

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL

20 AUGUST 2008

Present :- Councillor Julie Young (Chairman)
Councillors Nick Barlow, Kevin Bentley, Beverly Davies,
Mike Hardy and Justin Knight

Also in Attendance :- Henry Spyvee
Tim Young

7. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of the Policy Review Panel held on 14 May and 16 June 2008 were confirmed as a correct record.

8. Have Your Say! The Principle of Zero Waste

James Watson, a resident of Attlee Gardens, addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), explaining that he was continuing to experience problems in respect of the recycling collections in his neighbourhood. He confirmed that paper was being regularly collected but that plastics were being missed. The Chairman confirmed that these problems would be referred to the Council's Waste Services Team for their attention.

Councillor Julie Young (in respect of her spouses Chairmanship of the Board of Colchester Borough Homes) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Kevin Bentley (in respect of his involvement with Colne Housing Society Limited) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

9. Review of Colchester's Housing Strategy Statement

The Panel received details of the Housing Strategy, its priorities and Action Plans and was invited to review their contents prior to consideration by the Cabinet at its meeting in October 2008.

Lindsay Barker, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration and Richard Hughes, Housing Strategy and Research Co-ordinator, attended the meeting to assist members in their discussions.

The Strategy's overall vision for Housing in the Borough was to make Colchester a place where people choose to live in a decent, safe home which meets their needs at a price they can afford and in locations and neighbourhoods that are sustainable and

desirable and to balance the housing market so that supply of housing meets market demand and housing need.

The Strategy was split into the following chapters:

- Delivering market and affordable housing to meet housing need and demand;
- Managing and Improving existing private sector homes;
- Managing and Improving council and housing association homes;
- Preventing and Tackling homelessness;
- Housing with Support;
- Sustainable Communities.

It was suggested to the Panel members that their consideration of the Strategy might be assisted by use of the following questions:

- Are the priorities identified the correct ones?
- Will the Action Plan be achieved?
- What are the risks to achieving the Action Plans?
- What could be done to minimise the risks?
- To what extent has the Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Local Area Agreement prioritised Housing issues?

The Panel sought further information in relation to the following issues:

- Whether the reduction in homelessness applications and acceptances was a trend to be welcomed and what happened to those applicants who were not accepted. It was explained that this trend was largely as a consequence of successful prevention strategies, particularly in the private sector, whilst a number of applicants were given support to enable them to take up their rights to housing elsewhere;
- The impact of the Credit Crunch on the provision of Affordable Housing. It was explained that the implications of the current economic situation were as yet unclear. Work was being undertaken to prevent repossessions whilst there had been a small trend in developers offering housing to Housing Associations but also no evidence yet to indicate that rents were increasing;
- Colchester Borough council is committed to working with the Homes and Communities Agency, the successor to the Housing Corporation;
- The Greater Haven Gateway sub regional choice based lettings scheme is due to be launched in January to enable applications from tenants from across the 8 authorities in the sub region;
- The extent of joint working between officers and partners involved in Housing, Planning Policy and Development Control services;
- The number of council owned dwellings quoted in the report as remaining non-decent was 1,389 but it was emphasized that this was estimate that was required to be published for audit purposes and work was still being undertaken to determine a completely accurate figure;
- The method used to ascertain the number of tenants in the private sector was to use the responses to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment questionnaire and it was considered that this was a robust source from which to accurately determine numbers.

The following changes to the Strategy were suggested by the Panel:

- A reference in the Action Planning section making reference to architectural design issues;
- A clear statement relating to the accessibility of employment opportunities and shopping facilities;
- The chapter on Sustainable Communities to be amended to include a reference to the need to provide for alternative forms of transport, other than the car;
- An amendment to the Action Planning sections to reflect the need to investigate different and marketable models of provision for older people, possibly including Retirement Villages.

RESOLVED that, subject to amendments being made to reflect the changes suggested in respect of architectural design, accessible employment and shopping, the provision of alternative forms of transport and provision for older people, the Strategy be commended to the Cabinet for approval.

Councillor Kevin Bentley (in respect of his former Directorship of Colchester Town Partnership) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Nick Barlow (in respect of his membership of the Castle Neighbourhood Action Panel) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

10. Night-Time Town Centre for All

The Panel considered a report by Executive Director, Ian Vipond, inviting the Panel to consider the best way to deliver an initiative which would provide Colchester with a Town Centre that feels safe and welcoming to all in the evening.

Adrian Coombs, Acting District Commander, Colchester Police, addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), explaining that a number of individual groups existed which were involved with night time economy issues but that he was of the view that a strategic group needed to be set up to oversee the work being undertaken by groups individually. The Chairman thanked Mr Coombs for his contribution and indicated that she would very much welcome any further contributions he would be able to make in the context of a potential Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group.

The report explained that Essex Police, in partnership with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership had developed a Town Centre Tasking Group to co-ordinate the roles of partners in making the town centre safer. This group brought together, as appropriate, representatives from:

- CBC / Police Licensing;
- CBC Street Services;
- Transport;
- Club / Pub Watch;
- CBC Anti-Social Behaviour Team;
- CBC Environmental Services;
- Neighbourhood action Panel;
- Neighbourhood watch;
- Resident Group;
- Club and Pub Owners / Operators;
- Members of the Youth Forum.

The report proposed the setting up of a Task and Finish Group with the following terms of reference:

To investigate, with a view to determining short, medium and long term objectives,:

- The causes of the perception that in the evening the town centre is an unwelcoming place to many people;
- Concerns about a predominance of certain types of bars and clubs, yobbish behaviour and a grubby environment;
- How to bring about a change in the public's perception of the evening town centre atmosphere.

To consider a range of proposals, including:

- Bulk review of Licenses;
- Award Scheme for trade premises that change their approach;
- More visible night time cleansing;
- Night time street wardens;
- Enforcement of industry code on point of sale promotions;
- Physical improvements to design out crime;
- More varied offer in evening venues;
- (Enforcement) 'Action Nights'.

The Panel gave particular consideration to the following issues:

- The need for representatives from the business community to be included in any future discussions;
- The possibility of reviewing the work previously undertaken in connection with the Strategy to Tackle All Night time Disorder in Colchester (STAND) initiative;
- The possibility of seeking advice from Local Authorities who had successfully changed the perceptions of their town centres (such as Coventry or Birmingham) or nearby Local Authorities of a similar size;
- The possibility of creating a recreation / leisure park in another part of the town to divert activities elsewhere;
- The possibility of working with Licensing colleagues in relation to the options available to either concentrate or disperse clubs and pubs to certain parts of the town centre;
- The need for the town to host a healthy mix of venues with appeal to a variety of age

groups;

- The option to take proactive action, such as Orders restricting an individual's movements and prosecution of establishments serving alcohol to under age customers and customers who are already drunk;
- The possibility of issuing or selling night-time passes in order to purchase drinks in the town centre.

Councilor T. Young, the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel, explaining that he and the Chairman of the Licensing Committee had undertaken a tour of the town centre on a Saturday night with the Council's Licensing Officers and, whilst the night had been a relatively quiet one in terms of incident, he would not have been able to describe the experience as a pleasant one. In his opinion, there was a need for a radical change in emphasis in to deal with the night time issues and he welcomed the opportunity to participate in a Task and Finish Group.

Councilor Spyvee, the Deputy Mayor, attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel, explaining that Colchester was a safe town with town centre residents and people who travel into town being adversely affected by people who are in the town although not necessarily doing anything 'anti social'.

RESOLVED that –

- (i) Copies of the Final report from the STAND initiative be circulated to members of the panel and the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services;
- (ii) A Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group be set up comprising six members of the Council with Terms of Reference, proposals to be considered and invitations to act as expert witnesses as identified above;
- (iii) The Task and Finish Group be set up over the Autumn with a view to a final report being formalized by the end of the year.

11. Historic Town Centre Improvement

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration giving details of the process now required to take forward the Historic Town Centre Improvements Project which would include enhancements to the pedestrian experience in the Town Centre, together with other environmental and transportation improvements.

Funding of £100,000 had been secured from the Department of Communities and Local Government for the year 2008/09, with provisional additional funding of £700,000 for 2009/10.

A number of key short term outcomes had been established for the period to the end of 2008:

- The appointment of a project manager to manage and provide leadership for the process who would additionally be required to seek further funding for the ongoing projects from external sources;
- The creation of a Project Team and Project Board which would include Colchester Borough and Essex County Council Members as well as other key partners such as English Heritage;
- The definition of a vision for the Town Centre Core, i.e. what will define a successful, safe and economically vibrant town centre;
- The Development of a realistic Implementation Plan with some key milestone projects in the short, medium and longer term;
- The delivery of some of the short term “quick win” projects which would start to make a difference to the High Street in particular.

RESOLVED that the strategy to be adopted to progress the project to deliver Colchester Historic Town Centre Improvements, including the establishment of a Project Board, which has been developed in partnership with Essex County Council be noted.

12. Work Programme 2008/09

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Corporate Management giving details of the work programme for 2008/09 which had been updated to reflect the areas of work identified by the Panel at its previous meeting.

It was explained that the scheduling of the Educational Attainment item needed to be changed to the meeting on 3 November 2008.

RESOLVED that, subject to the addition of a Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group as agreed at minute no. 10 above, the amended Work Programme for 2008 /09 be noted.