

**POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL
11 JANUARY 2010**

Present :- Councillor Julie Young (Chairman)
Councillors Nick Barlow, Nigel Chapman,
Mike Hardy, Justin Knight and Jill Tod

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Nigel Offen
Councillor Paul Smith

21. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

22. Single Equality Scheme

The Panel considered a report by Executive Director, Pam Donnelly, inviting the Panel to review the contents of the draft Single Equality Scheme.

Pam Donnelly and Claire Holland, Equality and Diversity Officer, attended the meeting to assist members in their discussions.

The Council achieved Level Three of the Equality Standard for Local Government in March 2009. The Equality Standard has since changed to the Equality Framework for Local Government and we have migrated across to the Achieving Level of the framework. One of the recommendations of the review was that the Council considered moving to a Single Equality Scheme.

The Equality Bill was introduced in the House of Commons and published on Monday 27 April 2009, and sought to streamline and consolidate more than 100 pieces of legislation that related to equality and diversity in the UK. The Bill would also introduce a new duty on local authorities and public bodies. In response to this the Council had decided to draft and introduce a Single Equality Scheme, which would replace the existing schemes for race, gender and disability, as well as including religion or belief, age and sexual orientation duties in the scheme. The scheme also included information about each equality group in the borough where information was available; examples of work the council had been doing with the equality groups and a three year action plan which included equality objectives.

It was intended that the Scheme would be reviewed annually, with progress against the equality objectives and action plan being reported to this Panel,

and the scheme would be refreshed, with a new action plan being drafted, every three years.

An executive summary of the Scheme, draft equality objectives and action plan were sent out to more than 100 partners, stakeholders, voluntary and community groups, and the 29 Parish and Town Councils in the borough by email and post. A press release was issued and copies of the draft scheme, executive summary, equality objectives and action plan were sent to all libraries in the Borough, to be made available for public viewing. The draft scheme was also published on the council's website, with an electronic survey form to complete to feedback comments on the scheme. In addition, the council had three internal equality groups, the Diversity Steering Group, the Disability Reference Group and the Member Liaison Group, all three of which were asked to review and comment on the scheme. The draft scheme was also sent to the East of England Regional Assembly Equality and Diversity Network Members and the Essex Equality and Diversity Network Members.

The Equality and Diversity Officer circulated an Equality Impact Summary sheet which had been drafted with the intention that it be used in future to accompany reports to the Panel on new policy initiatives, providing members with a brief overview of the outcomes of Assessments. It was also explained that, in response to recent comments made regarding the negative references in the Action Plan to 'barriers stopping access to services', these would be amended to 'opportunities identified to access services'.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Diversity, attended the meeting and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel. He wished to thank the officers for their hard work in producing the document and welcomed the amalgamation of three schemes into one for all equality groups.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that, subject to the inclusion of a summary sheet for future Equality Impact Assessments and the amendment to the wording of the Action Plan to replace any references to 'barriers' with references to 'opportunities', as referred to above, the draft Single Equality Scheme be approved and adopted.

Councillor Nigel Chapman and Councillor Julie Young (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)

23. Colchester Tree Policy // Consultation Responses and Equalities

Impact Assessment

The Panel received a report inviting the members to consider the consultation responses and outcome of the Equalities Impact Assessment of the draft Colchester Tree Policy prior to the adoption of the Policy by the Portfolio Holder.

A draft of the Colchester Tree Policy had been presented to the Policy Review Panel in August 2009. At the meeting Panel members commented about the Policy with regard to the growth of trees impacting on the human rights of residents and the need for an Equality Impact Assessment to take account those residents who may be affected by trees.

The Panel had been informed that in spite of the presentation of the draft Policy to Members in March 2009 and the consultation draft being available on the Council's website, consultation responses had been poor. Further efforts had been made to increase the consultation response and the consultation period had been extended from 30 June to 30 September 2009. Responses had been received from Essex County Council's Natural Environment Team, Colchester Borough Homes, this Council's Landscape Officer, this Council's Conservative Group and Councillor Paul Smith, in response to which, the draft Policy had been amended accordingly.

Trees made a significant impact on the landscape character of Colchester. It had been recognised that the presence of trees could have negative impacts on individuals particularly where trees were in close proximity to property. The draft Policy recognised the effect of trees on properties in respect of structural implications but made little reference to the human aspects of trees and particular issues where tree growth created a potentially harmful environment for local residents.

An Equality Impact Assessment had been prepared for this draft Policy which responded to the issues associated with tree growth and public health. Where it could be established that the presence of trees was causing a detriment to the health of residents, further consideration would be given to the management approach to trees. This consideration will also take in to account the quality and importance of the tree in question.

RESOLVED that the consultation responses and outcome of the Equalities Impact Assessment of the draft Colchester Tree Policy be noted.

24. Economic Prosperity Strategy 2007 - 2010

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and

Regeneration inviting the Panel to review the Council's current Economic Prosperity Strategy 2007-2010 and corresponding Delivery Plan. It was intended that the review would help to inform and shape the Council's future Economic Prosperity Strategy to 2013 which would be brought to the Policy Review and Development Panel later in 2010.

Nigel Myers, Enterprise and Tourism Manager, explained that the role of the Economic Prosperity Strategy was to set out a framework to steer the activities of the Council and partner organisations to achieve a sustainable and strong local economy, foster the conditions for economic growth and capture the economic benefits for residents and businesses in the Borough.

The Economic Prosperity Strategy recognised the strengths and opportunities of Colchester's economic base whilst acknowledging the challenges to be faced in the post recession world. The issues of job creation, business creation, retention and growth, skills and training, addressing worklessness and creating the support and infrastructure for economic growth remained central and would continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

The onset of the recession in 2008 prompted a re-evaluation of Strategy to ensure that it remained 'fit for purpose' in the light of a dramatically changed economic environment. This re-evaluation resulted in an even greater emphasis being placed on working with partners on initiatives that would help local businesses in the context of an economic downturn. The setting up of 'Business Clinics' had enabled businesses to access face to face expert help and assistance tailored to their specific needs. The business helpline and improved signposting had enabled the Enterprise Team to help local businesses to get the support they needed quickly and effectively. Campaign activity had been realigned to promote 'Buy Local' and public procurement opportunities.

The Delivery Plan set out the Actions, Resources and Target Outcomes for the Strategy. A 'traffic light' system had been used throughout the lifetime of the strategy to track and monitor delivery against target. The Plan and the ambitious targets set across all the priority areas represented a step change in economic development in Colchester.

Ewan Dodds, lead partner for Business with Colchester 2020 and Ron Levy of the Colchester Retail Business Association (CORBA) attended the meeting to assist members in their discussions. Mr Dodds explained the work which had been undertaken jointly with the Council to signpost the opportunities available. Mr Levy took the opportunity to explain the support received from Council officers and the relevant Portfolio Holder. In particular, he welcomed the introduction of special offer car parking charges, the support for the Buy Local campaign and the lessons to be learnt from the Tour Series cycle race.

Councillor Offen, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Business attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel. He referred to the issues of Park and Ride, the A12 link and the Business Incubation Unit.

The Panel gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- Whether there was any interest in reviving the Business Improvement District initiative;
- The need to link work on the Economic Prosperity Strategy with the other Town Centre initiatives such as Public Realm;
- Views on the appointment of a new Town Centre Manager;
- The future facing unemployed 18 to 24 year olds in the current economic climate;
- The great diversity of business types in Colchester and the need to encourage a cluster approach at the same time as looking to attract larger companies.

RESOLVED that the review the Council's current Economic Prosperity Strategy 2007 to 2010 and its assistance in informing and shaping the Council's future Economic Prosperity Strategy to 2013 which would be brought to the Policy Review and Development Panel later in 2010 be noted.

Councillor Nigel Chapman (in respect of his chairmanship of the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Advisory Committee) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

25. Review of the Colchester Destination Development Plan 2006-9

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration concerning the outputs and outcomes of activity of the Council's Tourism & Visitor Services team in delivering the Colchester Destination Development Plan between 2006 and 2009.

Claire Taylor, Visitor Services Officer, explained that the current Destination Development Plan had been produced in consultation with the local tourism industry and other key interests and set out the Council's priorities in developing Colchester as a visitor destination. The Plan had helped raise the profile of tourism in the area, had reinforced its importance in economic development and employment terms and helped create a climate to enable the

industry to maximise opportunities to attract visitors. A paper detailing the outputs and outcomes delivered to support the Plan included the following highlights:

- The positive trends in the three key performance indicators (volume of visitor trips, economic impact of tourism and number of local people employed in tourism);
- Colchester's information services had been acknowledged nationally winning silver in the EnjoyEngland Awards for Excellence under the National Tourist Information Centre of the Year category;
- Identification of further opportunities to improve the visitor experience and stimulate civic pride and understanding of Colchester's history (through interpreting the Roman Walls for instance) and the recently announced Heritage Lottery Funded redisplay of Colchester Castle Museum which commences in 2011;
- Interest generated in developing hotels in Colchester following the publication of the Humberts Report;
- The Welcome Mat and Choose Colchester parking initiatives had made Colchester a more welcoming and better value place to visit;
- Colchester's street scene and toilets had also been improved following significant investment.

Significant progress was being made both in improving the visitor experience and also providing the infrastructure necessary for growth. However, there were some areas of delivery, such as tourism skills development, which needed to be progressed further. However, it was anticipated that the UK's only Hotel School, a prestigious new development at Wivenhoe House Hotel, would enable local hotels to develop hospitality skills and compete more effectively and would build on the strength of Colchester Institute's School of Hospitality which was a partner in this important project.

Councillor Offen, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Business attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel. He referred to the importance of tourism to the local economy, his admiration for the people working in the Visitor Information Centre, his hope that greater progress would be made to promote Colchester through the use of the internet and the possibility of increased tourism activity from Europe.

The Panel gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The extent to which those in the hospitality industry were working with other business partnerships;
- The need for further work to be undertaken to deliver special offer deals for tourists to take advantage of;

- The extent of work undertaken to attract the national tour operators to the town;
- An acknowledgement that the expected development potential would see a levelling off over the next few years in line with the economic down-turn;
- Information on the impact on the service of recent budget cuts;
- The apparent disparity of the Tourism budget figure reported in the Statement of Accounts (£441,000) and the costs quoted in this report to the Panel (£480,000).

RESOLVED that the outputs and outcomes of activity of the Council's Tourism & Visitor Services team in delivering the Colchester Destination Development Plan between 2006 and 2009 be noted together with the intention to review and update the strategy for the period 2010 to 2013.

26. Work Programme 2009/10

The Panel considered a report from the Head of Corporate Management setting out the current situation regarding the Panel's work programme for 2009/10.

The Panel had one further meeting scheduled for the current year but there remained five items to be considered.

RESOLVED that the work programme for 2009/10 be amended as follows:

(i) Subject to the agreement of the lead officers, arrangements be made to hold an additional meeting of the Panel in February to consider:

- Town Centre Improvements // Joint Presentation with Essex County Council and
- Night Time Economy // Final Report.

(ii) The business to be conducted at the Panel meeting on 1 March 2010 be:

- Waste Prevention and Recycling Options Appraisal / Final Report and
- 20 mph speed limit // Engagement Plan.

(iii) The item relating to Community Development / Neighbourhoods be deferred to the next Municipal Year.