

FINANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY PANEL

19 OCTOBER 2010

Present :- Councillor Dennis Willetts (Chairman)
Councillors Christopher Arnold, Nick Cope,
Scott Greenhill, Sue Lissimore, Jon Manning,
Colin Mudie, Kim Naish, Gerard Oxford and Colin Sykes

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Paul Smith

28. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on the 28 September 2010 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments. Minute 24, paragraph 4, to read "Councillor Hogg urged the panel to accept Councillor Chapman's request", and Minute 25, paragraph 13, first sentence to read "former Councillor Jones".

Councillor Gerard Oxford (in respect of being a Governor of the Brinkley Grove School) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Kim Naish (in respect of being a member of the Colchester Credit Union) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

29. Support for Colchester Credit Union

Mr. Robert Judd, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report on the Colchester Credit Union, explaining that the report provided members with an update on the support provided by Essex County Council to Colchester Credit Union, as requested by members following the review undertaken in November 2009. The update represented what was a good news story.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Diversity addressed the panel, agreeing this was a good news story, thanking Essex County Council for responding so positively following the November 2009 review, providing a grant of £14,000 this June, to be followed by a grant of £5,000 in 2011. Councillor Smith said nine tenants from Colchester Borough Homes have been helped by Colchester Credit Union as a result of improved support, commending the work of Colchester Credit Union and support provided by Essex County Council, saying he was pleased that the work of the panel had produced such a tangible result.

Councillor Willetts said he was pleased to see there was now agreement between Colchester Credit Union and Essex County Council.

Councillor Naish thanked Mr. Richard Cording and his team for the marvellous work of Colchester Credit Union, given their limited resources. Councillor Naish however,

remained concerned about loan companies, visibly seen knocking on residents' doors for outstanding payments and encouraging people to accept further advances, thereby creating a spiral of debt. Councillor Naish said more publicity was needed to promote credit unions in general, especially via television, and credit unions needed to consider a way to fund door step collections themselves.

Councillor Gerard Oxford said that Brinkley Grove School would like to set up a savings scheme and wondered if the Colchester Credit Union would be interested.

Mr. Cording, Colchester Credit Union addressed the panel and responded to Councillor Sykes, saying the reason for setting up weekly collection points at the Essex County Council run libraries at Prettygate and Wivenhoe, was that Colchester Credit Union was confident they could find the volunteers needed to staff these two locations.

Mr. Cording said loan companies have the ability to appear at a customer's home at a strategic time to meet a person's obligation, and it was unlikely that credit unions in general would have the ability to meet those criteria due to a lack of manpower or resources, and importantly was not considered in the spirit of the credit union philosophy.

Mr. Cording responded to Councillor Cope, saying the impact of grant funding was an agreed programme of work objectives to achieve agreed standards and growth. Essex County Council receives periodic updates on the progress of Colchester Credit Union against its work objectives.

Mr. Cording said marketing and publicity was an expensive exercise, for example, the delivery of fliers to targeted households, and welcomed Councillor Mudie's offer of help in distributing free of charge, the credit union's flier with other local distribution rounds.

Mr. Cording thanked the Council for its kind intervention in 2009, bringing together Colchester Credit Union and Essex County Council that ultimately led to an agreed arrangement between the two organisations, and funding to help Colchester Credit Union develop with Essex County Council some avenues they never thought would happen.

RESOLVED that the panel commented on, and noted the update from Mr. Paul Probert, Essex County Council, on the support for Colchester Credit Union.

30. Risk Management - period April to September 2010

Ms. Hayley McGrath, Risk and Resilience Manager, presented the 1st and 2nd Quarter Risk Management Progress report, saying that the work during this reporting period has resulted in no significant change, business as normal.

Councillor Willetts drew members attention to the risk matrix in appendix 2 of the report, saying the risks highlighted remained as those discussed and agreed at Full Council on the 13 October 2010.

RESOLVED that the panel noted and commented on the work undertaken during the period and the Strategic risk register.

31. Annual Review of Business Continuity

Ms. Hayley McGrath, Risk and Resilience Manager, presented the report on the Annual Review of Business Continuity.

Ms. McGrath said this annual report forms part of the Risk Management process, with the work carried out during the year quite varied and as summarised in section 5 of the report. It included, due to the 2009 Swine Flu outbreak, work undertaken to strengthen resilience in key areas. A staff survey identified staff willing to support other services if the need arose. The staff that showed an interest in the Cemetery and Crematorium attended a behind the scenes tour of the crematorium. Forty five staff subsequently volunteered to assist at the Cemetery and Crematorium in the event of a business continuity issue, a great success.

Ms. McGrath said Business Continuity had progressed a long way in the last year from when the original strategy was introduced. This review was undertaken as part of a requirement of the strategy, and the strategy itself has been revised but with no fundamental changes.

In response to Councillor Naish concerning the encouragement of key staff to have flu injections, Ms. McGrath said the Council had identified key officers working closely with the NHS / PCT, and whilst these staff would be encouraged to have the necessary injections, there was no policy in place.

Councillor Oxford congratulated staff on the excellent results within the report, and thanked staff for their willingness to participate, voluntarily, to work helping to sustain business continuity.

RESOLVED that the panel considered and noted the business continuity work undertaken during the period, commented on the review of the business continuity strategy and noted the intended work plan for 2010-11.

32. Work Programme

Mr. Robert Judd, Scrutiny Officer, introduced the Work Programme, confirming the addition of two items. Following a request from Councillor Manning at the recent Chairman's briefing, officers have agreed to report on the progress of the Decent Homes Programme at the meetings of 23 November 2010 (6-monthly update) and 22 February 2011 (Quarter 3 update). Mr. Judd also confirmed that the Mayoralty Task and Finish Group is working towards reporting their proposals back to the panel on the 23 November 2010.

Members agreed that the two additional items for the meeting on the 23 November could possibly create too much business for one meeting, and the Group Spokespersons agreed to review this before the next meeting, with consideration given to an extra meeting to allow business to be split into two manageable meetings.

RESOLVED that the panel considered and noted the 2010-11 work programme.