments and the useful points made, and would take away and consider. Mrs. Hedges said Mrs. Jo Parlett the new Communications Manager had a technical background, useful for future consultation communication and the Council will move forward on this note.

RESOLVED that the Panel considered and noted the draft Strategic Plan 2012-2015, prior to its consideration by the Cabinet on 25 January 2012 and adoption by the full Council on 22 February 2012.

27. Work Programme

The Panel agreed to Mr. Judd's request for the item on the review of the Colchester Community Stadium Limited being rescheduled to the meeting on 20 March 2012.

Mr. Judd agreed to talk to officers with a view to adding a review to the February meeting on Job Enabling / Creation.

Mr. Judd confirmed to the Panel that the issues discussed earlier on air quality would form part of the work to be presented to the Panel in January in regards to the review of Public Transport in the Borough.

RESOLVED that the Panel considered and noted the Work Programme.



Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel Scoping Document

Item
10

10 January 2012

Committee	Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel	
Topic	A review of the current provision of public transport in the Borough and the development of this to support the Borough's planned growth and regeneration.	Ref: SCR/2/11-12
Objective	The Panel is asked to review the provision of public transport in the Borough, and the extent to which those operations contribute to the Council's strategic priorities and to make the appropriate recommendations to Cabinet for consideration.	
Reasons for undertaking review	<p>The Council's Code of Corporate Governance states the aim for robust scrutiny, and a principle to engage with stakeholders to ensure public accountability.</p> <p>A review of public transport was undertaken by the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel during November 2007, and the Panel agreed to this further review at the meeting on 7 June 2011.</p> <p>The Panel agreed to this review, to focus on how public transport affects Colchester and its citizens, in both the town centre and rural areas, expressing the view that the provision of good and reliable public transport was fundamental to a successful future for the town centre. The Panel requested invitations to go to representatives from all the bus operators, rail operator, and the Essex County Council Portfolio Holder</p> <p>The Panel also requested that 'clean air policies' in the town centre in regards to the effect of heavy polluting vehicles should also be included in this review.</p>	
Approach	<p>The approach will be to take an overview of the progress to date.</p> <p>Members will engage with the transport operators, Portfolio Holders and officers about the progress of the overall project to date, and the comments of members will be noted.</p>	
Membership	Full Panel	

Background Information			
Supporting documentation	A covering report from the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration.		
Representatives	<p>The following persons have accepted an invitation to attend this meeting;</p> <p>Invitees</p> <p>Tracey Chapman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, Essex County Council (provisional)</p> <p>Mr. Alan Lindsay, Principal Area Transportation Coordinator, Essex County Council</p> <p>Mr. John Pope, Group Manager Public Transport, Essex County Council</p> <p>Mr. Geraint Hughes, Partnership Manager, National Express East Anglia</p> <p>Mr. Cameron Jones, Greater Anglian Franchise</p> <p>Mr. Tony Mears, Network Colchester</p> <p>Mr. Cliff Hussey, First</p> <p>Councillors</p> <p>Councillor Lyn Barton, Portfolio Holder for Renaissance</p> <p>Councillor Martin Hunt, Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services (apologies).</p> <p>Officers</p> <p>Ms. Lindsay Barker, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration</p> <p>Mr. Paul Wilkinson, Transportation Policy Manager</p>		
Future Action			
Governance Officer	Robert Judd Scrutiny Officer	Committee Officer	-
Lead Officer(s)	Pam Donnelly, Executive Director		



Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Item
10

10 January 2012

Report of	Lindsay Barker, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration	Author	Paul Wilkinson ☎ 282787
Title	Operation of Public Transport in Colchester		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

The Panel is invited to review the Operation of Public Transport in Colchester

1. Action Required

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to review the provision of public transport in the Borough, and the extent to which those operations contribute to the Council's strategic priorities and to make the appropriate recommendations to Cabinet for consideration.

2. Reason for Scrutiny

- 2.1 A review of public transport was undertaken by the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel during November 2007, and the Panel agreed to this further review at the meeting on 7 June 2011.
- 2.2 The Panel agreed to this review, to focus on how public transport affects Colchester and its citizens, in both the town centre and rural areas, expressing the view that the provision of good and reliable public transport was fundamental to a successful future for the town centre. The Panel requested invitations to go to representatives from all the bus operators, rail operator, and the Essex County Council Portfolio Holder
- 2.3 The Panel also requested that 'clean air policies' in the town centre in regards to the effect of heavy polluting vehicles should also be included in this review.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 This report sets the scene for bus and rail public transport and identifies a number of projects that Colchester Borough Council, Essex County Council and the operators have been working on since the panel last discussed this matter in November 2007.
- 3.2 The report has been set out to cover:
 - The Bus Network and Operation
 - The Rail Operation

4. The Bus Network and Operation

- 4.1 The bus services in Colchester work in an unregulated market, compared with cities such as London and the larger Metropolitan authorities. Most of the day time services are commercially run by private operators with some evening and weekend bus services contracted to Essex County Council. The network in the urban areas of Colchester is comprehensive and as reported in the 2011 Annual monitoring report 99% of the new

residential developments were within 30minutes by public transport of a GP, hospital, primary and secondary school, employment and a major retail centre.

- 4.2 The two main operators are First and Network Colchester. First's Colchester operation is managed as part of the North Essex and South Suffolk group. Network Colchester has changed ownership a number of times and has become part of Arriva as part of Tellings Golden Miller. Management changes have frequently occurred.
- 4.3 These two companies dominate the urban bus service with most services being run on a commercial basis on weekdays. Smaller companies such as Hedinghams, Carters and Chambers deliver more of the rural services, providing connections between the rural and urban areas. New Horizons Travel Ltd who mainly operate school bus services has introduced a new daily service from Tendring into Colchester
- 4.4 ECC subsidise a number of non commercially viable services, in the main covering evenings, weekend services, and some special services such as peak hour train connections at Colchester station. The level of bus services has remained fairly stable through restructuring and financial reviews.
- 4.6 The Local Government Association published a paper in the September 2010 raising the issue of bus subsidies. It recognised that the bus has an important role to play in society but was concerned that the level of subsidies was unsustainable (60% of revenue turnover) and that the model for distribution of subsidies should be reviewed to allow subsidies to be better targeted with greater local determination. The Central Government Bus Service Operator Grant is subject to change and the level of fuel duty grant to be paid to the bus companies will be reduced further in April 2012 and may result in further service changes this year.

Interurban Buses

- 4.7 Bus services to Ipswich, Clacton, Chelmsford Sudbury and Stansted continue to operate. One of the Stansted services has been altered to a bus rather than a coach operation, which has lengthened the journey time but the change reflects the level of patronage and makes use of an existing local bus service to reduce operating costs to maintain the service. There are still 2 coach services operating from Colchester to Stansted

Concessionary Fares and Bus Subsidies

- 4.8 The Concessionary Fare scheme has increased bus patronage and gives those over 60 and disabled, especially those without access to car, greater mobility. For efficiency and consistency ECC have taken over the administration of the concessionary fares scheme.
- 4.9 There has been obvious benefit to the users (free bus travel at point of use) but across the country there has been a disagreement between the operators and the government on the level of reimbursement to the bus operators through the scheme.

Congestion and Traffic Growth

- 4.10 Traffic congestion in Colchester still has a major impact on the operation of the bus network, resulting in unreliable journey times and poor punctuality.
- 4.11 Limited physical measures have been implemented recently to give the bus greater visible priority to ensure the impact of traffic congestion on the operation of bus services is minimised. A short bus priority lane was introduced from Bruff Close to North Station Roundabout in 2009.

- 4.12 The Better Town Centre initiative to reduce traffic in the core town centre area will give buses benefit during the day time allowing easier circulation of this area.

The Temporary Bus Station and Relocation

- 4.13 The St Botolph's regeneration area was formed following the creation of the St Botolph's Masterplan, which was adopted by the Council in 2005. This was to address significant decline in the general environment and its wider impact upon the Town Centre economy.
- 4.14 The Masterplan set out a clear framework for the regeneration of the area with defined delivery objectives including the creation of a new international arts venue, new retail areas and homes, together with additional public spaces, improved green spaces and strong connectivity between new and existing buildings and the wider Town Centre.
- 4.15 The temporary bus station is located in this masterplan area and is due to close at the end of December 2012 in line with the agreement with Essex County Council. The area of land used by the temporary bus station, will be divided into two parts, one (approximately two thirds of the area) would be transformed into open space as part of the extension to Berryfield Park, for use by the local school and the public. The second part (representing one third of the area) will form phase II of the St Botolphs Quarter development.
- 4.16 We are working closely with ECC and the bus operators to establish a replacement for the existing facility. The best location to achieve and deliver a new bus station is in Osborne Street/Stanwell Street. With the input of the major operators and reviewing the current time tables we believe that capacity can be provided for in this area.
- 4.17 There will be an increased number of stops and lay over spaces in Osborne Street for the main urban services and stops in Stanwell Street, mainly for the rural and coach services.
- 4.18 A physical test was undertaken in September to trial a new layout. It was proved that buses could manoeuvre on and off of the stops proposed at that time. Small changes were made to the design following the test to improve it. The design is currently with Essex County Council and has had an initial design safety review undertaken. These processes have recommended further changes to improve the safety of passengers and other road users in this area. The kerb line on the south side of Osborne Street will be moved to improve manoeuvrability in the area.
- 4.19 Design work is also progressing to provide interim measures including:
- Increased seating under the existing canopy
 - Secure clean toilets – improving those already in the NCP car park
 - New or relocated passenger information systems
 - A space for driver facilities
 - Vineyard Gate lift improvements
- 4.20 CBC is also looking into the potential to use space within existing buildings in the area for a covered passenger waiting area. We have also sought to ensure there is provision for Taxi/Mini cab drop off points in the area outside of the main bus operating times.
- 4.21 Colchester Borough Council has secured funding for the interim measures through the Haven Gateway Partnership and is reviewing developer funding with ECC to deliver these changes.

Park and Ride and North Colchester

- 4.22 The Park and Ride site at Cuckoo Farm was granted planning permission by Essex County Council in August 2011. The planning permission (with conditions) allows ultimately for a 1000 space site to be developed. The Council is supportive of this application as it supports the Cabinet's Strategic Plan ambition to tackle congestion and the Better Town Centre project by helping to reduce traffic flow on the two main approaches (Ipswich Road and the Northern Approaches Road) to the town centre from the north.
- 4.23 Colchester Borough Council is currently working with Essex County Council on the delivery of Park and Ride including securing the necessary funding for the facility and the bus route.
- 4.24 The NAR3 includes a busway which is being forward funded by ECC and will be constructed in 2012. This will provide the connection between the Axial Way/United Way roundabout and the existing Northern Approaches Road Junction. With ECC we are looking into ways of bringing forward the delivery of the last remaining section of the NAR busway between Mill Road and Bruff Close.
- 4.25 Further investigations are being undertaken into improving public transport operation and capacity in the station area as part of A133/A134 North South Capacity Improvements, identified in the LDF Core Strategy. We are currently working on developing a North Colchester Travel Strategy to look at proposals in this area to deliver sustainable growth and minimise the impact of traffic growth.

Public Perception of Bus Operation

- 4.26 There have been a number of small issues which continue to effect the public perception of bus operation in Colchester. This includes:
- Poor passenger information – especially when running late
 - Customer service
 - Quality of the bus fleet
 - Services focused on the town centre and the need to change to make certain journeys
- 4.27 Through the work of the Colchester Travel Plan Club (an initiative set up as part of the Local Strategic Partnership) we have shared with the bus operator's information where customers have raised issues especially around quality and service. This is very relevant when the 'club' has been trying to encourage people to take up a new form of transport, but are discouraged by lack of quality and service provision.
- 4.28 Passenger Focus, the nationally recognised body for passenger transport users, have now been charged with representing bus users as well as train users. The above information was also shared with them. We have also engaged Passenger Focus on the Station Travel Plan Work.
- 4.29 A number of local borough members have taken up local issues with bus companies and helped resolve these, e.g. routing of the services in the Highwoods area.

Passenger Information Systems

- 4.30 The current existing real time information system was installed in 1999, and will be life expired; parts are at capacity and will need replacing across the county. Essex County Council propose to let a new contract for an "Advanced Vehicle Location" system which includes the on street passenger information displays and the operating software. It is expected that the system will be more reliable and provide greater accuracy, and allow

expansion in the future. A business case is to be put to the ECC contracts board this month and if approved a new tender should be let in May 2012.

- 4.31 Discussions have taken place with ECC on this matter, in particular in relation to the significant changes to the town centre and it has been requested that Colchester is given priority to install the new systems here.

Air Quality Management Areas

- 4.32 Colchester Borough Council is to develop and implement an Air Quality Management Action Plan as part of its commitment to improving public health by reducing congestion and improving air quality. The Council regularly monitors Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels and in streets where they are predicted to exceed recommended targets, the Council will be formally declaring them 'Air Quality Management Areas' (AQMA).
- 4.33 As a result of being classified as AQMAs, areas will benefit from an action plan, which aims to significantly improve levels of NO₂ and reduce risks to public health by improving the pedestrian and living environment.
- 4.34 As part of these improvements Colchester Borough Council will carry out a consultation to find solutions to air quality in the town. It will engage with major stakeholders such as Essex County Council, affected residents and businesses, planning bodies, transport agencies and operators.
- 4.35 The areas which exceed the air quality targets include –
- Roads in the central corridor (now including Mersea Road, Brook Street),
 - Lucy Lane North (Stanway),
 - Ipswich Road/East Street Junction
 - Harwich Road/ St Andrews Ave Junction.
- 4.36 Excepting Lucy Lane North, the locations are characterised by an enclosed built environment, slow moving traffic with a mix of vehicles, including small petrol and diesel engine vehicles (cars and vans) and larger diesel engine vehicles (lorries and buses) in the traffic flow. Many of the roads in the 'central corridor' are part of the Better Town Centre reduction traffic initiative, which traffic regulation orders are being prepared for publication. The reduction in traffic flows along these roads should aid the flow of buses.
- 4.37 Emissions from all engines have been reducing over a number of years through technological improvements driven by European Emission Standards for exhaust emissions.
- 4.38 We would expect bus companies should ensure that only their newest buses pass through the roads which have been declared part of the AQMA. NO_x emissions from a Euro IV (2008) engine are half that of a Euro II (1998) engine. The standards applied for new type approvals and are not applied retrospectively but emissions from older engines can be improved through engine/exhaust modification.
- 4.39 All vehicles emit nitrogen oxide which converts to nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere, but at this time without further detailed assessment it is not known what contribution the exhaust from the bus fleet in Colchester makes to the level of pollutants.
- 4.40 There is a push from central government to declare Low Emission Zones (LEZ), in areas where European and National Standards for NO₂ are not being met. There are currently several trials taking place across in the UK. The current minimum standard for buses within a LEZ is Euro III this will be reviewed in 2012.

4.41 The Government has made announcements concerning the availability of funding for reducing emissions from road vehicles including a £20 million “Greening the Bus” fund, and has also made available £50m as part of the “Better Bus Area Fund” to improve the operation of buses. In light of the AQMAs, congestion and growth it would appear sensible to explore with the bus companies and Essex County Council ways in which these funding opportunities can be accessed for delivery of the relevant action plans.

Rail Operation

4.42 The current train operating company is National Express East Anglia (NXEA) and has operated the trains in this area since April 2004. The current Office of Rail Regulator performance measure for the mainline is 88.4% (moving annual average). This compares with 91.6% for the whole of the National Express East Anglia network. This compares favourably with other train operating companies.

4.43 The Passenger Focus Annual Passenger survey Spring 2011 rated NXEA at 78% for overall satisfaction. This was an increase over the previous year’s survey but less than the comparable value for other London and South East services (83%). NXEA score well on “how a request to station staff was handled” and the lowest score is for “facilities for car parking”.

4.44 National Express has modified the time table throughout the franchise period. The biggest change came in 2010 when National Express met its commitment in the High Level Output Statement to increase seating capacity on trains into Liverpool Street by providing 3,000 more seats on trains to London.

4.45 The Great Eastern Mainline has not been an easy line to operate due to the continual up grading work which has resulted in extensive and regular occupation by engineering teams at weekends with replacement bus services. This upgrading should provide a more reliable rail network. In 2007 the mainline and branches were re-signalled from Marks Tey through Colchester, which replaced life expired signalling equipment allowing for greater flexible working especially when there is an incident. To meet the needs of the 2012 Olympics and deliver a reliable train service much of the overhead electrical wires and supporting structures are being replaced between London and Chelmsford. Much of this work has taken place at weekends and will continue to do so over the next few months. Once complete this should ensure that during extreme weather the wiring is far more responsive to changes in temperature and allow the train timetable to be operated in full. Part of the Olympic work and future capacity for the whole line has been to provide extra capacity at Stratford Station by opening a new platform.

4.46 In Colchester we have worked very closely with NXEA and ECC to deliver the following projects:

- the regeneration and platform extensions at the Hythe Station (completed in 2010)
- the National Station Improvement Projects (NSIP) at Colchester (opened December 2011) and Marks Tey (due to be completed January 2012)
- the pilot station travel plan at Colchester station

4.47 The station travel plan pilot provided NXEA and CBC/ECC with a framework to be able to deliver and communicate to the rail users the NSIP work, investment in cycle parking, improved motor cycle parking, the “plus bus” ticketing initiative (for which the project secured funding from Passenger Focus). Essex County Council funding was used to install a new extended bus passenger shelter, passenger information system kiosk and investment in the cycle facilities. Reviews and evaluation are currently being undertaken by ATOC to report back to the Dft.

The New Rail Franchise

- 4.48 The current franchise with NXEA ends on the 4 February 2012. NXEA will be replaced by Abellio to operate trains until summer 2015. This short franchise will then be replaced by what is expected to be a longer term franchise (15 years) through a bidding process. It is expected that a 15 year franchise will be less prescriptive, allow greater risk, innovation and investment to be taken by the franchisee but also allow greater control and use of the assets including land around station. It is expected that they will take on some of the functions currently retained by Network Rail e.g. land management. Discussions within the rail industry are currently taking place on this.
- 4.49 Through the refranchising process we have supplied Abellio with information on Colchester Borough Council's draft North Station Masterplan and response to Network Rail's consultation on Better Rail Stations. Abellio have held stakeholder workshops in advance of the commencement of the franchise.
- 4.50 Colchester Borough Council is currently working with other local authorities along the Great Eastern Main Line (GEML) to seek future infrastructure investment along the line, especially to support economic growth. The GEML vision group are seeking commitment from the new train operator, Network Rail and the Department for Transport to secure future investment.

5. Strategic Plan References

- 5.1 Public transport can help achieve the corporate objectives of being 'Cleaner and Greener' and the priority aim of 'Congestion Busting'. The specific outcomes and actions relating to public transport include:
- Delivery of the Northern Approaches Road 3 and Park and Ride
 - Promoting change in Travel Behaviour and delivering on approved development policies
 - Reducing traffic in the town centre
 - Develop Air Quality Management Strategies
 - Access to the railway station through the Station Travel Plan project

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Ongoing consultation has been carried out within specific projects. Consultation and engagement has also continued in respect of key stakeholders such as access groups and bus operators for the town centre traffic and transport, business groups in respect of a wide range of projects and local residents and other identified groups who have a specialist interest.

7. Publicity Considerations

- 7.1 Publicity opportunities have been ongoing through the Better Town Centre Programme with regular engagement events held in the town, a dedicated website and other stakeholder meetings.
- 7.2 A communications plan is being drawn up for the publication of the Traffic Regulation Orders for the Reduction in Traffic in the Town Centre area.
- 7.3 A commitment has been made to engage with stakeholders on the development of the Air Quality Management Area Action Plans
- 7.4 The Station Travel Plan has included a communications plan and information has been distributed through a dedicated website and joint press releases made when necessary.

7.5 The train operating companies have communication and marketing teams and through the various projects we have made joint press releases and held joint engagement exercises.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Haven Gateway Growth Point Funding has been secured for Osborne Street/Stanwell Street Bus Station and for Traffic Reduction in the Town Centre. We are currently exploring with ECC the use of developer funding.

8.2 The Council is currently working with Essex County Council on the delivery of Park and Ride, including securing the necessary funding for the facility and the bus route.

9. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications

9.1 EQIA's have been developed for the key regeneration projects managed by the Council. There are no particular Human Rights Implications of this report.

10. Community Safety Implications

10.1 There are no specific community safety implications of this report.

11. Health and Safety Implications

11.1 The actions to be taken as part of the Air Quality Management Areas are designed to safeguard public health.

12. Risk Management Implications

12.1 There is a risk register for the Better Town Centre Programme.



Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Item
11

10 January 2012

Report of	Scrutiny Officer	Author	Robert Judd
Title	Work Programme 2011-12		Tel. 282274
Wards affected	Not applicable		

This report sets out the current 2011-12 Work Programme for the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel

1. Action Required

1.1 The Panel is asked to consider and comment the current work programme.

2. Reason for Action

2.1 This function forms part of the Panel's Terms of Reference in the Constitution.

3. Additional item

3.1 Local Housing (HRA) Review – The Panel have been requested to undertake a pre-Cabinet Scrutiny of the Local Housing (HRA) Review on 20 March 2012.

4. Outstanding Items for review

4.1 There are no outstanding items, though the review of the Street Service FSR Business Case implementation will be undertaken in 2012.

4.2 A potential review of Job Enabling / Creation to be undertaken in 2012 (following Panel discussions at the meeting on 13 December 2011). The Panel will be informed of progress in due course.

Meeting date / reviews	Portfolio
19 July 2011 1. Budget Strategy, Timetable and MTFF 2. Review of the Arts 3. Trial - doorstep collection of food waste (pre scrutiny)	Leader & Strategy / Resources and ICT Commerce and Sustainability Street and Waste
30 August 2011 1. Safer Colchester Partnership (Crime and Disorder Committee)	Housing and Community Safety
11 October 2011 (extra) (The Old Library)	
1. Consultation response – Business Rates Reform (Resolution to Cabinet 12-10-11)	Resources and Heritage
25 October (replaces 20 September 2011)	
Colchester Borough Homes – Fundamental Service Review	Housing and Community Safety
1 November 2011 (meeting cancelled)	
1. Sport and Leisure - Fundamental Services Review (to be re-arranged)	Communities and Diversity
29 November 2011 (extra meeting)	
1. An overview of the St Botolph's Regeneration project	Renaissance
13 December 2011	
1. Review of the Budget Strategy 2. 2011-12 6-monthly Performance report 3. Strategic Plan Action Plan 2012-15	Leader & Strategy / Resources & Heritage
10 January 2012	
1. Public Transport in the Borough	Renaissance / Street and Waste
14 February 2012	
1. Sport and Leisure - Fundamental Services Review	Communities and Diversity
20 March 2012	
1. Review of Colchester Community Stadium Limited 2. Local Housing (HRA) Review	Leader & Strategy Housing and Community Safety

