

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL

1 SEPTEMBER 2010

Present :- Councillor Nigel Offen (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Margaret Fisher,
Mike Hardy, Michael Lilley, Lesley Scott-Boutell and
Jill Tod

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Nick Barlow
Councillor Dennis Willetts
Councillor Sue Lissimore
Councillor Henry Spyvee
Councillor Barrie Cook

5. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2010 were confirmed as a correct record.

6. Economic Development Strategy 2010-2015

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration inviting the members to review the Council's proposed Economic Development Strategy 2010-2015, the role of which 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 resilience and growth and to capture the economic benefits for residents and businesses in the Borough.

Nigel Myers, Enterprise and Tourism Manager, and Councillor Barlow, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Culture and Tourism further explained that it was proposed to extend the lifetime of the strategy from three to five years to enable a greater degree of medium to longer term strategic planning.

The Economic Development Strategy formed a key part of the integrated strategic approach led by the Strategic Policy and Regeneration Service. This brought together the key strategies and delivery plans for economic development with housing, transport, renaissance programme and the Core Strategy. Providing jobs for Colchester's growing community was a central objective of the Core Strategy that set out the overall direction for the Local Development Framework that would guide spatial planning and steer future development and investment in Colchester up to 2021. At a much wider level the Strategy existed in a policy context, which flowed down from the European Union and National Government policies on employment, business support, innovation, skills and learning and investment, through to County, sub-regional and local Borough levels. The challenge for Colchester was to ensure that the Borough received sufficient funding and resources at the right time to meet its own needs and aspirations.

In the light of significant changes to the economic landscape since 2007 and the likely changes expected to 2015, a new structure for the strategy was proposed which was

more 'fit for purpose'. The structure was adapted from a model developed by Local Government Improvement and Development, based on a UK benchmarking study of the highest performing local economies.

A strong evidence base was vital to understanding the local economy and in informing the strategies and interventions necessary to build and sustain a strong and resilient local economy.

An important recent addition to the evidence base was the 'Place Profile', which scored the performance of Colchester against a range of selected benchmark indicators of economic, social and environmental well-being. The Place Profile provided for the first time an economic 'scorecard' of how Colchester stands nationally, within its region and sub-region. In terms of the Colchester profile, other places in the UK with the most similar profiles include Chelmsford, Bedford, Maidstone, Worcester and Poole.

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 placed a duty on local authorities to undertake a Local Economic Assessment (LEA), the purpose of which was to "equip local authorities and partners with a common understanding of local economic conditions". Colchester had completed its Local Economic Assessment in June 2010 and it was attached to the report to the Panel.

It was proposed that the following economic drivers would inform the key interventions undertaken by Colchester Borough Council and its partners to fulfil the role and purpose of the strategy:

- Improving Business Performance
- Supporting Priority Sectors
- Raising Skills and Reducing Worklessness
- Maximising Connectivity
- Enhancing Quality of Life
- Stimulating Investment

The Council's Strategic Plan 2009 - 2012 had as one of its nine priorities 'Enabling Job Creation' and the actions and outcomes contained in this priority would be strongly aligned with the Economic Development Strategy. Both strategies identify the critical importance of actively addressing issues such as employment opportunities, workforce skills, business creation and growth and creating the necessary support and infrastructure to enable sustainable economic growth. Working in close partnership with a wide range of agencies was vital to delivering the strategy.

For this reason, representatives from two of Colchester's key partners, Signpost and the Colchester Business Enterprise Agency, had been invited to present to the Panel their achievements and vision for the future of the local economy.

Eugene Kraft, Chairman of the Trustees, Alf Mullins, Manager and Paul Feasey, Development Manager of Signpost, an independent organization helping people to get back into work or move on in their careers, together with Bob Baggalley, Chief Executive and Malcolm Braithwaite, Chair of the Board of Directors of Colchester Business Enterprise Agency, a non profit making organization helping new businesses

and small entrepreneurs all contributed to presentations and attended the meeting to assist members in their discussions.

Councillor Willetts attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel speaking in support of the work undertaken to meet the needs of local industries. However, he was concerned about the problems associated with a prosperous town, such as high house prices, the daily migration of workers travelling out of and into the Borough to work, the current progress made on Colchester's regeneration projects and the corresponding need to ensure the necessary infrastructure was or would be in place as soon as possible.

Councillor Lissimore attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel about her concerns regarding the extension of the Strategy to 5 years given the current economic situation, the mechanisms necessary to assist local businesses to engage with the Strategy.

The Panel gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The percentage, and corresponding number, of 16 – 19 year olds currently out of work and the reasons why
- Details of the barriers for people wishing to return to work;
- The skills necessary for graduates to fill local business opportunities;
- The resources necessary for the partner organisations to cope with increased demands on their services;
- The measures used to raise awareness of the partners' services in the local community;
- The impact of the current level of Business Rates on the local economy.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contributions from the representatives of Signpost and Col Business Enterprise Agency be welcomed and the representatives be thanked for their attendance;
- (ii) The Council's proposed Economic Development Strategy 2010 to 2015 be accepted and arrangements be made for the Strategy to be reviewed by the Panel in 12 months time.

Councillor Margaret Fisher (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)

7. Introduction of 20 mph Speed Limits

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration giving details of the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group formed to look into the introduction of 20 mph speed limits in the Borough, together with an outline of the

current views of Essex County Council, the Highway Authority, on the matter of reducing speed limits in residential areas.

Paul Wilkinson, Transportation Policy Manager, explained that discussions had recently taken place with officers from Essex County Council on a number of matters including the issue of 20mph limits. Although there was the potential to introduce 20mph limits it did not appear to be an Essex County Council priority, especially on an area wide basis. If communities were keen to see 20mph introduced then their requests would have to be considered through the “localism” agenda. The interpretation of Essex County Council’s strategy was that unless the average speeds were low already (around 20mph) then signed only limits, as implemented in Portsmouth, Oxford and other towns and cities, would not be introduced unless supporting physical speed reduction measures were deliverable and affordable.

Nationally the new Government was to release a paper for consultation on transport in urban areas and from recent Ministerial statements it appeared that part of this would encourage greater use of 20mph limits for safety and the promotion of walking and cycling. The outcome of this paper would need to be considered in the context of the localism agenda.

Essex County Council had recently further advised that in advance of the national Comprehensive Spending Review and Local Transport Plan process announcements, the County Council’s Road Safety and Network Management teams had been asked to undertake initial investigations into delivery of 20mph limits with further information and discussion to follow.

In the circumstances, it was proposed that the Task and Finish Group should retain a role in developing the strategy for Colchester. However this work could not start until further lobbying of Essex County Council had been undertaken. An outline engagement and consultation plan had been developed by the Group but it was not intended to proceed with delivering this as it would raise public expectations prior to Essex County Council giving clear indication of support for the delivery of 20mph limits.

Councillor Willetts attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel speaking in enthusiastic support of the introduction of 20 mph limits in Colchester. He believed that the residents of Colchester wanted to see this policy implemented and he felt the Council should take the lead in delivering the initiative and ensuring the local police were supportive.

Councillor Spyvee attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel speaking in support of the introduction of 20 mph limits in Colchester on the basis of greater road safety and the evidence that speed reductions would be achievable without the injection of large amounts of investment. He believed the Portfolio Holder should be requested to proceed with the initiative in as robust a fashion as was possible.

The Panel gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The overwhelming view that all efforts should be made to ensure the delivery of 20

- mph limits in Colchester as soon as possible;
- The evidence gathered by the Task and Finish Group clearly confirmed the merits of the introduction of reduced limits in residential areas and that the delivery need not be an expensive option but was highly achievable using the will and consensus of local people;
 - The need to take the opportunities to use the influence of local County Councillors to put pressure on the relevant officers at County Hall;
 - The need for officers to continue to use the evidence gathered by the Task and Finish Group to seek changes in the current view of Essex County Council.

RESOLVED that the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services be requested to report the following recommendations to the Cabinet -

- (i) The work to engage with Essex County Council be continued using both political channels and consultation processes to try and influence their position;
- (ii) The 20 mph Task and Finish Group and any further work on a structural engagement process be suspended for the time being pending an announcement from Essex County Council giving clear support for the delivery of 20mph limits;
- (iii) The members of the 20 mph Task and Finish Group be thanked for their efforts and contributions to the very comprehensive work of the Group.

8. Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group // Final Report

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Environmental and Protective Services giving details of the recommendations of the Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group formed to focus on the issues arising from the Night Time Economy by investigating the main causes of the current situation, to seek best practice elsewhere and to develop a broad range of proposals to address these causes.

Beverley Jones, Head of Environmental and Protective Services, and Councillor Barlow, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Culture and Tourism explained that it had generally been agreed that one of the main drivers to creating a Town Centre that felt safe and welcoming to all in the evening was around changing the 'monoculture' that existed after about 5.30pm when the retail outlets of the town close and the bars, restaurants and clubs open. By increasing the diversity of the 'offer' in town, it would be possible to increase the diversity of the people using and accessing the town.

From this three key themes developed for the work of the Group:

- To investigate the commercial appetite for increasing the diversity of what was on offer in the town centre;
- To investigate the responsibilities held across Colchester Borough Council and other partner organisations such as the Police in relation to enforcement and influence;
- To recognise that this was not an issue which was experienced by Colchester alone and there may be much that could be learnt from best practice.

In order to understand the views of the businesses and the complex interaction between the very different approaches a workshop was arranged to consult as widely as possible with all the stakeholders of the Town Centre. In addition, it was intended undertake some Peer Research utilising the knowledge, skills and relationships that Borough Councillors hold in the geographic areas they represent.

It was further proposed that the integral best practice element of the project should be commissioned from the University of Essex. A brief was produced and agreed but in the current financial climate the cost of the research (in the region of £10k) was considered too great. Instead, a literature review of all research available had been undertaken and the results, Best Practice – Guidance, Research and Advice and Best Practice – In Practice were appended to the report. The best practice outlines recommendations to be taken forward for Colchester and also attempted to reflect the considerable amount of work that was being undertaken in respect of the town centre as part of the Better Town Centre work programme.

Councillor Lissimore attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel requesting that the members consider the benefits of linking the Night Time Economy outcomes with the potential pedestrianisation of the town centre. She was of the view that the better pub and club managers should be asked to assist to improve the town centre generally and that a Liaison Group comprising the local police, magistrates and young people be set up to investigate ways to improve bad night time behaviour.

Councillor Spyvee attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel congratulating the Task and Finish Group on the volume of work they had completed, hoping that this could be built upon and the Group's recommendations could be implemented. He agreed that the town centre at night had seen significant improvements over a number of years. There was a high proportion of residents who lived in the town centre and he highlighted the benefits of the Purple Flag scheme, awarded to town centres which had achieved a certain level of success.

Councillor Cook attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel explaining that the Government had announced the introduction of proposals to potentially give residents greater opportunities to comment on Licensing applications.

Lindsay Barker, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration attended the meeting and assisted members in their discussions. She confirmed that she was very keen to continue the work of the Better Town Centre Steering Group which provided an opportunity to coordinate initiatives collectively across the whole organisation and that she was keen to take forward a number of initiatives, including the Purple Flag award.

The Panel gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The significant impact made by the introduction of the SOS bus service;
- The very significant improvement in the atmosphere in the town centre at night compared to a number of years ago;
- The need to give time for new initiatives such as the later opening of some town

centre shops on weekday evenings to deliver any lasting changes or influences

RESOLVED that, in his capacity as Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Culture and Tourism be requested to report the following recommendations to the Cabinet for consideration -

(i) Consideration be given, so far as is possible to the implementation of recommendations of the Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group and arrangements be made for progress on them to be reviewed by this Panel in 12 months time;

(ii) The members of the Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group be thanked for their efforts and contributions to the very comprehensive work of the Group and the Group be now curtailed.

9. Work Programme 2010/11

The Panel considered a report from the Head of Corporate Management setting out the current situation regarding the Panel's work programme for 2010/11.

The outcome of discussions between this Panel's Chairman and the Chairman of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel was awaited in relation to the appropriate Panel to consider the Olympics 2012 report, it was likely that the timing of the Waste Prevention and Recycling Options Appraisal update would need to be rescheduled due to the revised timetabling of the Street Services Fundamental Service Review and the addition to the work programme for the Panel's meeting in November of a report on the Single Equality Scheme.

RESOLVED that the work programme for 2010/11 be noted.