

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

16 DECEMBER 2008

Present :- Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)
Councillors Nick Barlow, Mark Cory, Pauline Hazell,
Peter Higgins, Margaret Kimberley, Kim Naish,
Nick Taylor and Julie Young

Substitute Members :- Councillor Mike Gamble for Councillor Mike Hogg
Councillor Gaye Lewis for Councillor Gaye Pyman

25. Minutes

The minute of the meeting held on 4 November 2008 was confirmed as a correct record.

26. Work Programme 2008-09

Mr. Robert Judd, Scrutiny Officer and Ms. Pam Donnelly, Executive Director explained that the item on the review of the Colchester2020 partnership arrangements, originally scheduled for the 6 January 2009, would need to be deferred, until later in the year, possibly at an extra meeting arranged in late April or early May. This was due to recent changes to the roles of board members, a new Chairman, Colonel Tony Phillips and the financial climate, all culminating in the current redrafting of their Strategy.

Ms. Ann Wain, Executive Director, addressed the panel, explaining the completed draft of the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan would be presented to the panel on the 6 January 2009. Ms. Wain said that with the panel's agreement, a report on National Indicators, an introductory report giving an overview of the current situation, would also be reported to this meeting.

It had been the intention to present the 2009-10 Budget Strategy at the same meeting as the draft Strategic Plan. This would not be possible for the meeting of the 6 January 2009, and the Chairman explained that this piece of scrutiny would need to be done at a meeting later in January, but prior to the Budget Strategy decision being taken by Cabinet on the 28 January 2009.

RESOLVED that the panel;

- i) Noted the 2008-09 rolling Work Programme, including the aforementioned changes and additions.
- ii) Agreed to the Scrutiny Officer arranging a meeting in late January for the panel to be able to jointly scrutinise the 2009-12 Strategic Plan and 2009-10 Budget Strategy.

Councillor Julie Young (in respect of being a Member of Essex County Council, and her husband being a Cabinet Member) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Peter Higgins (in respect of his wife being a Cabinet Member and a Member of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

27. Life Opportunities targets 6-month performance report

Councillor Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Partnerships, introduced the item on Life Opportunities targets 6-monthly performance report.

Councillor Dopson said the targets were set in October 2007 by the Public Service Partnership, a sub group of the Local Strategic Partnership, and commenced from April 2008. The targets were set voluntarily and were specifically set to enable the Borough to focus on issues of interest to Colchester, such as areas of deprivation and local people experiencing difficulties in the issues within the targets set.

Mr. Matt Sterling, Community Partnerships Manager presented the report to the panel, explaining in detail each of the targets and the progress so far being made against each target.

In response to Councillor Young's question concerning the apparent mismatch in the targets set, for example some housing targets appeared far more stretching and ambitious than the educational targets, Mr. Sterling said the scale of ambition of each target is what partners consider to be achievable, and is decided with the lead agency providing the knowledge and the partners providing the challenge, culminating in an agreed target. In response to Councillors Young and Kimberley, Mr. Sterling said the Council looked at deprived areas where there is a particular problem, focusing on as small a geographical area (super output areas) as data will allow, but acknowledging the difficulty in assimilating the relationship between school and residency data. Whilst focusing on small areas, if need dictated, targets were flexible, enabling resources to be redirected to other areas.

In response to Councillor Gamble, Mr. Sterling said the current financial climate would inevitably have a detrimental effect on household homelessness, though the Housing Team is hopeful that the implementation of new ideas could improve the overall results.

In response to Councillor Naish, Mr. Sterling said he would provide members with ward details in respect to the Health targets (the number of wards targeted numbered between 4 – 10 according to the target), and would check the accuracy of 'Berechurch Ward' under the skills target, rather than Shrub End Ward.

In response to Councillor Gamble, Councillor Young said there was no police evidence to show that the improvement in crime in the St Andrews Ward had resulted in the dispersal of crime to neighbouring wards, though Councillors Arnold and Higgins confirmed that whilst there had been a small amount of crime / anti-social behaviour spill over to their wards, from neighbouring wards, it had been speedily dealt with.

Mr. Sterling acknowledge the comment of Councillor Hazell, that in reference to teenage pregnancy and sex education, the Change makers Programme had highlighted the poor delivery of sex education locally. In response to Councillors Higgins and Arnold, Mr. Sterling said he would address the need for a better definition in regards to the age range for teenage conceptions, and would forward this information to the members of the panel.

In response to Councillor Cory, concerning the lack of knowledge of panel members to make an informed judgement, Mr. Sterling said the challenge in understanding the detail of each individual target was the responsibility of each lead partner, the Council's role was to take an overview of the targets and results and comment accordingly. Councillor Arnold said this was an opportunity to comment on the work being done, that the views of this panel did have some influence. Panel members were not required to be experts, but were part of the democratic process, and did on occasions come up with some 'gems' of advice or comment.

Councillors Kimberley and Gamble congratulated officers on the results so far achieved in 2008-09.

RESOLVED that the panel commented and noted upon the first 6-month performance data for the Life Opportunities targets and requested a further update of the year end results in early June 2009.

28. Climate Change and Carbon Management

Mr. Chris Dowsing, Strategic Waste and Sustainability Manager, introduced the item on Climate Change and Carbon Management.

Spontaneous applause and congratulations on behalf of the Council was given by the panel members to officers, on hearing that the Council had for the second year running received the Colchester Business Award for Environmental Awareness.

Ms. Sam Preston, Climate Change Officer, gave a presentation on the Council's commitment to climate change and the Nottingham Declaration Strategy, with reference to the Council's targets for National Performance Indicators and the Colchester2020 Carbon Challenge of a 30% reduction in CO2 emissions across the Borough by 2020. Ms. Preston explained the Council's priorities within the Nottingham Declaration, the results of local consultation on climate change and the local carbon footprint, and details of some commissioned projects and their potential CO2 savings. Ms. Preston concluded by speaking about the Council's delivery of sustainable services and being a community leader for this goal.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Mr. Dowsing said that Colchester2020 are currently in the process of developing a small group of partners to work on carbon reduction, led by the new lead partner, Mr. Paul Zollinger-Read.

Councillor Young, as a point of interest and awareness, said the County Library Service

now hire out monitors for households to gauge their energy usage.

In response to Councillor Young, Councillor Gamble, Chairman of the Planning Committee, confirmed that Ms. Karen Syrett, Spatial Policy Manager, was looking at carbon reduction issues being incorporated into the Local Development Framework, and this would have a knock-on effect on Planning Policy and applications. Mr. Dowsing confirmed to Councillor Young that the Council's service fleet vehicles did run on bio-diesel fuel.

Mr. Matthew Young, Head of Street Services, confirmed to Councillor Young that Councillor Barton, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning, had commissioned Mr. Ian Vipond, Executive Director, to take a lead on the Sustainable Communities Act, and this piece of work would be reported on shortly.

In response to Councillor Barlow, Mr. Dowsing agreed that there was still a lot more scope for working with other Council's and organisations to improve our carbon footprint, and agreed with Councillors Barlow and Arnold that a huge amount of work was still needed to work across all Council services, understand the linkages and assimilate our own carbon reduction, with a need for the awareness of carbon reduction to be imbedded into the organisation.

Councillor Arnold suggested that the Cabinet should consider, with qualification, that all Cabinet and Cabinet Member reports / decisions should incorporate 'carbon impact' as a standard item.

In response to Councillor Cory, Mr. Dowsing confirmed that the Council were supporting the work of the University of Essex (a Colchester2020 partner) on the project to examine technological advances in the home that will reduce energy usage.

RESOLVED that the panel;

- i) Commented and noted the Council's actions planned and taken to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- ii) Requested the Cabinet to consider with qualification, that all Cabinet and Cabinet Member reports / decisions should incorporate 'carbon impact' as a standard item.
- iii) Requested a further update in one year's time (2009-10).

29. Performance Related Pay for Cabinet Members

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Business, introduced the report on Performance Related Pay for Cabinet Members.

Councillor Smith said this was a proposal to introduce a scheme to provide for an apportionment of the Cabinet Member Special Responsibility Allowance to be linked to performance. Councillor Smith said this proposal could be trialled, prior to

implementation, and he would be happy to be subjected to the first review.

Councillor Young said she failed to comprehend this proposal that would cut the responsibility allowance to a Cabinet Member by 60% if they achieved their goals and only paid the full allowance if they exceeded their goals or was judged to be outstanding. Councillor Young said the banding was entirely wrong, and any person considered outstanding should surely receive an allowance above 100%.

Councillor Young said whilst she was not against a scheme in principle, many issues with this scheme would be raised that needed clarifying and that the responsibilities are far more difficult to measure, than was the case with the staff scheme. The current financial climate and more challenging times ahead could limit resources in certain areas and could make it extremely difficult for targets to be met.

Councillor Hazell said more information and Councillor feedback was needed before any scheme would reach agreement, and felt that any scheme that was introduced could not be compared with the Performance and Reward Scheme for staff.

Councillor Gamble was against the scheme in principle, but also said taking a proportion of an allowance away before a review was like being guilty until proved innocent, that went against the grain. The idea of having less and having to earn back an allowance did not sit easy. Councillor Gamble concluded by saying the allowance paid was for the responsibility of the role and work in public life and should not necessarily get linked to incentives.

Councillor Naish said he believed in the principle of performance related pay to possibly all members, but felt the details of the scheme proposed needed much refining.

Councillor Kimberley asked whether members, as a jury of their peers, are qualified to do such a task. Councillor Kimberley questioned whether a genuine assessment of a portfolio holder's performance could be undertaken, especially given that responsibilities could change, are extremely diverse and some targets may through no fault of the portfolio holder be impossible to meet.

Councillor Arnold said the Special Responsibility Allowance given to members was not pay, but an allowance made in lieu of the time spent in public service, and cannot therefore be spent earning an income, a reward in its own right. Councillor Arnold said given the time he had given as a portfolio holder, which equated to half the minimum wage, to take this away seemed monumentally unjust. Councillor Arnold also questioned the equity of the portfolio holder's responsibilities.

Councillor Barlow said he agreed with the basic principle, but like others believed the scheme being offered was not workable and a lot more work would be needed to provide a scheme that would gain agreement.

Councillor Higgins said before we even got to an agreeable scheme, members may not come to agreement on measurable objectives, and measurable objectives could

hinder a portfolio holder who focused on certain targets. Councillor Higgins also thought the press reaction to any portfolio holder who had been judged to have failed could create more problems and be counterproductive to the purpose of the scheme.

Councillor Hazell said some of the problems raised by members could potentially discourage young people and many others to work in public life.

Councillor Smith thanked panel members for their comments.

RESOLVED that the panel would not recommend the introduction of a scheme to provide for an apportionment of the Cabinet Member Special Responsibility Allowance to be linked to performance.