

Review Committee – 26 September 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **26 September 2006** 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 K Savill
Cllr P F A Webster

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr Mrs E M Hart - Essex County Council
D Carlin - Road Safety Officer, Essex County Council and Vice-Chairman of Rochford Crime and Disorder Partnership
Chief Inspector J Walker - District Commander, Essex Police and Chairman of Rochford Crime and Disorder Partnership

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
R J Honey - Corporate Director (Internal Services)
P Gowers - Overview & Scrutiny Officer
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cheryl Milton-White and John Zammit, advisors to the Anti-social Behaviour Review Project.

309 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

310 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.

311 PROJECT POSITION SCHEDULES

(1) Anti-social Behaviour Review Project

Prior to receiving the update position schedule for the Anti-social Behaviour Review Project, the Committee welcomed Mr Dan Carlin, Road Safety Officer (Rochford and Maldon Districts), Essex County Council and Chief Inspector John Walker, District Police Commander, both of whom had been invited to input to the project.

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A summary of Mr Carlin's main activities as they related to anti-social behaviour had been issued with the agenda. In expanding on this and responding to Member questions, Mr Carlin advised that:-

- Road awareness and Accident Reduction -If just one fatal accident is prevented by involvement with the road-runner scheme, then the scheme can be seen as a success. The Rochford District Crime and Disorder Partnership contributes £3000 per annum to fund the initiative. The scheme attracts 1,100 students from across the District. By comparison, the cost associated with a road accident fatality incident is approximately £1.44m.
- Courses are evaluated by the means of questionnaires before, during and after the event which are used to identify learning levels, effectiveness, and success
- Some activities involve older persons and cover aspects such as tiredness when driving and the use of eyesight and reaction testing.
- All schools in the District, apart from Fitzwimarc, participate with road-runner. Fitzwimarc is being approached about their involvement in this and other initiatives
- There is work with the fire service on various projects.
- It can be observed that there are instances when facilities for young people are introduced by agencies without young people being asked what they actually want. It was also suggested that the breakdown of family units/family values has an impact on anti-social behaviour.
- The next road-runner event is within the Maldon District (Purleigh) on 6 and 7 November. Any Member of the Council is welcome to attend. All Members will also be welcome to attend the next event to be arranged within the Rochford District.

Chief Inspector Walker advised that:-

- The police have now started an initiative with the Council whereby they invite appropriate young motorcyclists and their parents to attend public meetings to discuss and encourage responsible use of their machines.
- Ideally, education should be available at the point an offence has been committed. However, this can be impracticable.
- There could be merit in considering whether potential contact should be made at the point when a motorcycle is seized. The police do not have powers to retain a motorcycle for a first offence.
- The police do experience problems with older vehicular users, including the users of mobility scooters.

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- Problems have reduced at the King George playing field in Rayleigh following a public meeting held in Rayleigh.
- There will soon be twelve Police Community Service Officers within the District. Such officers can help with the establishing of relationships within the community and reducing the fear of crime.

During discussion it was observed that issues such as vehicles blocking the ability of buses to pick up passengers could perhaps be picked up in the context of the consideration of bus services.

County Councillor Mrs E M Hart reported on her recent experience in accompanying a Neighbour Policing Team. The Team had covered the areas of Hullbridge, Southend, Hawkwell and Hockley. The Team's activity had been impressive. There had been an incident involving adult offenders.

Chief Inspector Walker tabled police records of anti-social behaviour incidents between April 2005 and April 2006. Comparison statistics could be brought to future meetings. Responding to questions, Chief Inspector Walker advised that:-

- Damage to motor vehicles is categorised as a criminal offence and comes under separate statistics.
- The married status of offenders and their parents is not something that the police would ask.
- The police do sometimes get complaints from individuals about their experience in communicating with a police station with non '999' calls. Call volumes have increased in recent years due to aspects such as the availability of mobile phones and the types of crime that can be reported. It can be recognised that the use of police vehicles to respond to calls may reduce the potential number of officers available for the beat. The grading/prioritisation of calls has helped address problems and neighbourhood policing has developed solutions.
- The police are looking to target specific locations within each of the town/villages from their data base of information to deliver neighbourhood specific solutions and roll out best practice
- There may be merit in asking telephone callers if they would want a follow up visit by the police. Whilst follow up of each case by a visit would be ideal, account needs to be taken of resource and other issues.
- The police operate a system known as "daily dashboard", allowing neighbourhood police officers to know of all offences over the last 24 hours. The roll out of Non Emergency Number 101 should help address situations whereby the police receive calls that would be better referred to other agencies.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mrs E M Hart, Chief Inspector Walker and Mr Carlin for their effective contributions to the Committee's work.

The position schedule relating to the anti-social behaviour project was noted.

(2) The Operation of Planning Enforcement Project

Cllr K J Gordon presented the position schedule relating to the operation of planning enforcement project.

The answers to questions by project team members had often generated additional questions. It had been established that some enforcement cases were eleven years old, which may point to the need for an increased resource and a review of outstanding cases to consider whether some need not continue.

It was recognised that evidential data would be needed to support any final recommendations reached by the project group and that the review activity should involve the identification of trends. It was acknowledged that it would be inappropriate to develop recommendations on a case specific basis.

It was noted that when considering enforcement:-

- To an extent the level of expectation associated with some enforcement cases can be beyond what can actually be achieved.
- The infringement of planning requirements are civil, not criminal, matters. As such, offences are sometimes viewed as relatively minor by the courts.
- The enforcement system is far from perfect and the processes and procedures involved are protracted and can be manipulated in certain instances. Collecting robust evidence which will stand up to challenge can in itself prove problematical

It was observed that, whilst there may be obstacles to pursuing some cases, these should be weighed up against the value of the role of planning enforcement within the planning service as a whole. There could well be merit in pursuing a specific case to highlight that the Council takes action (allied to appropriate publicity).

The position schedule relating to the operation of planning enforcement project was noted.

(3) Monitoring of the Committee System

Cllr Mrs R Brown presented the position schedule relating to the monitoring of the committee system project.

By its very nature, it would take time for aspects of work on this project to come to fruition. It could be observed that, whilst the project team had a view

on the value of Sub-Committees perhaps comprising only five or six Members, the Planning Policy Sub-Committee had been successful in its work. In terms of observations set out in the position schedule, the quality of the report from the external auditors to the Audit Committee had been an issue and it was felt that Policy Committee Chairmen should be more involved in the work of their Committees. Whilst some of the pages of an agenda had been wrongly orientated, the reasons for this had been identified and addressed. The project team had been pleased to note that there had been a review of the indexing and records kept at the Members' Library and is to consider canvassing officers as well as Members to ascertain their opinions of the new Committee structure.

During discussion of the potential value of introducing arrangements so that each Policy Committee Chairman liaised with officers in advance of meetings on agenda content reference was made to the possibility that, from a resource perspective, consideration could perhaps be given to an arrangement whereby Chairmen and officers all convene on a particular day.

Specific reference was made to an item in a recent Members' Bulletin setting out Section 106 monetary receipts by financial year. The team had felt that it would be appropriate to seek clarification that the financial contributions to school facilities had been made.

It was noted that the former Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee had, in January 2004, asked questions of the County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and the County Manager for Planning and Admissions. There was no reason why the Review Committee could not undertake similar activity.

It was agreed that, in the first instance, it would be appropriate for the Chairman to write to the Cabinet Member for Education at the County Council seeking confirmation that monies had been applied as indicated in the Section 106 document (and that District locations had benefited specifically).

The position schedule relating to the monitoring of the Committee system project was noted.

(4) Bus Services Project

Cllr T Livings presented the position schedule relating to the bus services project.

Referring to observations set out in the schedule, Cllr Livings advised that letters received had related to the condition/time keeping of buses and the condition of bus shelters. Whilst there had been an indication from Members that residents in Great Wakering felt that there was a shortage of buses, the Parish Council felt that the current service was sufficient. Although it could be observed that an individual's quality of life may be reduced if there is no access to a bus service, such observations can be seen as subjective.

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Letters had been sent out to the four local bus companies in the District with replies so far having been received from two (NIBS and Stephensons). Neither of the replying companies had indicated that they had had complaints of lack of service but point out that they are the smaller operators and only have a very limited service within the District. Thirteen responses had been received so far to the survey placed on the Council's website, none of which show that there is a commercial demand for additional services. The County Council is to identify a price for introducing a service for the Dome to Hullbridge and Hockley to Rayleigh. This may form part of review recommendations.

The project was reaching a point whereby final recommendations could be developed.

During discussion reference was made to the likelihood that a number of older and younger persons do not use internet facilities and to consideration being given to a separate mechanism for surveying these groups. Reference was also made to the value of a final report identifying when bus contracts are due for renewal. It was noted that the County Council had no control over the synchronization of buses at railway stations. It was also noted that:-

- Whilst there could be further enquiry, the Wyvern Community Trust (which made journeys for four to five people from the Dome to go shopping) had not indicated that there was any group that they did not accommodate.
- In terms of engaging with customers, the County Council organises two meetings each year targeted at Parish/Town Councils and there is a County-wide Bus Users Forum.

In referring to the Wyvern Community Trust comment was made on the value of identifying the various organisations offering voluntary bus services across the District.

The position schedule relating to the bus services project was noted.

The meeting closed at 10.09 pm.

Chairman

Date