

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
30 MARCH 2010

Present :- Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)
Councillors Mark Cory, Mike Hogg,
Jackie Maclean, Kim Naish, Gaye Pyman,
Laura Sykes, Nick Taylor, Dennis Willetts and
Julie Young

Substitute Member :- Councillor Ray Gamble for Councillor Jon Manning

58. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minute of the meeting held on 2 March 2010 was confirmed as a correct record.

Given the substantive item within the above minute had been the review of Colchester's Arts and Culture, where a new reporting format for providing information to the panel had been used, the panel, in response to the Chairman's inquiry, agreed the new format was helpful and would be used in all future scrutiny reviews of this type.

59. Have Your Say!

Mr. Hamilton addressed the panel to say Colchester Council has negotiated a lease of Shoeworld to the Slack Space Art Group in complete contravention of the local code of corporate governance, with the negotiations deliberately done in secret to prevent mobility scooter provision to the Bus Park.

Mr. Hamilton said that for two years the Council has refused to allow a charitable mobility scooter service at the Bus Park, unfairly evicting Colchester Shopmobility from Queen Street, forcing them into portacabins and then to St Marys Car Park. Following this, Shopmobility had their Council grant removed, only to be reinstated following legal action.

Mr. Hamilton said Firstsite were allowed to purchase the property in Queen Street, and who now lease out to a building contractor. Because of imaginary building works, Mr. Hamilton said he was refused permission to place a security storage container somewhere on the Bus Park, and confirmed he had reported the history to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Having refused to allow a mobility scooter service, but allowed a free lease to Slackspace, Mr. Hamilton said this was the final straw. Mr. Hamilton concluded by saying this was a clear case of maladministration and he would be asking the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate this matter as well.

Councillor Julie Young (in respect of his-her membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

60. Items requested by members of the Panel and other Members

Councillor Call for Action – Parking problems in the vicinity of Colchester General Hospital

Councillor Arnold introduced the item that invited the Panel to consider whether the local enforcement solutions to the parking problems are sufficient for the Councillor Call for Action not to be invoked.

Councillor Naish said the parking problems in this area of Colchester are well known by local residents and visitors to the area and was amazed that nothing was to be done. Councillor Goss was representing local people, trying to put something in place for residents not to have their lives blighted by this issue. As a regular visitor to the area, Councillor Naish could not see how officers could say there was not a problem.

Councillor Young said it was difficult to discuss this issue without parking enforcements officers present to advise members, saying this issues were the same as experienced at other major buildings such as the Community Stadium, University and Schools. Councillor Young said this type of issue does effect the quality of residents lives and thought it would be worthwhile to do more work on an issue that needed further solutions. Later, Councillor Young said consideration should also be given to the trial she believed was organised by Tendring District Council at Brightlingsea and the use of ‘Inconsiderate Parking Notices’.

Councillor Taylor said the Parking Enforcement Team is responsible for the whole borough, reacting to black spots on demand, nice in theory, but how will they monitor, how often will they monitor and will enforcement actually take place. For instance, Councillor Taylor said if surveillance was carried out every three months, it would have no effect, and nothing to date had resolved the problem. Councillor Taylor felt resigned to no parking enforcement action being taken, but would be prepared to go with the action proposed within the report.

Councillor Willetts could understand why Councillor Goss was not present at this meeting, given that at a previous meeting he had been told not all avenues of investigation had been explored in terms of Councillor Call for

Action (CCfA). Councillor Willetts said whilst the Highways Agency surveys suggest there is no problem, members need to better understand the problems and possible solutions, and the issue would be benefited from a review by the Panel that would include an update from officers of the effects of the new parking enforcement policy. Councillor Willetts said the main serious issue causing this problem was the planning matters in terms of major structures such as schools and hospitals, with in this case hospital staff not having sufficient staff parking spaces.

Councillor Hogg said the parking problems were often caused by inconsiderate parking, with a need to educate drivers on how to park properly. Councillor Hogg believed the panel should do all it could to address the problem.

Councillor Gamble said he thought the new enforcement policy would not work, but like Councillor Taylor, hoped he would be proved wrong. Councillor Gamble said yellow lines should be a consideration for debate as part of any further review.

Councillor Pyman endorsed the comments of Councillor Willetts, adding that more attention to detail was needed when drafting major employer's Travel Plans.

Councillor Naish said whilst it was said that the Police will take action against the drivers of obstructing vehicles, as a general rule they do not unless a person can prove they cannot pass the vehicle on foot.

Councillor Arnold welcomed the comments by members, a good number of doubts. Their comments would be passed to the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services and the Head of Street Services. Councillor Arnold said any trial of the new parking enforcement policy should initially be in the area around Colchester General Hospital, and the outcomes reported to the panel, possibly at the time of the Street Services Fundamental Service Review to be scrutinised by the panel in September 2010.

RESOLVED that the panel:

- i) Agreed not to invoke 'Councillor Call for Action' to address the parking problems in the vicinity of Colchester General Hospital.
- ii) The Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services and the Head of Street Services should be invited to attend a meeting of the panel in 2010-11 to review this parking issue, possibly at the time of considering the Street Services Fundamental Service Review on 17 September 2010.
- iii) The review should provide details of the following;

- Any trial of the new parking enforcement policy, hopefully in the areas around Colchester General Hospital.
- The Travel Plan for Colchester General Hospital and any current or future parking developments at the site.
- The effectiveness and consideration of 'Inconsiderate Parking Notices'.

61. Review of the work of the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Diversity, Culture and the Arts.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources, Diversity, Culture and the Arts, attended the meeting and gave a comprehensive overview of the highlights and achievements of the work within his portfolio over the last year, thanking officers for their support and hard work in what had been a very successful year.

In response to Councillor Sykes, Councillor Smith said the Mobile Museum Vehicle in Greytown House Car Park was awaiting major repairs, hence its long stay in the car park. That said this service fell within the portfolio of Councillor Barlow, and Councillor Sykes should seek an update from him.

Councillor Smith responded to Councillor Young on monitoring equality and diversity targets, including sexual orientation, saying the measurement of these targets is included in many areas of human resource work including surveys. Statistics from these sources of evidence are appraised and where possible gaps are addressed. In regards to sexual orientation, progress is slow, mainly due to the difficulty in identifying these groups where individuals are less likely to self identify in what is a very sensitive area. In regards to faith, the Council is involved with a local forum represented by all the mainstream religions. The Council website has links to all recognised religious holidays and part of the Council's Fundamental Service Reviews includes monitoring around equality and diversity areas to ensure of no discrimination.

Councillor Smith acknowledged the work of other authorities such as Brighton, who have developed their own sexual orientation policy, and would ask officers to consider this work in relation to Colchester. In response to Councillor Gamble, Councillor Smith said in terms of racial equality, the Council recently promoted and supported the annual festival 'Black History Month'.

In respect to Councillor Gamble's enquiry about the Council's Housing Revenue Account, Councillor Smith said the account was above the prudent

level, due to a number of improvements. Due to a value for money exercise at Colchester Borough Homes, the cost of voids work had been halved from £2,000 to £1,000, with the cost of supplies negotiated to lower levels. The reduction in the time void properties remain empty also provides an increase in rental income.

Councillor Smith, in response to Councillor Taylor, said considerable effort is made to put local companies on the approved list of contractors with the effect of a nett increase in work by local businesses. Feedback is given to businesses in terms of how they perform in the bidding process. Councillor Smith said the Council's commercial premises lettings had progressed, and was generally satisfactory, but with a small number of businesses failing or ceasing trading, but to his knowledge not as a direct result of any Council action.

Councillor Smith said the current Council's buildings repairs programme is fully funded, including major work at Leisure World and the Town Hall. Only at the Museum Resource Centre had repairs been identified but with no funds allocated for the repair. This was subject to regular review until suitable arrangements are put in place.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Councillor Smith said contrary to local criticism, repairs to the Roman Wall remain ongoing, with one section thoroughly completed at a time, rather than doing spot check remedial work across the whole wall. Councillor Smith confirmed that English Heritage is very thorough in inspection and approval of works undertaken. At a locally held English Heritage meeting, the Mayor, Councillor Spyvee requested Colchester was considered for future funding. An announcement of future work and funding of the Roman Wall would be made shortly.

RESOLVED that the panel thanked Councillor Smith for attending the meeting and the work achieved in the last year, and for responding to questions from members of the panel.

Before adjourning the meeting, Councillor Arnold took the opportunity to thank Councillor Taylor, who would not be standing at the forthcoming local elections, for the time he had spent at Colchester, paying tribute to the work he had done as ward councillor, his membership to various panels and committees and as the Cabinet Member, Portfolio Holder for Resources, sentiments endorsed by the panel and Councillor Smith.