

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

16 NOVEMBER 2010

Present :- Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Mark Cory, Andrew Ellis,
Bill Frame, Theresa Higgins, Nigel Offen,
Gerard Oxford, Dennis Willetts and Julie Young

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Martin Hunt

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Theresa Higgins (in respect of being a Board Member of the YMCA) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

20. Street Services Fundamental Services Review

Ms. Pam Donnelly, Executive Director and Mr. Matthew Young, Head of Street Services gave a joint presentation on the Fundamental Service Review Full Business Case.

The Chairman started proceedings by thanking the Portfolio Holder and officers for involving members from the outset of the current work on the Full Business Case.

Ms. Donnelly gave a broad overview of the Fundamental Service Reviews (FSR) to date, Housing Services, Environmental and Protective Services and Revenues and Benefits Service and this, the fourth major FSR, Street Services, a review that is trying to cover an array of different services, small and large, but with a very important theme running through all, customer services.

Ms. Donnelly spoke about the three principles of the FSR, Customer Excellence, with the customer having a voice, their views and thoughts fed into the process, shaping and influencing outcomes, effectiveness, ensuring the business case is fit for purpose, and finally, efficiencies, having to take account of the budgetary needs year on year through to 2013/14.

Mr. Young spoke about the breadth of the FSR, which would produce the biggest changes in decades to some of the services provided by the Group. The FSR has focused on improving services to customers, having to reflect the needs of residents and businesses, but at the same time reducing costs, with an anticipated saving of £800k within three years, £400k in the first year. Mr. Young said staff will need to adjust to the anticipated new working arrangements, with greater flexibility, with services in some cases delivered on a 24/7 basis, with staff being provided with improved, tried and tested technology.

Ms. Donnelly spoke of the journey so far, a clear process, with a radical rethink of

'where do we want to be'. Customers currently access services through a variety of channels. The 'Customer' solution would simplify the process, reducing the number of processes and thereby increase effectiveness. The new service would provide 24/7 customer contact, with single customer records and each customer contact fed into a central knowledge bank, feeding out accurate speedy responses to customers and frontline services. This would require behaviour change, encouraging recycling and residents getting more involved in their communities, with a need for education, to persuade and encourage people to engage and act.

Mr. Young spoke about 'Zoned Working'. The Borough would be split into seven zones, based on demographics, needs, in depth knowledge from staff and communities, the types of properties and businesses and finally, the availability of resources. Mr. Young said considerable work had gone into determining the zones and officers did want to try the recommended zones from the outset, though the zoned working will be under constant review from the start, and will if needed be adjusted.

Each zone will have its own dedicated community based team, multi-skilled, and will incorporate a Manager, and variable numbers of Wardens and Operatives, according to the needs of each zone. The teams will be ambassadors to the Council, pro-active, ahead of the game, spotting and preventing things from happening with a 'see it, and solve it' mentality. Ward and Parish Councillors would also be an integral part of the success, and the zone team will, at a very early stage, develop a positive relationship with these important partners.

In terms of recycling and waste, Mr. Young said collections would move to a Tuesday to Friday collection service, making the service more efficient, avoiding most Bank Holidays, with the only days to be resolved being the Christmas and New Year period and Good Friday. This will be addressed in the Implementation Plan. New technology will provide the base for building fair and equal collection routes and drivers will have increased responsibility for staff and refuse vehicles. New investment at the Shrub End Depot was vital in ensuring the improved efficiency on the streets is replicated at the Depot, and a procurement process has begun to pursue interest from private business. Mr. Young later confirmed to Councillor Ellis that this process would look at all options, including Waste Treatment Facilities.

The Recycling and Waste Task and Finish Group would continue to have a role to play in developing and encouraging participation in food waste trials and subsequent collections.

Mr. Young spoke about the business development of distinct services within Street Services and the impact of this through the FSR. It was anticipated that Community Alarms will merge with the CCTV Monitoring Centre and then focus on marketing their services and ultimately increase income from the potential within the Borough.. Street Services had tendered for the contract with Colchester Borough Homes to provide void property clearance, that itself subsequently leads to the recycling of goods, a good source of income, and it was hoped this contract would be extended to local Housing Associations and registered social landlords in years two and three of the Implementation Plan. The Engineering Team would be retained, with expertise that could provide service growth and increased income, particularly in flooding and

drainage.

The majority of the work of the Small Works Team would be included into the zoned working operations and the Vehicle Workshop would examine ways of increasing efficiency and possibly consider other delivery options.

In respect of Parking Services, Mr. Young said there has been an Essex wide review of civil parking enforcement, in which Colchester has played a leading role, resulting in Colchester being named the 'preferred partner' to deliver this service to the north of the County, stretching from Epping Forest to Tendring. The Council is currently preparing a Business Case for consideration by Essex County Council and at the point of acceptance, the Portfolio Holder will formally sign off this decision. .

The Professional Support Unit is a proposal that Members would be used to in these reviews said Ms. Donnelly, but in Street Services this team would include all the strategy functions as well as being an important hub for supporting and getting full potential from new technology, performance management and being pro-active and supportive to the zoned teams.

Mr. Young concluded the presentation by saying he truly believed the outcomes would be the provision of an improved service though he did not underestimate the task at hand. The Cabinet report, together with the comments and proposals from the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 1 December 2010, followed by the introduction of the Implementation Plan to include the statutory ninety day consultation period with staff.

In response to Councillor Offen, Mr. Young said the zone teams would ultimately act as a mobile Customer Services Unit, with most staff able to exist on the streets or in vehicles but with the necessary technology at hand, to be able to respond as needed. Ms. Donnelly said as a close partner, Colchester Borough Homes would also be involved in this process as part of a joined-up approach. Later, and in response to Councillor Arnold, Mr. Young said the behaviour change for zone working was immense, with education an important aspect of the development of the teams, who will be pro-active in their work. Also, residents will play an important part in this work, with education and encouragement needed to secure their participation and enable smarter, more efficient working. Mr. Young confirmed to Councillor T. Higgins that this approach would be very important for blocks of flats, apartments and bedsits such as the YMCA where community involvement would be a benefit. Mr. Young also confirmed to Councillor Chapman and Arnold that unlike what had happened following previous reviews, there would not be instances where services in the rural areas are permanently moved to Town Centre problems to the detriment of the rural areas. It was also confirmed that zone teams would provide a better opportunity to address the litter issues around those areas on the urban fringe.

Councillor Frame agreed with the proposal that all members of the Council should be involved in this type of review from the outset, though this should be done in a way that does not impede progress. Mr. Young confirmed to Councillor Frame that the individual budgets for each zone team is currently part of the detailed work currently ongoing, with each Zone Manager having ownership of this budget, influencing what

and how money is spent. The budgets will form part of the Implementation Plan to be reported to the Panel probably near to the end of 2010/11. Mr. Young confirmed to Councillor Ellis that there are staff that will form part of the zone teams that have the necessary budgetary skills and experience required, but if necessary the appropriate level of training and development will be provided.

One of the very positive outcomes from the previous Street Services review was the food waste trials, but this project was currently parked because the focus was on the FSR. Councillor Young said it was imperative that the public are on board with a firm plan to introduce food waste collection. Mr. Young said the food waste trials are only on hold while the FSR is being undertaken, but it is the intention that officers will report back to the Policy Review and Development Panel in January 2011 to suggest a way forward that will include a 6-month timescale for completion. The intention was to move forward initially with the Tuesday to Friday collections, let them bed-in, then introduce the work required to establish trials. This needed to include planning for implementation, the identification of funding and the purchase of vehicles and equipment.

Ms. Donnelly reassured members that Street Services are working very closely with the Communications Team, and the Implementation Plan will include the detail of a 'Communications Plan', including benefits, changes and rewards for doing things differently, and all part of an overall public relations campaign. This will be a lot of work culminating in proposals to be agreed by the Cabinet.

In response to Councillor Cory, Mr. Young confirmed that the current 13 leases on the refuse vehicles expire in 2011, and these will be temporarily extended until it is confirmed what the refuse collection fleet will comprise, taking account the outcomes from the task and finish group and the review of food waste trials.

Ms. Donnelly confirmed to Councillor T. Higgins of the importance of partnership relationships from the outset. The Police had been consulted, as one of the primary stakeholders, and Chief Superintendent Alison Newcomb was reviewing the Street Services Business Case with a view to linking this work with the Neighbourhood Action Panels.

Ms. Donnelly, in response to Councillor Oxford explained that the educational process around behaviour change would include encouraging young people in the town centre at night to behave differently, but not at any time will unacceptable unsociable behaviour be tolerated and enforcement will operate alongside education. Mr. Young said officers are in dialogue with licensing officers to find solutions, working with town centre businesses to get them to be more active and contribute to this work.

Mr. Young confirmed that Area Governance was operated in some Councils, e.g. Hull, with zoned committees for governance arrangements supporting zoned areas. Ms. Donnelly said this would be considered as part of the Localism Bill to be considered in December. Ms. Donnelly also confirmed that officers are in discussions with Tesco to work on a recycling reward scheme, and further detail once confirmed will be shared with Members at a later date.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Mr. Young said future housing growth had been considered and would be built into the route optimisation programme, as would the effects of continual improvement to recycling rates. Therefore, at this moment it is not envisaged that additional resources will be needed over the initial three year period due to the effect of housing growth. Mr. Young later confirmed to Councillor Willetts that the workload of zone teams would be built up using the route optimisation programme, building in holiday and sickness leave and with a view to having little or no reliance on overtime or agency resources.

Mr. Young confirmed to Councillor Arnold that the creation of the Central Communications and Marketing team happened late in the FSR process and acknowledged that it did have an impact on the duties to be performed by the Professional Support Unit. The benefits of this unit would be a small central pool of officers with the necessary expertise in strategy, policy, communications and promotion. Ms. Donnelly said Street Services had been involved in the proposal for a central communications team, with the aspiration to provide a more focused and efficient process, building-in improved safeguards to the operation of the service. The inter-relationship between the Communications team customer services, the Professional Support Unit and the zoned teams would be a major key to the success. Mr. Young confirmed to Councillor Willetts that the Professional Support Unit would be smaller in number to the current workforce, benefitting from economics of scale, more effective working and technological expertise and improvements.

Councillor Arnold expressed concerns that the risks identified within the report were not being presented in the standard format now associated with the periodical reporting to the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Panel and that a Business Case was to be endorsed before the risks are reviewed and the mitigating action agreed. Ms. Donnelly said as FSR developed so the approach to risk was changing. Risk assessment was an important factor to the consultation process and changes are/will be fed into the process all the time. Ms. Donnelly said Councillor Arnold's comment would be picked up as an action within the overall process.

Mr. Young confirmed to Councillor Arnold that the specialist Graffiti Team would be retained under the new arrangements. However, the zone teams will also be encouraged to react and clean graffiti where possible, and this would apply to buildings /structures either publicly or privately owned.

Councillor Frame requested further information that would provide the assurance of transparency in regards to the tendering process for the Void Properties contract.

RESOLVED that the panel endorsed the report 'Fundamental Service Review of Street Services', to be presented to the Cabinet on 1 December 2010, and further requested;

i) That the Cabinet agree for all future FSR that effect all or most of the residents of the Borough, all members of the Council are involved from the outset of the review, and in a way that does not impede progress, together with the other relevant stakeholders.

- ii) The Cabinet to extend the Terms of Reference for the Waste Prevention and Recycling task and finish group to include a review of the refuse collection fleet needed to carry out the Street Services Implementation Plan, taking account of the results from trials such as that of food waste collection.
- iii) That further consideration is given to the risk management process, to ensure the risks identified at the review stage are considered and mitigated against prior to the implementation of the Implementation Plan.
- iv) Confirmation of the tendering process for the Void Properties contract.

21. Review of the work of the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services

Councillor Hunt, Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services attended the meeting for the review of his work in respect of the Street and Waste Portfolio.

Councillor Hunt took the opportunity to thank Ms. Donnelly, Mr. Young and all the staff within the Street Services Team for their excellent work in respect of the Fundamental Service Review (FSR).

In response to Councillor Arnold, Councillor Hunt confirmed that the implementation of the new Graffiti Policy was proving very successful, a noticeable difference, with the pro-active teams now responding within two days of notification, down from the original average of six days. Graffiti blitzes had been undertaken in many areas of the borough, and this programme will continue until January 2011. This has been a newsworthy success story.

Mr. Matthew Young, Head of Street Services said the removal of graffiti was undertaken on all buildings and structures whether publicly or privately owned. The Council do still receive a small amount of funds from Essex County Council for this work, but have not as yet recovered any costs for this service from private owners. It is intended that in the future more effort will be made to claw back costs from private owners. Councillor Hunt confirmed that graffiti removing kits are provided through the Neighbourhood Action Panels, not by the Council. Councillor Oxford thanked the Graffiti Squad for their excellent work, making an enormous positive difference to the street scene.

Councillor Hunt confirmed to Councillor Higgins that as part of the change in working practices following the FSR, the educational process will be at the forefront of the work of the zone teams, reacting to situations and where necessary reminding households that it is their responsibility to deal with the issue. The zone teams will also work in close harmony with the Parish Councils in both a pro-active and reactive way and discussions are already in progress to secure closer partnership working between the Council and Essex County Council Highways. Councillor Higgins asked that street service operatives are instructed to remove fixings when removing flyers.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Councillor Hunt said the Leader was in ongoing dialogue with Essex County Council (ECC) in regards to the new Park and Ride Scheme and the Cabinet are anticipating that when the finances of the scheme are

discussed the Council will be able to negotiate a share of the proceeds to offset any loss of income from the Council's Car Parks. Mr. Young said the new parking strategy will hopefully ensure park and ride will have as limited an effect as possible on parking revenue. The Council has made a bid to manage the park and ride site and is awaiting a response from ECC. The outcomes of this work will be reported to a future meeting on the panel before any formal decision is taken.

Councillor Hunt confirmed to Councillor Frame that the Cabinet will be guided by the work of the night time economy task and finish group in regards to any suggestions to curb unsociable behaviour through licensing law. The Cabinet are committed to making progress, with food waste / litter trials a priority in determining any future actions. In a wider context, Councillor Hunt said notices to clean the street had been issued to three major food outlets, and fly-tipping enforcement had proved a success, with fewer reported instances,

Councillor Hunt confirmed he is in regular discussions with the market traders. There remained long standing grievances over problems with power to stall, high rents and a variety of other smaller issues. Councillor Hunt and officers are considering the level of payments for market spaces when the market trader is on holiday, and an extra market day each week.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hunt for attending the meeting and responding to the Panel's questions.

22. Work Programme

The Panel noted the 2010/11 Work Programme.