

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

7 JUNE 2011

Present :- Councillor Andrew Ellis (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman (Former Mayor) ,
Theresa Higgins, Kim Naish, Gerard Oxford,
Will Quince, Colin Sykes and Dennis Willetts

Substitute Members :- Councillor Nigel Offen for Councillor Nick Cope
Councillor Laura Sykes for Councillor Bill Frame

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Nick Barlow
Councillor Tina Dopson
Councillor Beverley Oxford
Councillor Paul Smith
Councillor Tim Young

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on the 22 March 2011 and 18 May 2011 were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Councillor Kim Naish, Councillor Nigel Offen and Councillor Laura Sykes (in respect of being a member of the Board of Colchester Borough Homes) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

4. Work Programme

The panel discussed the new work programme for 2011-12.

Members approved of the decision to stop individual Portfolio Holder reviews in favour of topic based reviews with the Portfolio Holder present that will enable members to consider the work and role of the Portfolio Holder.

The Panel agreed to Councillor C. Sykes request to the review of Public Transport in the Borough, and item originally requested by Councillors Offen and Cory in 2010. Councillor Sykes said the review should focus on how public transport affects Colchester and its citizens, with representatives from all the bus operators and the Essex County Council Portfolio Holder being invited to attend. Councillor Willetts supported this review, saying the provision of good and reliable public transport, especially to the rural areas, was fundamental to a successful future for the town centre. Mr. Judd confirmed that the local train operator would also be invited to attend this review. The panel agreed to a further request from Councillor Ellis to widen this review to include 'clean air policies' in the town centre and the effect of heavy polluting buses on these policies.

Ms. Donnelly confirmed to the panel that each fundamental service review is scheduled at various stages into the scrutiny and Cabinet process. The Arts review scheduled for the July meeting was a case in point, a review that would see all the Borough's major arts partners attending.

The Panel agreed to Councillor Ellis's request to review over the course of the year the nine strategic priorities within the Strategic Plan. Mr. Judd agreed to liaise with the Administration to consider grouping the priorities and scheduling reviews into the 2011 Work Programme. The Panel also agreed to receive an update on the St Botolph's Regeneration project and all its component parts.

Following a request from Councillor L. Sykes, Mr. Judd agreed to speak to senior officers about the possibility of a review of Colchester Borough Homes.

RESOLVED that the Panel approved the draft Work Programme and agreed to the additional reviews requested by Councillors C. Sykes and Ellis.

5. Annual Scrutiny Report

Mr. Judd, Scrutiny Officer, presented the Annual Scrutiny Report, a report that informs the Council of the work of the scrutiny panels enabling the Council to form an opinion of the effectiveness of the scrutiny function.

In response to Councillor Offen concerning the 2010 review of Greenways (HX Serious Case Review) and subsequent correspondence between the Council and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Mr. Judd agreed to send a reminder letter to the CQC requesting a response.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Mr. Judd agreed to amend the section on Partnership Arrangements by extending the work of the Crime and Disorder Committee to include the review of the Colchester's public response to town centre demonstrations. Mr. Judd also agreed to invite Councillor Turrell, Leader of the Council to attend the July and December meetings for the review of the Council's Budget Strategy and Performance Monitor in view of these being the only opportunities for scrutiny to understand the leadership role and workload under the new 'super leader' arrangements.

RESOLVED that the panel considered and approved the Annual Scrutiny Report.

Councillor Tina Dopson (in respect of being an employee of Essex County Council (Deputy Head of St John's Green Primary School)) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7 (3)

Councillor Colin Sykes (in respect of his membership of the Colchester Association of Local Councils) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the

provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

6. 2010-11 Year End Performance report

Councillor Tina Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Diversity introduced the 2010-11 Performance Report, providing the performance results for the last year and the Strategic Plan Action Plan for 2011-12 the final year of a three year plan.

Councillor Dopson said 71% of the indicators agreed and 86% of the actions within the Strategic Plan Action Plan had been achieved.

Councillor Dopson agreed that the scrutiny review over the coming year of the nine Strategic Plan priorities and the actions and achievements within the priorities was a good idea.

Ms. Lucie Breadman, Head of Corporate Management provided further details to the report, saying that the level of detail it was hoped would be enough to provide sufficient accountability. The targets for the 2011/12 indicators are set locally, at a realistic level that will challenge and drive improvement.

Councillor Willetts said during his time as a Councillor, Councillors had bemoaned the poor performance of the Planning Service in certain areas, and regardless of performance targets had never achieved expectation. Wasn't there a better way to flag how long this has been happening and the concerted action being taken? Councillor Willetts said he would like to see a greater, fulsome explanation on the Planning Service. Ms. Donnelly said the Head of the Planning Service does retain a Planning Improvement Plan, a useful document, regularly updated and monitored, and this would be provided to members as an addendum to the minute.

Councillor Dopson responded to Councillor Ellis, explaining that the NI 154; the net additional homes provided would achieve the 2010-11 target of 650 homes. However the future target for 2011/12 has been retained at 650 because setting a future target of 850 homes, as set out in the Council's Delivery Plan, was not realistic or achievable due to a slowdown in development growth. The panel were informed that cumulatively over the life of the plan the borough was still on track to meet the overall targets set.

Councillor Offen said the year end performance of NI 184, Food establishments compliant with Food Hygiene was an excellent result, but warned that without targets in this work it had the potential to be a disaster waiting to happen. Ms. Breadman confirmed that monitoring would continue at Service Level but in an attempt to rationalise the overall number of measures in the corporate indicator set it was agreed to remove this one. Councillor Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety said the food safety team did an excellent job, so members should be assured this good work would continue.

Given the downward performance in the time to process new benefit claims following on from introducing the fundamental service review implementation plan, Councillor Willetts said it would be helpful if more information was provided that could give reassurances to members that this was a blip following implementation, and that

improvements will follow. Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT said many of the problems that beset the benefit service were at the beginning of the 2010-11 year and whilst performance has improved the result is skewed due to the poor start. Councillor Smith said as the implementation plan procedure changes are rolled out and embedded so the processing times will improve. Whilst the implementation plan has resulted in a reduction in staffing levels, as an interim measure, additional help is being employed to help turnaround the current situation, but this is a temporary measure until the implementation is complete.

Councillor Dopson confirmed to Councillor Willetts that the reason Colchester had reached a plateau in performance on household waste recycling (40%) and many other authorities are showing vastly improving performance was wheelie bins. It has been statistically proven that these Councils benefit dramatically, purely from the introduction of wheelie bins.

In regards to indicator NI 195 Improved Street Cleanliness, Councillor Quince said it would be helpful to have some information on the current situation in regards to dog fouling and the enforcement of. Whilst it was accepted that it is difficult under current legislation to enforce due to the need for a witness statement, it was anticipated that new zonal working would create an environment of greater community engagement and empower local residents to persuade the culprits to change their ways and/or help the zonal teams to make the enforcements. It was also envisaged that the future 'knowledge bank' as discussed during the Street Services fundamental service review would add transparency to the process, making the detail more freely available. Later during the discussions, it was pointed out that in some Councils, councillors are trained to issue penalty notices for dog fouling, something that it was agreed should be considered in the Borough.

Despite the improved performance in sickness levels, Councillor C Sykes still felt the current sickness level was very high, a point concurred by Councillor Quince, who said these levels were plus 2 days above the levels in the private sector. Ms. Breadman said that there had been significant improvement in the sickness levels over the last few years and this was still a year on year decrease. She also noted that it is more difficult than ever to compare sickness levels both across the public sector and the private sector as there is no longer any standard methodology for calculations. The council has elected to retain its historical reporting methodology to ensure that we can benchmark real improvement and there is continued very close monitoring activities undertaken in all Services including a reviewed short term sickness policy for next year. Councillors Ellis and Quince said it would be helpful to see a more detailed breakdown of sickness levels and a more detailed report.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Councillor Smith said the 2011-12 targets for Council Tax and Business Rate collection and sickness levels remained at the previous year's level, and given the effects of the hard economic times both externally and internally, to achieve these targets, that are some of the highest set in Essex, would be a job well done.

Councillor Quince enquired to the cost of the work on 'encouraging take up of benefit by older people through the Welfare Rights Team (WRT)' and to 'Carry out food

poisoning awareness initiatives to educate older people'. Councillor Dopson said the Age Concern receive a grant of £30,000 from the Council, and their work and that of the WRT had provided £1.2 million additional benefit income to local older people. The cost of food safety awareness initiative was not at hand, but Councillor Dopson said this education is now carried out at local schools.

In response to Councillor Chapman's enquiry on the acquisition of further burial land, Councillor Dopson said the matter of obtaining additional burial land has been ongoing for some considerable time but it is now finally nearing a conclusion. The identification of a suitable location and an agreement on the terms necessary to acquire it are at an advanced stage. If this land can be obtained, the life of the cemetery will be extended for many years to come. The provision of a location dedicated exclusively for the burials of persons of the Jewish faith is being looked at as a separate issue. An area of land within the existing Cemetery has been identified for this and discussions and a site meeting have taken place with representatives of the local Jewish community. They have indicated that they consider the area in question to be very suitable for their needs and the further issues that need resolving to deliver this are therefore being dealt with by the Cemetery management. Councillor Dopson confirmed to Councillor Higgins that Islamic burials are few but respect the wishes of the faith in facing towards Mecca. Councillor Dopson also confirmed to Councillor C. Sykes that to her knowledge no other faiths had made a request for an official area within the Cemetery.

Councillor Offen informed panel members of the progress so far on the 20mph limits as part of the future local transport strategy, though further progress was reliant on Essex County Council helping with progress. Councillor Offen later reiterated this point, adding that there was an expectation to progress this issue, and once there was Government led support the Task and Finish Group will be reactivated.

In regards to developing the trade waste service, Councillor Young said that the Head of Street Services was looking at other options to facilitate this service. Undercutting Council prices by local competitors had made it impossible to do this work internally on a cost effective basis.

Councillor Dopson responded to Councillor Quince on the Attendance Reward Scheme for younger people, a scheme where primary schools were selected through consultation to participate, and children were rewarded for improved attendance, with books presented to children whose attendance improvement was dramatic and with other children receiving smaller prizes.

In response to Councillor C. Sykes, who asked about 'Youth Provision' as distinct from 'Young People's Needs', and the need to consider the provision of facilities such as youth hubs, BMX tracks and skate board parks, Councillor Dopson said whilst she accepted there was a need for these type of facilities, usually funded by Essex County Council, to fund on a permanent basis was very expensive. That said, Councillor Dopson agreed to re-examine the plan in terms of youth provision, based on the comments made by Councillor Sykes.

Councillor C. Sykes commented that in relation to 'Localism', it would have been useful to involve the Colchester Association of Local Councils within the 'Actions'. Councillor

G. Oxford said the Federation of Local Residents Associations had been consulted on 'Localism'.

In response to Councillor C. Sykes comments regarding Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAP), that the quality and worthiness of these meetings is patchy, Councillor Young said NAP is a Police led initiative, so any change to the current arrangements in terms of support or closure would be a Police decision. The Police are keen to continue NAP, though they readily accept improvements are needed in some areas. Discussions with the Police on NAP and other issues are ongoing, and clarity in defining NAP areas will be considered. Councillor Young said members would get the opportunity to discuss NAP issues with the Police at the Crime and Disorder Committee's Safer Colchester Review in August.

Councillor Dopson responded to Councillor C. Sykes, saying the success of 'job clubs' a jointly led initiative by the Council and Job Centre Plus was patchy, not helped by the stigma, though to some extent the success can be dependent on how well the event is advertised.

In response to Councillor Chapman's enquiry into the Young Peoples Housing Forum and support to young tenants, in reference to the actions on the Youth Enquiry Service and Young People's Housing Forum, Councillor Dopson said the Young People's Housing Forum was established to encourage better communication, and joint-working between agencies. It may be that this will lead to joint bids for new funding, or the agreement of joint-protocols to better help young people. The Council have made a grant of £40,184.00 to the Youth Enquiry Service, a local charity, to provide advice to young people faced with homelessness, and to give advice to young people currently housed to sustain their tenancies.

The Council's Housing Options team have recently started holding joint-interviews for young people with Essex County Council (ECC) Social Care staff so we can identify what help is needed from both agencies at the same time and avoid young people 'falling between the cracks'. As envisaged in the Housing FSR, we have been holding educational events for young people with ECC Youth Services at our various temporary accommodation units. These sessions are teaching young people more about the responsibilities of maintaining a tenancy and a realistic view of what help will be available from CBC

RESOLVED that the panel;

- a) Commented on the 2010 -11 year end performance summary and appendices.
- b) Agreed the proposed indicators for inclusion into 2011 -12 performance management reporting process and the targets to measure progress.
- c) Agreed to the strategic plan actions for 2011 -12.
- d) Requested a supplementary report as an addendum to future reports on the

corrective action being taken to address identified weaknesses in some areas of the Planning Service, and asked for a copy of the current Planning Service Improvement Plan to be provided to members as an addendum to the minute.

e) Asked the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Diversity to reconsider 'Youth Provision', e.g. youth hubs, BMX tracks and skate board parks.

f) Asked for Members to be notified of future food safety awareness school sessions.