

# STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

## 20 JULY 2010

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

*Substitute Members :-* Councillor Jackie Maclean  
for Councillor Nigel Chapman  
Councillor Peter Higgins for Councillor Theresa Higgins

*Also in Attendance :-* Councillor Paul Smith

### 8. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2010 was confirmed as a correct record.

**Councillor Peter Higgins (in respect of his spouse being a member of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

### 9. Items requested by members of the Panel and other Members

#### **Greenways Care Home – Serious Case Review**

Mr. Gareth Mitchell, Head of Life Opportunities attended the meeting to assist members of the panel in their deliberations in his capacity as the Council's senior manager for safeguarding.

Mr. Mitchell said he was the Council's representative on the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB), a multi-agency board that includes membership from the Borough and District Councils whose aim is to promote and develop effective protection systems for vulnerable adults.

The Serious Case Review for "HX Care Home", the care home concerned, was commissioned by the ESAB in order to establish whether there are lessons to be learned from the case about how local agencies and professionals work together to safeguard vulnerable adults.

The Executive Summary and Action Plan resulting from this review have been published by the ESAB. The Overview Report, which is a more detailed report from the review, is a confidential report which was considered and ratified by the ESAB at its January 2010 meeting. All copies of this confidential report were returned to ESAB staff at the end of this meeting to maintain confidentiality. A letter received from Liz Chidgey, Deputy Executive Director at Essex County Council, which was handed out to panel members, sets out the reasons why this report remains confidential.

Mr. Mitchell said that, unlike the safeguarding children agenda, there is currently no statutory duty placed on the Council around the safeguarding vulnerable adults work. The Council participates in this agenda in response to government guidance and as good practice, bearing in mind the important services the Council delivers to vulnerable adults and the Council's community leadership role. He told panel members that he had started attending the ESAB in January 2010 and had attended two meetings so far, including the meeting at which the Serious Case Review report was considered.

In response to Councillor Offen, Mr. Mitchell said that he believed that the ESAB was accountable to the independent regulator of Health and Social Care, the Care Quality Commission (CQC),. Councillors Offen and Young expressed disappointment and doubts about the whole process, not reassured about how the ESAB could deal with the issues.

Councillor Offen, supported by Councillor Willetts, proposed that the panel's concerns about the Serious Case Review be referred to the CQC, although Councillor Willetts was unhappy with the manner in which this issue had been discussed at the first June meeting, with many panel members like him, being told information based on assumptions. Councillor Willetts said whatever actions are taken by the panel should always be based on informed evidence.

Councillor Smith, St Johns Ward, asked that the panel agreed that any request to the CQC would include i) the need to consider the circumstances surrounding the February 2008 decision that the Greenways Care Home had met all requirements set by the Essex County Council Quality and Monitoring Team and ii) with respect to confidentiality, the need to stress that the Council did not wish to make the reports public knowledge, but there was a need to have access to this information to satisfy itself that agencies had done all they could to address the issues.

Councillor P Higgins said any informed opinion that came from future scrutiny would only be possible if those who prepared the report are included in the debate.

Mr. Mitchell requested the panel to consider in the first instance writing to the Chair of the ESAB to request a briefing on the Overview Report, in private session if necessary, and to ask for confirmation of the process to be followed by the panel if it remains unsatisfied with the response from ESAB and wishes to escalate the issue further.

### **Future of the Greenways Care Home Site**

Mr. Robert Judd, Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Essex County Council Portfolio Holder for Adults, Health and Community Wellbeing, Councillor Ann Naylor had acknowledged a request to provide details on the future of the site and a written response would be sent to the panel as soon as possible.

*RESOLVED* that the Panel agreed to the following:-

- i) A letter to the Chair of the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board requesting a briefing for the panel on the Serious Case Review Overview Report, in private session if necessary and asking for confirmation of the process for escalating the panel's

concerns beyond the ESAB, if appropriate, to the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

ii) Depending on the response to the letter above, a letter to the Care Quality Commission, asking the CQC to investigate the panel's concerns about the HX Care Home Serious Case Review, with details of the reasons for the concerns, the draft letter to be agreed by the Group Spokespersons.

## **10. 2011/12 Budget Strategy, Medium Term Financial Forecast and Budget Timetable**

Mr. Sean Plummer, Finance Manager, attended the meeting and presented the Budget Strategy Report.

Mr. Plummer explained in depth the Budget Forecast for 2011/12, highlighting the current forecasted Budget Gap of £1,958,000 including a budget reduction of £770,000 from the removal of the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and LABGI Grant (Local Authority Business Growth Incentive) and the assumption of a 5% reduction in the Government Grant, equating to £646,000. Mr. Plummer said all the budget assumptions would be confirmed one way or the other by this coming September. The intention was, said Mr. Plummer, to provide a budget for 2011/12 with no increase in Council Tax.

Mr. Plummer explained the 5 Track Approach adopted when determining the proposed strategy, including income generation, efficiencies (including Fundamental Service Reviews), Total Place Projects, Shared Services and Cuts and Reductions.

Ms. Donnelly, Executive Director, later explained that in reference to Total Place, Colchester was recognised as one of the most enthusiastic local Council's, looking at a whole range of activities, naming Essex County Council, neighbouring authorities and the Haven Gateway Partnership, as some of the major partners that Colchester are engaging. Whilst government guidelines on Total Place are still awaited, Colchester is in talks with a number of local Councils considering a range of service provisions that involved pooled resources. Ms. Donnelly confirmed that differentiating between Total Place and Shared Services was becoming difficult. Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Diversity addressed the panel to explain that Choice Based Lettings and the SOS Bus are good examples of Total Place.

Councillor Arnold, in reference to the Cabinet's wish to continue to improve the Budget process requested the Cabinet to give a strategic update in December 2010 or January 2011, with tables and indexes illustrating the implications on the delivery of the Strategic Plan Action Plan for 2011/12.

*RESOLVED* that the panel considered and noted the 2011/12 Budget Strategy, Medium Term Financial Forecast and Budget Timetable, and requested the Cabinet to give a strategic update in December 2010 or January 2011, with tables and indexes illustrating the implications on the delivery of the Strategic Plan Action Plan for 2011/12.

## 11. Work Programme

The Chairman explained that the work programme had been amended to include all the three major Fundamental Service Reviews being undertaken, with one full business case review (Street Services) and two stage two follow-ups (Housing Services and Revenues and Benefits).

Ms. Donnelly, Executive Director said the Head of Street Services had agreed to invite Members of the Panel to attend a Street Services presentation prior to the September meeting (Members will be notified of the time, date and venue of the presentation), so members will have a better understanding of the process at the time of the scrutiny review.

Ms. Donnelly also confirmed that she was in dialogue with officers concerning a future review of the Museum Service, and a date of the review would be scheduled accordingly. The Chairman also confirmed to the panel that a scoping report would be prepared for future Portfolio Holder reviews with a view to giving clarity to the process and making it more meaningful for both Members of the Panel and the Portfolio Holders.

*RESOLVED* that the Panel agreed the current work programme for 2010-11.