

Review Committee – 20 March 2007

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **20 March 2007** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr K H Hudson
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs R Brown

Cllr K J Gordon
Cllr Mrs S A Harper
Cllr T Livings

Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn and Cllr D G Stansby

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P K Savill

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
P Gowers	-	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
J O'Brien	-	Committee Administrator

85 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Responding to a Member's question on responses requested from Chief Inspector Walker (minute 30/06), officers advised that a revised question had subsequently been sent and a response was anticipated to be received by 30 March 2007 and would be distributed to Members of the Committee.

86 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T Livings declared a personal interest in the bus services review project by virtue of being a user of public transport.

87 REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE PLANNING ENFORCEMENT SERVICE

The Committee considered the final report of the project team on the review of the Operation of the Planning Enforcement Service.

In presenting the report, the project lead advised that the enforcement questionnaire sent to local authorities in the Audit Commission family group as part of the review had provided both interesting and useful results, and was an approach not adopted before by the Council or any other authority consulted

in this field. This could be regarded as a positive step in opening up communication channels to assist in improving and developing the Planning Enforcement service.

The Committee was mindful of an errata that had subsequently followed the report issued.

It was observed that Planning Enforcement is a discretionary service, and not a statutory requirement by Government.

During discussion on the recommendations, the following was noted:-

- The duty rota in place involves members of staff within the Planning Enforcement Team. Time is split between being in the office as a duty planner 'on call', studying for the planning qualification via day release, as well as dealing with individual case work. If duty rotas were changed, this would have implications across the whole Division and may well have a resource impact.
- Recommendation no 5 should have the first bullet point omitted, as it was agreed that the re-wording could be misinterpreted and may result in public confusion as to what was meant.
- The term 'regularly reports' under recommendation no 7 was appropriate.
- It was felt to be of high importance that all Members should be encouraged to attend additional training in planning law and specifically enforcement, as outlined in recommendation no 9.
- Recommendation no 10 would be amended to read as follows 'It is recommended that the Head of Planning & Transportation publish a quarterly report in the Council's publication "Rochford District Matters" as to Planning Enforcement stating the number of new cases and cases closed in the quarter'. This would take into account that an approach via an article instead of a list would be more appropriate.
- Recommendation no 11 should end at the word 'neighbourhood', thus removing the text 'free of charge, and that this opportunity should be widely advertised'.
- The proposal for an aerial survey of the District 'bi-annually' was fit for purpose, and the information would provide useful evidence for future referral.

The Committee recognised the thorough examination that had taken place to conclude their review and complete the final report and joined the Chairman in congratulating the project team on all their work and efforts.

The report and recommendations were endorsed.

Resolved

That, subject to the above amendments, the final report and recommendations be agreed for submission to the Planning Policy & Transportation Committee and Standards Committee as appropriate.

88 REVIEW OF BUS SERVICES

The Committee considered the final report of the project lead on the review of Bus Services.

The Committee noted that:-

- Commercially from the evidence gathered it would appear that the number of buses provided in the District is sufficient to serve the population, but there was not an adequate distribution of services to outlying parts of the District where there was small or irregular demand.
- It could be recognised that the No 8 bus service had been missed by residents that had no alternative means of public transport for this route.
- Various consultations had taken place as part of the review, and disappointingly there had been no written response from the bus company 'Arriva' to the project team's letter sent out regarding the review.
- Following a meeting attended by the project lead, subject to approval from Essex County Councillor Rodney Bass there is a proposal by Essex County Council's Highways & Transportation Department to subsidise a community bus service between Central Avenue, Hullbridge and Rochford via the Dome one day a week on a 3month trial basis.

The Committee recognised the extensive work carried out by the project lead to complete the review and produce the final report. Thanks were extended to officers for their involvement and assistance.

The report and recommendations were endorsed.

Resolved

That the final report and recommendations be agreed for submission to the Planning, Policy & Transportation Committee for consideration.

89 ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR REVIEW

The Committee received a verbal update from the Project Lead, Cllr K H Hudson, who advised that:-

- Anti social behaviour is of a high concern for Residents within the District, and improving and developing youth facilities is considered imperative.
- There is a new initiative from Essex County Council to deliver services for the youth via 29 area teams, but it would seem that there was to be a reduction in funding.
- The Project Team were fortunate to have received co-operation from a number of sources and significantly the Police had been very helpful.
- He was pleased to have attended a two day seminar that had been organised by the Police on the topic of anti social behaviour.
- A meeting had been requested with the Chief Constable of the Essex Constabulary to discuss Neighbourhood Policing. Officers would arrange for Committee Members to attend.
- Subject to any additional findings from the meeting with the Chief Constable, sufficient information and evidence had already been gathered for a final report to be drafted and submitted to the Committee in due course. Essex County Council and Essex Police would also receive copies.
- Upon completion the review would have covered all areas of anti social behaviour, including the youth.

The Committee recognised that there was a possible link between anti social behaviour and mental health.

Mention was made of the proposed review on Mental Health Services / Provision with respect to the emerging new facility at Rochford.

Officers advised that Essex County Council ultimately had the powers on Health Overview and Scrutiny, and were happy to delegate these powers to Rochford District Council, subject to meeting certain conditions. These would include any future report produced by the Council to be shared with Essex County Council.

Discussion led onto the topic of general practitioner surgeries, and the possible closure of the Hawkwell and Rochford surgeries within the District. The Chairman confirmed that a letter of concern had already been written and submitted to the South East Essex Primary Care Trust (PCT) on 14 March 2007, in response to their communication with patients two weeks earlier.

Officers advised that:-

- Essex County Council ultimately had the powers on Health Overview and Scrutiny on this subject.
- An emerging strategy appeared to be replacing single doctor surgeries with multiple practice surgeries in an effort to offer more facilities. It could be recognised that unfortunately this may not always suit those of the community, particularly concerning accessibility from outlying areas and the elderly population.
- There could be significant merit in the Committee considering a future review of doctor/surgery provision.
- Following the request of a visiting Member, officers would speak with Essex County Council contacts regarding the possible closure of the two surgeries within the District to obtain any further information from the PCT regarding their decision making process.

As requested by the Chairman, officers would liaise with the Health Overview and Scrutiny Officers at Essex County Council regarding scoping on the topics of Mental Health and General Practitioner Surgeries and report back to the Committee as to the way forward.

90 MONITORING OF THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

The Committee received a verbal update from the Project Lead, Cllr Mrs R Brown, who advised that:-

Since the project team began the monitoring of the Committee system to evaluate how the Committees were progressing their remit, significant changes to the Committee system have been proposed and are currently being considered. These have been produced as a result of the Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” and the emerging requirements of the Local Government Bill currently making its way through the various parliamentary stages. However, until the end of the formal consultation period and the final proposals are presented at the next Council meeting in April, the team have continued to consider the functioning of the present structure.

The team are currently preparing a report for submission to the April meeting which will cover the areas that the team have looked at during the year that would be appropriate to report on.

The meeting closed at 9:25pm.

Chairman

Date

If you would like these minutes in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.