

## **STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **3 NOVEMBER 2009**

*Present :-* Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)  
Councillors Nick Barlow, Mark Cory, Kim Naish,  
Gaye Pyman, Laura Sykes, Nick Taylor,  
Dennis Willetts and Julie Young

*Substitute Members :-* Councillor Peter Higgins for Councillor Mike Hogg  
Councillor Sonia Lewis  
for Councillor Jackie Maclean

#### **26. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minute of the meeting held on 13 October 2009 was confirmed as a correct record.

#### **27. Have Your Say!**

Mr. Andy Hamilton addressed the panel, saying he had received the Council's Allegations Sub Committee judgment in respect of the complaint submitted by him concerning his communications with Councillors about the proposed sale of 15 Queen Street that had followed previous communications with the Head of Resource Management. Mr. Hamilton said he has been enraged by the attitude of Councillors and the Allegations Sub Committee who had not treated his intention to purchase the lease on the building for charitable purposes seriously. Mr. Hamilton said he had been denied information concerning the proposed lease sale and subsequently, the Allegations Sub Committee had stated that he had merely expressed an opinion that the building should be used for mobility scooters.

Mr. Hamilton concluded by saying the Allegations Sub Committee had decided it was correct for information to be denied to him, and that he could not make a written offer for the sale was his own fault. Mr. Hamilton said there would be repercussions for Councillors due to their behaviour.

#### **28. Decisions taken under special urgency provisions**

The Chairman, Councillor Arnold informed the panel that he had certified the Cabinet decision relating to the Investment in schools in Colchester that identified the need for further information to be obtained about the terms of the investment and for a Statutory Public Consultation to be undertaken. As a matter of urgency, the Cabinet was in a position to take an informed decision before the time limit on the funding expired.

## 29. Transforming Colchester's Housing Services

**Councillors Chapman and J Young (in respect of being members of the Colchester Borough Homes Board), Councillor Sykes (in respect of being a member of the Colchester Borough Homes Board and Stanway Parish Council, and Councillor Arnold (in respect of being a member of Great Horkesley Parish Council) all declared a personal interest in the following item.**

Councillor Beverley Oxford, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods, Ms. Lindsay Barker, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration and Mr. Gareth Mitchell, Head of Life Opportunities attended the meeting for this item.

Councillor B Oxford introduced the Transforming Colchester's Housing Services review. Councillor Oxford recommended the detailed business case to the panel, saying it would ensure the Council achieves its aims of tackling homelessness through a new housing policy, enhanced and effective response and help to our customers, a decent home for all and safe homes especially for the elderly and vulnerable.

Ms. Barker and Mr. Mitchell introduced the report on Transforming Colchester's Housing Services, with a business case that addressed the strategic aim of ensuring that Colchester has the best possible arrangements for meeting the housing needs of residents.

The business case would require a redesigned front-end process for customers, the alignment of housing solutions for customers with other key drivers of improved life chances, a stronger focus on the Council's "strategic enabling" role in housing, greater collaboration between the Council and Colchester Borough Homes across the whole housing function and a new organisational structure with more flexible ways of working.

The review provided an emerging framework around the important balance between brokering solutions for customers, driving housing supply, increasing work to prevent homelessness and managing existing housing stock and tenants and effectively as possible. Fifteen themed workshops were organised, involving over seventy staff, plus internal and external stakeholder workshops, to address what we do now and how it could be improved, to provide insight into potential new ways of working and to validate the resulting opportunities for improvement, resulting in the development of the final business case.

The final opportunities included effective self service, multi-skilled staff, a

collaborative approach between housing and benefits teams, education and cultural change, short term housing solutions and a Colchester Association of Social Landlords, a stronger Council / Colchester Borough Homes Partnership, returning more empty homes to use, supporting landlords to deliver more quality private rented accommodation and a professional support unit.

Officers spoke about the delivery process, the effectiveness of the new approach and the efficiencies emanating from the review.

Councillor Chapman addressed the panel saying he welcomed this review and thanked officers and all others involved in the review for carrying out such a thorough exercise. Councillor Chapman said the 'spaghetti junction' image shown in the presentation and highlighting what was found at the vision and outline design stage proved the review was long overdue.

Whilst Councillor Chapman was supportive of the effective self serve approach to delivery, still wanted assurances that 'face to face' contact would still be available for vulnerable people finding themselves in dire straits, that at times customers needed a human face to communicate with. Councillor Chapman was also thankful that the Borough's temporary accommodation was being addressed, because he was concerned that improvements were much needed without delay.

Councillor Chapman concluded by welcoming a stronger partnership between the Council and Colchester Borough Homes, and asked that the skills of officers within Colchester Borough Homes, often not recognised, are recognised and where possible fully utilised.

Ms. Barker confirmed to Councillor Chapman that whilst the customer insight review showed the profile of customers had changed, with many now wanting to communicate on-line, it was realistic to expect 'face to face' contact with customers and this would always remain.

Mr. Mitchell responded to Councillor Chapman by explaining that the temporary accommodation review had provided the impetus to implement new temporary accommodation arrangements sooner and it was recognised that other organisations are better equipped to deliver this service in the future, and this was to be proposed to the Cabinet tentatively confirmed as by the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Mitchell said Council officers welcomed a greater collaboration between the Council and Colchester Borough Homes, recognising absolutely the need to bring together the joint skills of both organisations.

Councillor J Young very much supported the principles highlighted within the

review of 'letting go' of some services that had historically been done in-house, though the success will depend on how well the delivery partners deliver. Councillor Young remained concerned for vulnerable people, though she was pleased to see the Allocations service moving to Colchester Borough Homes. Mr. Mitchell clarified that whilst 'letting go' of some functions, this would not be an abdication of responsibility. There was an opportunity to gather partners more effectively around the table and find collective solutions, especially for vulnerable people, and reassured members that all acute cases would continue to be dealt with sympathetically and quickly, but more effectively.

Councillor Willetts expressed the wish for there to be a more detailed business case, showing clear objectives and how the different services would migrate to the new and better structure, and with a financial summary to support the business case, with a broad indication of how the potential reduction in staffing levels would be managed.

Ms. Barker explained that the report did state a twenty five per cent reduction in the current resources (not posts) and the business case did give detail on the expectant training, development and IT requirements, to be contained within the current costs through business re-engineering and the simplification of processes. Ms. Barker said the Implementation Plan would give more detail that was currently being worked up, but once agreed by Cabinet, could be shared more widely. Mr. Mitchell confirmed that the resource to implement the recommendations in the business case would be found within existing service budgets and there would be no additional costs.

Ms. Pam Donnelly, Executive Director, spoke to the panel to reassure members of the validity of the business case, which was available on-line and a link would be provided to members after this meeting. Ms. Donnelly stressed that the business case did support high level strategic options, that the implementation would start rigorously in January 2010 and with existing resources to support the organisational changes.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Diversity (including the Housing Revenue Account), explained to the panel that the detailed financial information was not available yet as the split between the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund had not been completed. Councillor Smith also said the precise details were sensitive in terms of the effects of the implementation plan, though further information would be forthcoming following the December Cabinet decision.

Taking officers and members explanations into account, Councillor Willetts said he was disappointed that with regards to good practice, a simple financial statement with details of the implementation costs, but without identifying jobs,

could not be produced, concluding that without this document the review was incomplete and short of a decent conclusion.

In response to Councillor Taylor, Ms. Barker said this was a long term review, for the present and the future, as there was no desire to go through this process again in five years time. Ms. Barker said the organisational change would ensure that new roles will provide far greater flexibility in staff roles and service provision. The new Professional Support Unit would have the ability to regularly monitor performance and customers comments, and manage solutions to ensure the people's needs are met. Mr. Mitchell said the scale of change for the service would be enormous, but the changes will allow greater flexibility. He also confirmed that a risk register for the review would be developed as part of the Implementation Plan. Mr. Mitchell confirmed that following the Cabinet decision, there would be regular staff involvement and consultation during the implementation stage, and any current vacant posts are on hold also pending the implementation.

Mr. Mitchell confirmed to Councillor Lewis that the review of Temporary Accommodation had made tangible progress in the last few months, and dialogue with 'able' partners was progressing, with external funding partners also supporting the proposals in principle.

RESOLVED that the panel;

- i) Thanked Ms. Barker and Mr. Mitchell for attending the meeting, giving a presentation on Transforming Colchester's Housing Services, and responding to questions from the panel.
- ii) Noted the report Transforming Colchester's Housing Services to be presented to the Cabinet on 2 December 2009, and asked Cabinet to consider the comments made by the panel

### **30. Climate Change and Carbon Management**

Ms. Sam Preston, Climate Change Officer introduced the report on Climate Change and Carbon Management, providing an update on the report presented to the panel in November 2008. The report provided progress on the Strategy and Action Plan formally adopted by Cabinet in March 2009, under the four priorities, "reducing our own carbon footprint", "becoming a community leader", "delivering sustainable services" and "using our powers".

In response to Councillor Willetts, Ms Preston said that signing up to the Nottingham Declaration had provided the impetus to produce the Carbon Management Programme, and with the Self Assessment Framework in place,

will further show Colchester's continual commitment to the declaration.

Councillor Willetts commented that he felt more work was needed to improve the procurement process when letting contracts in terms of the effect on the carbon footprint. For example, what would be the effect of giving the 'Analogue to Digital Conversion' contract to a company in Scotland, a round trip of 900 plus miles? Ms. Preston confirmed there is still a huge amount of work to be done to ensure good practice across all service areas and this included procurement. Councillor Arnold said it would be sound practice to ensure the carbon impact between different potential contractors is considered.

Ms. Preston acknowledged Councillor Arnold's point that the Council would need to ensure positive engagement with local residents, private businesses and individuals about ways to reduce our carbon impact locally. Ms. Preston said the Council is involved in various different events and supporting community groups. Ms. Preston said there is now a mind change happening with people, and community groups and parish councils are contacting the Council for advice.

Mr. Chris Dowsing, Strategic Waste and Sustainability Manager responded to Councillor Arnold saying the work carried out by Councils and forming part of Council's accountability within the Government's National Indicators would in part provide the process for measuring the carbon impact to homes in the borough. Mr. Dowsing said there is an action plan in place that included carbon management working between the agencies and bodies within Colchester2020. Mr. Dowsing concluded by saying that Government officials and local officers are fully aware of the need to connect with all local groups and residents, and the Department of Energy and Climate Change are currently embarking on a national awareness campaign of signposting, branding and television advertising.

*RESOLVED* that the panel noted the report presented to the panel on Climate Change and Carbon Management, and thanked Ms. Preston and Mr. Dowsing for attending the meeting and responding to questions from the panel.

### **31. Street Care Strategy Review**

Councillor Tim Young, Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services, Mr. Dave McManus, Street Care and Recycling Manager and Ms. Jolene Rogers, Street Care Development Officer attended the meeting for this and the following item.

Other officers from the Street Care and Recycling team attended the meeting

and Councillor T Young thanked them for attending, adding that their attendance showed the commitment of staff to achieving success with the Street Care Strategy. Councillor Young also added that he and officers are still awaiting the outcomes from the Night Time Economy Task and Finish Group which will be considered for the Street Care Strategy.

Mr. McManus presented the report on the Street Care Strategy, originally introduced in 2006 with the aim of clearly defining how Street Services would manage and improve the Street Scene. Mr. McManus spoke of the three main aims and achievements of the strategy, though saying there had been difficulties in providing a 'reader friendly' document. Mr. McManus went on to explain the needs within the 2009 review, including the update of priorities to reflect the Council's strategic aims and needs of the community, ensuring litter standards are consistently achieved and customer expectations are met, improve co-ordination and collaborative working, placing greater focus on education and enforcement and encouraging the public and local businesses to take more responsibility for the quality of the local environment, to comply with legislation and adopt consistent enforcement action, and the need for greater investment to meet standards expected including quicker and more effective enforcement.

Mr. McManus concluded by explaining the next stages of the process, public consultation, internal consultation, clear and defined procedures and a new look electronic strategy.

Ms. Rogers, with the use of screen and laptop, gave members a guided tour of the Council's on-line consultation facility providing links to all the appropriate councils and agencies and with the opportunity to carry out the process without the need to print documents, though it was confirmed that a link to a printable version for manual completion would be available.

Councillor Naish congratulated the Street Care Team for all their hard work. There have been noticeable improvements across the borough, and for him, especially in the Berechurch Ward. In response to Councillor Naish, who felt more attention should be given to Town Centre cleaning at the end of nighttime business, Mr. McManus said legislation dictates that town centre should be regularly cleaned between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm, so there was a need to juggle resources outside these times to maximise efficiency and a strict regime of nighttime Street Litter Control Notices (SLCN) was having a positive effect. Mr. McManus said additional street cleaning was trialed last year for the 4-5 weekends leading up to Christmas. It was agreed at that time that making streets cleaner and emptying bins more regularly did give residents and visitors a feeling of greater safety.

In response to Councillor Barlow, Mr. McManus said officers are continually

working with fast food outlets in regards to getting them to work within the Fast Food Code of Practice. It was said that between 2006-08 seminars were arranged for fast food premises, but with little success with businesses not bothering to attend. Business information packs are given to businesses and information inserts are given to businesses via their Business Rate billing. Mr. McManus said businesses are now positively responding to SLCN, but was happy to consider the suggestion that stronger legal representation was needed by the local authority to press the legal need for businesses to cooperate.

Councillor J Young complimented the Council for the provision of refurbished public toilets at Lion Walk and Wivenhoe. The refurbishments had been well received by all users.

Councillor Young said that all people, and especially the young, had to take greater responsibility in taking their waste home for recycling (disposal) and hoped the Council would do more to engage with young people on this issue.

Mr. McManus said the amount of footfall in areas generally dictated the number of waste bins installed in any area; therefore areas of heavy footfall required more waste bins. Where new bins are installed they now provide cigarette receptacles.

In response to Councillor Taylor, Mr. McManus said the Council is undertaking awareness campaigns. Officers are also revisiting previous campaigns for ideas, but thinking differently about the implementation. An education program for schools is being developed over the next year and a half. Mr. McManus said the Council now had membership of an Essex wide group where campaigns may have a bigger impact with a consistent message.

Councillor T Young confirmed to Councillor P Higgins that he had responded to Councillor T Higgins in reference to her Council question on the Old Heath toilets.

*RESOLVED* that the panel noted the report presented to the panel on the Street Care Strategy review, thanked all the Street Services officers for attending the meeting, and thanked Mr. McManus and Ms. Rogers for presenting the report and web tour and responding to questions from the panel.

## **32. Graffiti Policy and Procedures**

Mr. McManus presented the report on the Graffiti Policy and Procedures. Mr. McManus described the current procedures for dealing with reporting of graffiti



and statistical information in terms of the number of incidents, and the time taken to remove the graffiti. Photographic slides were presented to the panel showing contrasting pictures of areas before and after graffiti were removed.

Mr. McManus spoke about the different approaches to cleaning graffiti and by way of comparison, the approach adopted by West Sussex, a pro-active approach, where ninety eight percent of graffiti is cleared within five working days, with an emergency weekend service.

Councillor Oxford said Highwoods suffered with a high level of graffiti, but unless local people themselves undertook to foot the bill for the removal of graffiti on their property or boundary wall it was never removed. Councillor Oxford was therefore supportive of a 'clean all' policy that did not differentiate between private and public dwellings. During the course of the ensuing debate Councillor's Lewis, Arnold, Higgins and Barlow all concurred with the comments of Councillor Oxford.

Councillor Arnold said he believed the current policy did not work, and the visual impact of the current policy on visitors to Colchester was powerful enough argument to adopt the West Sussex approach. Councillor Arnold also said there was a case to ask partners for funds to contribute towards the cost to the Council.

Councillor Higgins said it would be important that the persons employed to remove graffiti are proactive in their approach, that they have the incentive and initiative to tackle what they see, not just what they are told. Councillor Barlow said officers should be diligent at the planning stage to keep to a minimum the number of built surfaces that can potentially fall foul of graffiti (safety by design).

Councillor Cory was conscious that a 'clean all' policy could make cleaning costs escalate and that it was imperative that officers continue to push and promote community projects that empower local people, especially the young, to contribute to the work and spread awareness. Mr. McManus said research suggests that as successful as the 'Lucy Lane' project was, these types of projects as a rule do not reduce graffiti.

Councillor T Young said he was keen on the 'clean all' approach, that the image and perception of Colchester should be good and welcoming. Councillor Young hoped that should Colchester take a lead, the County Council and other agencies would follow and support. Councillor Young concluded by saying that he would be putting a growth bid into the 2010-11 budget and welcomed the support of the panel.

*RESOLVED* that the panel;

- i) Thanked the officers for attending the meeting, giving a presentation on the Graffiti policy and responding to questions from the panel.
- ii) Gave their consent to Street Services developing and implementing a 'clean all' graffiti strategy along the lines of that operated within West Sussex.

### **33. Review of the work of the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services.**

Given the length of the meeting due to the number of substantive agenda items, with the time being 9.08 p.m. the panel agreed to continue with the final two agenda items, without a break.

**Councillor J Young (in respect of her spouse being the Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services) declared a personal interest in the following item.**

Councillor T. Young gave a brief resume of the work and successes within his portfolio since the 2008 review.

In response to Councillor Naish, Councillor Young said the Council was working closely with the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) in respect of licensing matters, an improving and successful partnership

In response to Councillor Barlow, Councillor Young said the town centre market on a Friday and Saturday was well run and he believed was successful, and at this time he was not considering a new location. Councillor Young welcomed any suggestions that would make the market more accessible.

Councillor Young confirmed to Councillor Arnold that the Street Care Development Officer was working on the developing engagement with local shopkeepers at Dedham in respect of the Dedham Toilet Scheme, and was hoping to roll out fully over the next few months. In regards to the overall toilet strategy, Councillor Young said this was a discretionary service therefore not a high priority, though his expectation was to have all present toilets maintained to a high level of cleanliness.

*RESOLVED* that the panel thanked Councillor Young from attending the meeting and responding to member's questions.

### **34. Work Programme**

Councillor Arnold confirmed that in regards to the item on the progress of the Greenways Care Home, provisionally scheduled for the 5 January 2010, he would share with the panel's group spokespersons the progress update given to him by the Essex County Council Portfolio Holder before taking a view on the provisional January review.

Councillor Arnold also confirmed that he had agreed with the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Partnerships to delay the review of CYPSP until 2010-11 allowing time for the new Joint Colchester / Tendring partnership to evolve.

*RESOLVED* that the panel considered and noted the 2009-10 Work Programme.