

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 March 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **26 March 2002** when there were present:

Cllr D A Weir – Chairman

Cllr R Adams
Cllr A Hosking
Cllr P J Morgan
Cllr M G B Starke

Cllr R E Vingoe
Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

INVITEE

Cllr V H Leach – Chairman of the Environmental Services Committee

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive
S Scutton – Head of Planning Services
A Bugeja – Head of Legal Services
P Denholm – Solicitor
J Bostock – Principal Committee Administrator

Representing Essex County Council – P Whitehouse, Sustainable Transport Marketing Manager

119 PLANNING: DELIVERING A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE – GREEN PAPER

Pursuant to Overview & Scrutiny Rule 15, Cllrs R Adams, M G B Starke and P F A Webster had requested that the decision of the Environmental Services Committee relating to the Green Paper (Minute 96/02) be referred to this Committee for consideration.

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had invited Cllr V H Leach, Chairman of the Environmental Services Committee, to this meeting to assist understanding of the Policy Committee's decision.

The Committee noted that those Councillors calling in the decision had felt that there should be some strengthening of the bullet point comments set out in the Resolution to Minute 96/02.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- Whilst the Government had asked for a response to the Paper by 18 March, the Council could submit supplementary

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comments after this date. Whether they were considered or not would be for Government to determine.

- Any suggestions for strengthening the wording of the Minute could be submitted to the next meeting of the Environmental Services Committee for consideration.
- When considering the possibilities for autonomy of decision making in service areas such as planning, account needed to be taken of the implications of Human Rights Legislation.
- The White Paper on Regional Government was soon to be released.

The Committee discussed and agreed suggested wording aimed at strengthening the observations of the Policy Committee. It was also agreed that it would be appropriate for consideration to be given to submitting observations to the Government on the local autonomy aspect of the Green Paper and on the relatively short timeframe within which comment on the Paper had been required.

Resolved to RECOMMEND to the Environmental Services Committee:-

- (1) That the wording in the bullet points to Minute 96/02 be strengthened so that the resolution reads:-

“That this report forms the basis of the Rochford District Council’s response to the Government Green Paper “Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change” subject to the following Member comments:-

- Disagreement with the proposal that there should be new business planning zones with relaxed planning controls.
- Support for the proposal that planning consents be limited to three rather than five years, with applications for renewals being considered afresh.
- It is totally contradictory for the Government to say that the process for Local Plans should be speeded up, while at the same time seeking more extensive community involvement.
- Disagreement with a local plan system that can change on a day-to-day basis, stability being essential to any planning system.

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- A major omission is that there is no indication of whether the District Council or the planning applicant would bear the charge for the responses of statutory consultees.
- It is fundamentally desirable that Parish Councils, Chambers of Trade and other local organisations are not left out of the process.
- There is a specific requirement to fill the gap between the local development framework and the regional tier.
- Concern that many of the changes proposed in the Green Paper should not be implemented until a Regional Government has been elected by popular franchise. (HPS)

(2) That the Government also be advised :-

- (i) That more time should have been given for responses to this fundamentally important Green Paper.
- (ii) This Council would have liked further clarification on what is actually meant by the opportunity for more autonomy in planning at local level with specific examples of how local autonomy could be carried forward. (HPS)

120 OVERALL WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which detailed topics for consideration with a view to agreeing the priorities for the work programme and timetable.

Responding to Member questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- Given the frequency of meetings, it would be possible to pick up any issues arising from the Stambridge Sewage Treatment Plant at relatively short notice. If appropriate, it would also be possible to invite Anglian Water to attend a specific meeting.
- The monitoring of Town Centre Enhancement Programmes was within the Committee's remit.

Resolved

That the Work Programme set out in the report of the Chief Executive be agreed on the basis of the following specific arrangements:-

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- Policies on the emerging local plan and rural/urban bus initiatives to be a key early area of work.
- That Essex County Council Highways and their contractor be asked to formally report to this Committee on progress in relation to the town centres, other highway matters and any issues arising in July, the frequency of updates to be determined at that meeting.
- That twice yearly (the September/October and February/March cycles) the Council's Contractor, ServiceTeam, be asked to formally report on progress and issues relating to the refuse collection and street cleansing contracts.
- That issues arising out of problems at the Stambridge Sewage Treatment Plant be brought to this Committee as and when they arise.
- That consideration of the Hackney Carriage Licensing arrangements and consultation with both operators and drivers be programmed for completion by the Summer recess at the latest.
- That work on the programming and reporting on the effectiveness of the roll-out of the kerbside recycling initiative and consideration of any amendments to the current scheme and the way forward be timetabled so that it is completed by October/November 2002.

121 PUBLIC TRANSPORT INITIATIVES – INVITATION FOR BID SUBMISSIONS TO THE RURAL AND URBAN CHALLENGE FUNDS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on information received from the County Council seeking bid submissions under the Rural and Urban Challenge Fund initiatives.

The Chief Executive was able to report that, so far, communication had been received from Hullbridge and Rawreth Parish Council's. Hullbridge Parish Council had observed that it would be of value if transport services to the Dome Caravan Park in Lower Road could be enhanced and that, notwithstanding the Council's Taxi Voucher Scheme, some form of Social Transport Scheme to assist residents to/from shops might be appropriate. Rawreth Parish Council had referred to the value of addressing transport problems between Rawreth and Battlesbridge and in the vicinity of the Carpenters Arms. Consultation with the Rayleigh Association of Voluntary Services had established that the Association was currently undertaking research into Community Transport Initiatives in the area. At this stage, the

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Association felt that the District Council might like to consider submitting a funding application for some form of Community Transport Scheme.

Mr David Whitehouse thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend this meeting, Rochford being the first Authority to extend an invitation.

In presenting the detail of the Challenge Fund, Mr Whitehouse observed that Community Transport Initiatives were proving particularly popular. Whilst it was preferable to be able to demonstrate elements of deprivation when submitting bids, this was not essential. It was hoped that any possible projects could be suggested by 10 April. The County Council was not seeking great detail at this stage as finalised proposals needed to be submitted to the Government by the end of August 2002. The County Council's Road Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy Manager would assist organisations in working on the detailed aspects of any bid.

During discussion of community transport, a Member referred to recent work being undertaken in Switzerland aimed at combining Postal Services with Rural Transport Services. Reference was also made to the value of being able to research the type of statistical information which could be used in support of any bid submissions. In the latter regard there could be value in considering the possibilities for joint working with the Association of Voluntary Services.

The Committee agreed that, at this stage, it would be appropriate to approach the Rayleigh Association of Voluntary Services with a view to working with them on the feasibility of submitting proposals for schemes which could address transport problems already identified within various parishes within the District and other areas of demonstrable need.

Resolved to **RECOMMEND** to the Environmental Services Committee that the Rayleigh Association of Voluntary Services be approached on the possibilities for joint working to establish the feasibility of submitting Challenge Fund bids aimed at addressing transport problems in areas of demonstrable need within the District. (CE)

122 **ROCHFORD DISTRICT REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN – NEW SECTIONS AND TIMETABLE FOR DEPOSIT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which sought views on sections to be included in the First Deposit Draft of the Replacement Local Plan and addressed timetabling issues.

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Responding to Member questions, Officers advised that:-

- The Government was looking for the Local Plan to deal with key issues relevant to local communities.
- There was no intention that policies relating to listed buildings be diluted.
- It was important to achieve a common understanding of all aspects of Local Plan content.

The Committee concurred with a view of a Member that, given the level of interest that would be generated from prospective developers and landowners, it was important for appropriate time to be given to producing Local Plan documentation and that the process should not be hurried. Cognisance also needed to be given to the officer resources available to progress documentation, it being unlikely that the First Deposit Draft would be finalised before September 2002.

The Committee endorsed the suggestion of the Chief Executive that the Committee Members should each submit any specific observations they have on the report appendices to the Head of Planning Services with a view to all observations being furnished to the next meeting for detailed consideration..

Resolved

- (1) That the Environmental Services Committee be advised that time and resource pressures are such that it is unlikely the Local Plan First Deposit Draft will be finalised before September 2002.
- (2) That Members of this Committee submit any specific observations they have on the report appendices to the Head of Planning Services so that these can be compiled and reported for detailed consideration to the next meeting. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 9.34pm.

Chairman _____

Date _____