

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL

13 JANUARY 2014

Present :- Councillor Julie Young (Chairman)
Councillor John Elliott (Deputy Mayor)
Councillors Mark Cable, Nigel Chapman, Barrie Cook,
Mark Cory, Colin Mudie and Lesley Scott-Boutell

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Annie Feltham
Councillor Gerard Oxford
Councillor Dennis Willetts

23. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 4 November 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

24. Invited Guests

The Chairman welcomed three guests who had been invited to the meeting in order to broaden the Panel's discussion on Zone Working:

- Inspector Barry Atkinson, Essex Police
- Father Richard Tilbrook, St Barnabus Church, Old Heath
- Liz Brightwell, Teacher at the Ryes College and Community, Aldham

25. Zone Working

Nick Chilvers addressed the Panel pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(2) asking a number of questions including:

- What is the current management structure for Zone Working and does the recent merging of services with the parks team lead to potential complications?
- Who determines the priorities for the service, bearing in mind the current contributions made to community activities and the need for enforcement and control?
- Describe the practical benefits for residents and the authority since the arrangement was set up?
- What are the trends and changes in workload and how do they think this will change as the Borough expands?
- What demands are the new housing developments having on the teams and do they differ to covering established areas?
- Can assurances be given that the resources within the teams will continue at the current level, given the numerous calls on the team's time?

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Community Services inviting the Panel to consider the success of the Zone Working principles which had been developed by the Council and to make relevant recommendations to Cabinet on the future shape of the Team.

Cassandra Clements, Zones Group Manager, explained that the new system of Zone working had been introduced in 2011 following the Street Services Fundamental Service Review (FSR). This was followed by an organisational structure change within the Universal Customer Contact FSR which delivered Community Services, and in turn altered the operational structure for Zones, Parks and Recreation and Community Initiatives. The borough was currently apportioned across seven Zones and four Parks Areas which together provided 66 full time equivalent staff with net budget expenditure of £1.7m. The zone operatives, zone wardens and Managers carried out a range of activities across some key priority areas including, enforcement, education, cleanliness, open spaces, health and wellbeing, social inclusion, capacity building and grounds maintenance. Cassandra explained that, between April and September, the highest volumes of work were in the following categories:

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| • Litter picking | 1,828 tasks |
| • Fly tipping | 1,473 tasks |
| • Maintenance tasks | 965 tasks |
| • Community Activities | 760 tasks |
| • Recycling Container Delivery | 753 tasks |

The Chairman invited each of the guests in turn to address the Panel on the issues from their perspective.

Inspector Barry Atkinson explained the benefits of partnership working between the Zone Teams and the local police. He was sure that crime and the fear of crime had been reduced as a result of the numerous examples of joint working between the Council and the Police, including Neighbourhood Action Panels, Community Days of Action, the Christmas Cracker Operation and the recent operation to jointly patrol firstsite and the St Botolph's area.

Father Richard Tilbrook explained that he had worked with the Zone Wardens since they had first been introduced in Old Heath. Originally the wardens had been issued with high visibility uniforms which meant that the contributions within communities were given a high profile. The wardens had dealt with community problems on the street and often generated schemes for action themselves. Since the introduction of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) the work of the Zone Wardens had changed and there has been some confusion over priorities

Liz Brightwell, Teacher at the Ryes College and Community, Aldham explained that she worked at a residential school for teenagers with challenging behaviour where the emphasis was on providing an education to give the pupils life skills to enable them to cope with the demands of independent living. She had contacted the Council for assistance with community activities for some of the pupils and had been very pleasantly surprised that the zone wardens were prepared to work with the pupils litter picking in the local area. She explained that two pupils had recently attended an older

persons Christmas party with the wardens and were benefitting from an ongoing relationship with two wardens who had demonstrated that they were willing to spend time with them.

Councillor Willetts attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel. He recollected his first encounter with the Zone Team in his ward two years ago and was interested in how the Zone Teams could be improved to become a more cost effective service. He was aware that the Teams had a budget of £1.7 million and was interested to learn whether there were opportunities to outsource parts of the Team's activities or whether it was possible to increase income from the Team. He speculated whether it was possible to extend the areas of influence for the Zone Team and whether there could be more involvement of the community in service provision.

Councillor G Oxford attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel. He indicated that he would have been interested to learn the views of a representative from one of the larger wards in the Borough as he was of the view that Highwoods ward was desperately short of adequate resources from the Zone Team. The make-up of the Team for the Highwoods area had been subject to frequent changes which had meant it had been difficult to build working relationships.

Particular discussion from the Panel members was in relation to:

- Councillor Cable - the value of the community activity in relation to vulnerable people undertaken in comparison to the core functions of the team, the need for clarity around what areas of work are given priority and what resources are available to enable diversification;
- Councillor Young – whether there was any interaction with the Essex County Council Highway Ranger teams;
- Councillor Scott-Boutell – the problem associated with poorly timed weed spraying schedules which were ineffective if they occurred at periods of anticipated rainfall and information on the schedules for the sweeping of wards;
- Councillor Cory – the need for the relationships between the Zone Teams and Essex County Council colleagues to continue to improve, the need for the Zone Teams to be clearly visible by the people in the communities in which they work, an acknowledgement of the importance of enforcement activity but the need for this to be combined with encouragement and education so that relationships within communities is seen as a positive one and the potential to expand on the Junior Warden schemes which had been supported by a number of Councillors by means of their Locality Budget funds;
- Councillor Cook – acknowledged the potential for other areas of work to be explored but his preference was for the Teams to consolidate the workload they currently undertook to very positive benefit within many communities;
- Councillor Chapman – considered the service had developed very well, was interested to learn how decisions were made as to which activities were undertaken and which were not, how many team members were authorised to issue fixed penalty notices, the increasing lack of effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Action Panel (NAP) arrangements and whether the Colchester Borough Homes Housing Officer regular four weekly reporting regime within the wards could be used proactively to encourage people to engage with the NAPs;

- Councillor Mudie – whether parking on grass verges was an offence which could be enforced;
- Councillor Elliott – problem of fly tipping which seemed to be particularly difficult to address in the Tiptree area along with hedge trimming to prevent overhanging across roads.

In response to questions raised, the following information was provided:

- Savings targets of £150,000 had been identified for the service and this had already been achieved by doing more for less cost. There were opportunities to promote additional income in terms of the joining together of the Zones and Parks Teams and it was hoped that savings would be delivered from a new litter picking contract which would reduce duplication of service delivery;
- There had been operational needs to change staff in the Highwoods Team, whilst another member of staff had requested a change of location. Resources across the Borough had been looked at and it was likely that it would be possible to deliver changes to the distribution of Team members from an over provision elsewhere;
- Where agency responsibility for work is difficult to identify the teams will assist by working with and/or chasing partner organisations to ensure work is concluded satisfactorily for communities;
- The priorities for the teams lay with street cleaning, enforcement and enabling activities which have a positive impact on communities rather than working with vulnerable communities;
- In terms of capacity, the team's work commitments were currently the equivalent of 2.7 persons under resourced
- Experience had tended to show that the Essex County Council Highway Rangers did not have the resources to deal with issues which had a significant impact;
- The Zone Team's clothing had been introduced corporately in a drive to bring a common theme across the various Council uniforms;
- It was anticipated that statistics on the issue of enforcement notices would be available on the Council's website shortly and these could be supplied to councillors for their wards upon request;
- The building of relationships within communities and the balance between enforcement activities and educational ones was down to the skills of each individual warden;
- Junior Warden schemes had been operated in a number of schools and the Team was now working with Thurstable School, Tiptree to increase the number of students who had benefitted from the activity, there had also been placements for work experience for the unemployed and the opportunity to consider apprenticeship schemes had been investigated but this had proved difficult to achieve;
- The majority of decisions not to undertake activity were in relation to community events which were now activities which were supported within communities rather than delivered;
- The operational control of the Teams was undertaken by Cas as the Team Manager but strategic issues were referred to the Head of Service and the Portfolio Holder for determination;

- The need to change the way the NAPs were operating was acknowledged along with the opportunity for the NAP regime to be used to communicate and co-ordinate activity within communities;
- The service currently had 17 wardens and 7 managers who were all authorised to issue the eight different categories of notices for the control of activities such as fly tipping, littering, dog fouling and graffiti;
- Sweeping was undertaken between February and October each year with one vehicle dedicated to the town centre and six others for the rest of the Borough. The vehicles spent a week in each Zone area with the wardens determining the areas to be prioritised so that hotspots or requests could be responded to proactively. It was intended to publish the routes online which would illustrate the expectation that all roads would be subject to a sweep at least once within a six week cycle;
- Car parking on grass verges did not fall within the responsibility of the Council as it was now an matter for the North Essex Parking Partnership;
- Tiptree had one of the highest incidences of fly tipping in the Borough, all incidences were investigated in order to find evidence and intelligence about who had left the material but often all that could be done was to arrange for clearance. It was no longer possible to utilise CCTV to assist in gathering evidence so it was now necessary to rely on reports from within communities themselves.

In order to assist plans for the future of the services, the Chairman invited each member of the Panel to identify the one priority they considered to be the most important for Zone Working. These were:

Councillor Elliott – Enforcement action to address problems of fly tipping;

Councillor Cable – more flexibility to tackle problems of overgrowth;

Councillor Chapman – improvements to the environment and partnership work with Parish Councils on the larger issues;

Councillor Cook – continue with current practices;

Councillor Scott-Boutell – litter picking and improved capacity for youth activities across the Borough;

Councillor Cory – increased enforcement activity and an expansion of the service through income generated from partnership working;

Councillor Young – to continue the current flexibility of service delivery.

In concluding the discussion, the Chairman also invited Nick Chilvers and Councillor Feltham to share their thoughts on the outcomes of the discussion. Mr Chilvers referred to the fact that the Zone Working Team were very well thought of by the Councillors on the Panel, that the teams were considered to be quick and responsive and it was likely that the work of the NAPs could be undertaken by the Zone Teams and the Community Police Officers. Nevertheless, he felt he was still unclear as to where responsibilities for future decision making lay within the Teams and at a strategic level, that the

workload priorities for the teams required clarification and new challenges presented by increased development at the Garrison and off Turner Road needed to be planned.

Councillor Feltham, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Communities, addressed the Panel explaining that the Zone Teams did cut across the whole of the organisation and it was therefore not surprising that it impacted across three portfolio responsibilities. She referred to the concept of communities and community working and welcomed the enabling and encouraging attitude of the Teams to this element of their work. She acknowledged that there were many views on what service the Teams should be providing and this would have an impact on whether they were viewed as doing their job well or not. She referred to the challenges ahead due to cost pressures for all Councils and the need for future work planning to take account of the limited resources likely to be available. This was particularly difficult when trying to measure the value of and identify priorities for a qualitative service.

RESOLVED that –

- (i) Inspector Barry Atkinson, Reverend Richard Tilbrook and Liz Brightwell be thanked for their valuable contributions to the meeting.
- (ii) Cas Clements be asked to contact Nick Chilvers direct to respond to those matters identified by him which she hadn't been able to address at the meeting itself.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the following issues be borne in mind when considering the council's future shape for Zone Working:

- Support for the See it, Solve it principle;
- Improved visibility for the Teams within the Communities;
- Partnership working could provide valuable opportunities for the future in terms of resources and work priorities;
- Improved vehicle capacity;
- Investigate future opportunities for efficiencies and additional income;
- Under resourcing issues in Zone 3 need to be addressed;
- The unique role of the teams needs continued support;
- Seek improved liaison with the Essex County Council Highway Ranger teams;
- Greater capitalisation of the fact that the face of the Council within communities is embodied by the Zone Team members;
- Need for a measured approach to outsourcing of functions as full support for this approach is not clear;
- The publication of enforcement activity on the website is welcomed;
- The further development of the Junior Warden scheme across the Borough warrants greater support;
- The special skills available within the individual team members and the quality of the service needs to be acknowledged and supported;
- Opportunities to utilise the Neighbourhood Action Panel regime to publicise and co-ordinate activities needs to be explored;
- Support for community activities rather than the delivery of the activities was a welcome development.

26. Work Programme 2013-14

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive setting out the current Work Programme for the Panel for 2013-14.

The Work Programme had been updated since the meeting of the Panel held on 4 November 2013 to reflect decisions in relation to the status of the report on the Council's Market Strategy, the conclusion of the work of the 20 mph Task and Finish Group and the establishment of an Alcohol Consumption Task and Finish Group

RESOLVED that the current situation regarding the Panel's work programme for the year be noted.