

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

16 JUNE 2009

Present :- Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)
Councillors Nick Barlow, Mark Cory, Mike Hogg,
Jackie Maclean, Kim Naish, Gaye Pyman,
Laura Sykes, Nick Taylor and Dennis Willetts

Substitute Member :- Councillor Michael Lilley for Councillor Julie Young

3. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 20 May 2009 and 5 May 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. Decisions taken under special urgency provisions

The Chairman confirmed to the panel that he had agreed to approve the following decision taken under the special urgency provisions. The decisions "Comment form for Nominated new Nuclear Power Station Sites.

Councillor Arnold explained that from the time the comment form had been completed and signed off by Councillor Turrell, Leader of the Council, there was not sufficient time to put on the Council's Forward Plan.

Councillor Arnold informed the panel that Cabinet had endorsed the recommendations within the panel's report on 'A new build nuclear power station at Bradwell', ensuring the work by the task and finish group would continue.

RESOLVED that the panel noted the Portfolio Holder decision taken under special urgency provisions.

5. Strategic Plan Action Plan

Councillor Turrell (in respect of being a Member of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item.

Councillor Anne Turrell, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, and Ms. Ann Wain, Executive Director, attended the meeting for this and the following item.

Councillor Turrell gave a brief introduction on the report, saying that this was an opportunity to consider the one year Strategic Plan 2009-10 Actions, which worked towards achieving all the targets set within the three year 2009-12

Strategic Plan Action Plan.

Councillor Arnold asked that given there are no baselines or targets, accepting some were embodied in Local Area Agreements, how did the Administration intend to measure progress during and at the end of the municipal year. Councillor Arnold gave examples of where there are no start and finishing points to be able to measure progress.

Councillor Turrell said that in order to give context to many of the actions and outputs it was necessary to align the Strategic Plan 2009-10 Actions, with the Action Plan, but which was not included within the agenda papers. Ms. Wain explained that the Action Plan was listed within the report as a background paper, but apologised, saying it should have been included within the report. Ms. Wain said work continued on the format of the plan, developing a new concept, and amendments could be made.

Councillor Arnold agreed that both the Strategic Plan and Action Plan documents needed to be presented together to provide the required context.

Councillor Turrell confirmed to Councillor Hogg that in terms of fostering increased community spirit, an action within Community Development, work was now to commence on determining the targeted wards, mechanisms and criterion, and all councillors will be informed once this information is available. Councillors questioned the timescale of July 2009 for this action, given the work on determining what wards and criterion to use had not been decided.

Councillor Taylor asked whether some of the timescales were correct, that is, had they happened (in the case of timescales with dates that had already expired) or was the year incorrect. Ms. Wain said some actions within the plan are progressive from one year to the next, hence timescales do in some cases show a finished date. It was explained that the six monthly progress report (to be reported in late 2009) will show outputs with progress and completion dates, and the year end report that will give an opportunity to assess the overall delivery.

Councillor Maclean said she was disappointed that the report did not allow actions to have the capacity for movement and new progress within the current year.

Councillor Turrell concluded the deliberations by accepting there were presentation issues with the current report and agreed to a redrafted annual Strategic Plan along with the Action Plan being reported back to the panel as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the panel;

- i) Commented on, and noted the Strategic Plan Action Plan 2008/09.
- ii) Requested a redraft of the annual Strategic Plan along with the Action Plan, taking into account the comments of the panel, and that is presented to the panel at the earliest convenient meeting.

6. Performance Report 2008/09

Councillor Arnold explained to the panel that following discussions with the Executive Directors it was agreed that due to the inextricable links between National Indicators and the Strategic Plan it made sense to examine these documents together. This report, in the form of Best Value Performance Indicators had previously been reported on a regular basis to the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Panel, but would as of now be a part of the terms of reference of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and the Terms of Reference would be amended accordingly.

The panel deliberated at length detail of many of the National Indicator results. Where questions remained unanswered, the panel requested further updates at future meetings (see resolutions ii) to iv). The panel requested clarification on the following;

The correlation between NI 154 Net additional homes provided, NI 155 Gross number of affordable homes delivered, the Council's target of 35% of homes built to be affordable homes and NI 11, part of the Life Chances Local Area Agreement on increasing the amount of affordable housing available in the borough by 241 homes (see minute ii).

A recent Government statement had stated national homelessness had reduced significantly, but indicator 156 Number of households in temporary accommodation suggested the opposite in Colchester and was a concern, as was the results of the Council's tenants' satisfaction with their landlord. Ms. Pam Donnelly, Executive Director, informed the panel that a review of housing services was currently being undertaken, with a final report due to be completed in early autumn. The panel agreed to Ms. Donnelly's suggestion that the summary of findings to be reported to the Portfolio Holder would be presented to the panel thereafter, sometime in late autumn.

Ms. Wain confirmed to the panel the excellent year end result for the Council's sickness rate, reducing from 10.25 days per person in 2007-08 to 8.28 days in 2008-09, due in part to the work of officers to improve the result. Councillor Arnold acknowledged this achievement.

Councillor Offen, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources, addressed the

panel to explain that in regards to indicator 8, Invoices paid on time, the result showed that of the 26,400 invoices processed only 75 were not paid on time, though any disputed invoices were not reflected in the overall performance. Given the current economic downturn and in an effort to improve local business cash flow, the Council had achieved paying 98% of the invoices to local businesses (businesses with a CO post code) within 20 days.

Councillor Arnold said he would look closely at this result in 6 months time, hastening to add that he would like to think the margin was slender between those CO businesses and local businesses in the Maldon, Braintree and Witham areas.

Councillor Taylor mentioned that other Essex Councils took a stricter approach to recovering outstanding Council Tax and Business Rates. Councillor Barlow said the Policy Development and Review panel reviewed the Council's Debt Management Policy in 2009, a policy that now differentiates between those who 'won't pay', and those who 'can't pay'. Councillor Offen explained that Colchester's approach remained relatively successful, with the Council remaining 5th in the overall Essex Local Authorities listing.

RESOLVED that the panel;

- i) Commented on, and noted the Performance Report 2008/09.
- ii) Requested that the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration report back to the panel at the earliest convenient opportunity, a report providing clarification on all affordable housing information in the context of National Indicators, as mentioned in the above minute.
- iii) Recognising the difficulties experienced by the Council's Housing Services during the last year, reflected to some degree in the poor National Indicator results, and requested that the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods, Executive Director, Ms. Pam Donnelly and the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration provide an overview of the completed Housing Review to the panel in October / November 2009.
- iv) Agreed to complete a strategic overview of the Planning Service following the completion of the current planning review, for the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration and the Head of Environmental and Protective Services to report to the panel sometime in the autumn of 2009.
- v) Requested the Head of Life Opportunities to provide to the panel a report giving a breakdown of the Life Chances Local Area Agreements and their constituent national indicators results at the earliest convenient meeting.

7. Work Programme

The panel considered and noted the 2009-10 work Programme.

RESOLVED that the panel;

- i) Commented on, and noted the 2009/10 work Programme.
- ii) Requested that the items of review requested under minute 6, Performance Report 2008-09 would be incorporated into the new work programme.