

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

29 SEPTEMBER 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

17. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minute of the meeting held on 24 August 2009 was confirmed as a correct record.

18. Have Your Say!

Mr. Andy Hamilton attended the meeting and addressed the panel, saying that he had attended the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Panel meeting on the 22 September 2009 to explain how the Council was only allowing the Firstsite group to lease 15 Queen Street. Mr. Hamilton said he had tried without success to contact the Council's Estates Officer on Monday 28 September without success.

Mr. Hamilton said he felt it was shameful that the Council intends to give Firstsite the lease to 15 Queen Street without consideration of more deserving charitable uses. Mr. Hamilton said he was interested to see the Hospice building is used for charitable purposes and would have sought a lease restricted to those activities. With this in mind he believed a similar situation could allow for restricted charitable activities at Firstsite for such organisations as mobility scooters and a local credit union.

Mr. Hamilton was surprised by the Council's unconditional financial support of the Firstsite group, which included a contract for Firstsite that he believed was not in the public's interest, given they did not the finances or skills required to manage what he considered was a disastrous project.

Mr. Hamilton said the Firstsite group refuses to allow the public to attend their meetings, and refuse to answer questions, ignoring the taxpaying public whilst squandering public money.

Given his comments to this time, Mr. Hamilton said he wished the Council to accept this as an initial complaint against a senior Council officer and a Member of the Cabinet. Mr. Hamilton concluded by saying should the Council continue with the provision of a lease to Firstsite for 15 Queen Street, they will have to answer to the Ombudsman and the Disability Commission.

Mr. Pritchard, Chief Executive, in response to the panel, confirmed that Firstsite are currently occupying temporary accommodation.

19. Review of the Colchester2020 Partnership.

Dr Paul Zollinger-Read, Chairman of Colcheser2020 and Chief Executive of North East Essex Primary Care Trust and Mr. Adrian Pritchard, Chief Executive, Colchester Borough Council, attended the meeting for this item.

Dr Zollinger-Read gave a resume of the work of the partnership during this year, explaining that there had been changes, culminating in a larger organisation. The partnership believed there was need for a new strategic direction that resulted in a reviewed membership now considered more inclusive, with additional partners such as the Colchester Institute and Citizen's Advice Bureau. The Partnership now focuses on five priority areas (as noted in the covering report) with clear action plans and measurable outcomes, and this is to be monitored through a new performance management programme, with greater focus on the current economic squeeze.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Dr Zollinger-Read understood the feeling that there was not such a green theme running through the new Sustainable Community Strategy, and the partnership was now looking at ways to address this, taking account of other successful models. Mr. Pritchard said it was accepted that the green theme does not come through as clearly or as well as it had done in the original Community Strategy, and Lead Partners are been asked to address the green / sustainable issues within the revised priorities and performance measures.

In response to Councillor Taylor, Dr Zollinger-Read said the Partnership's communications with other large organisations at a regional level was not as developed as well as the partnership would like, but was being addressed in the Partnership's Direction of Travel statement. Mr. Pritchard said the partnership did participate as the Local Strategic Partnership in the Essex Partnership Forum and there are connections at regional and national levels in providing a successful lobbying process. Dr Zollinger-Read added that a local strength was the Partnership's mini assemblies, engaging with small local businesses, a real success. As an example, Mr. Pritchard, as Lead Partner, was for his priority area, looking to establish a small group represented by voluntary agencies, local housing landlords and the Night Shelter Manager, to engage with participants at a second level from the assembly.

Dr Zollinger-Read and Mr. Pritchard confirmed to Councillor Naish that where

targets within the Delivery Plan are missing, this was a process matter rather than an outcome matter, and that Local Area Agreement measures are now in place.

In response to Councillor Hogg, Dr Zollinger-Read said that whilst it was clearly set out what the partnership was aiming to achieve, this was not designed to resolve all society problems. The partnership would endeavour to achieve its targets and would be brought to account on delivery at the end of the year.

Dr Zollinger-Read and Mr. Pritchard agreed with Councillor Hogg that a quarterly update communiqué from the Partnership would help members and the like, in discussions with local residents on such matters.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Dr Zollinger-Read and Mr. Pritchard spoke about the consultation process that led to the methodology for the new strategy. Whilst the formal methodology came from the partnership assembly meeting, a very well attended meeting, where the agreed priorities were broadly in line with the previous priorities, it was stressed that these had been underpinned by substantial qualitative and quantitative consultation by the Council and local Primary Care Trust. Dr Zollinger-Read reaffirmed his belief that the priority areas are the right areas to be addressed. Councillor Naish later commented that when in conversation with residents in his ward, the priorities within the Delivery Plan are the priorities mentioned by local people.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Dr Zollinger-Read and Mr. Pritchard agreed that action 4.3.2 “to provide support to residents and businesses to reduce their carbon emissions” did not fit with the key action of 4.3 “to improve the sustainability and reduce the carbon emissions of our housing”, and would take away and address through discussions with all Lead Partners.

It was stated that the financial restraints on the partnership targets would become more apparent over the coming three years, generating challenging discussions between all the Assembly partners to find new innovative ways of collectively delivering on, and achieving the desired outcomes.

Dr Zollinger-Read said he would respond to members of the panel in regards to Councillor Arnold’s request for greater clarity in respect of the targets to “work to change the perception of our ‘heritage’ to include natural and green spaces”.

Councillor Arnold thanked Dr Zollinger-Read and Mr. Pritchard for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that the panel considered and noted the work of Colchester2020, the Local Strategic Partnership, and the progress made towards the

partnership's revised priorities.

20. Public Service Partnership

Ms. Ann Wain, Executive Director and Mr. Adrian Pritchard, Chief Executive, attended the meeting for this item, and Ms. Wain presented the report, Local Area Agreement – Performance Management.

In response to Councillor Barlow, Ms. Wain said she appreciated the difficulty with understanding the scale within the graphs for each priority, but this was being addressed for future reports. Ms. Wain also said that we were still awaiting data for some indicators, and where this was the case, the achievement indicator did show red.

Mr. Pritchard, in response to Councillor Taylor said that whilst the Comprehensive Area Assessment involves the assessment of the prospects for the future achievement of shared priorities by the Council and other local partners, the Government deal directly with the Counties not the Local Strategic Partnerships, so Essex County Council would have put their signature to the targets through agreement with the Government.

Ms. Wain, in response to Councillor Arnold said the main principle behind the Public Service Partnership (PSP) was partnership working, where more can be achieved collectively than individually, with the Council helping to co-ordinate the help and support required. Ms. Wain confirmed that indicators 4 and 5, about how local people feel they can influence local decisions and their general satisfaction with the local area are measured by the National Place Survey, which replaced the Best Value Survey. Mr. Pritchard added that as was the case with the basis for the methodology of the new Community Strategy, collective consultation does amount to a significant volume of consultation responses, whilst acknowledging that the response from hard to reach groups was overall smaller. Ms. Wain said the National Place Survey was statistically valid, and had been agreed with confidence levels, accepting more qualitative surveys were needed to get to those 'hard to reach' groups.

In response to Councillor Naish, Ms. Wain said there are a lot of statutory education targets, and whilst it has been a struggle to get the necessary data, we are now making some good progress, and the PSP are to review these indicators at their next meeting.

Councillor Tina Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Partnerships addressed the panel, explaining the difficulty with gathering statistical information on children, though it had been proven nationally that children who are cared for by someone other than their parents have the poorest outcomes

in terms of health and youth offending. Councillor Dopson said the Probation Service was looking at schemes for light sentence offenders to work on meaningful projects within their communities, and members were invited to contribute to suggesting projects for these people.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Ms. Wain said the £700,000 Performance Reward Grant for projects to help deliver the Local Area Agreement (LAA) was funded by the Essex Partnership. Local partners and organisations are invited to offer up potential local grant projects for grant financing. The projects are judged against an agreed set of criteria, those being 1) the project can deliver on at least one LAA target, 2) it is about partnership working, 3) it is new sustainable work, given the grant is for two years, 4) it is able to attract funding from other external organisations. The bids are assessed and fed back to the Essex Partnership, who undertakes rigorous checks before approval.

RESOLVED that the panel commented on and noted the information contained in the Local Area Agreement Performance Management document.

21. Work Programme

RESOLVED that the panel;

- i) Considered and noted the 2009-10 Work Programme.
- ii) Approved the extra meeting to be held on 13 October 2009.