

Community Services Committee – 4 March 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Services Committee** held on **4 March 2003** when there were present:-

	Cllr K A Gibbs (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)	
Cllr Mrs R Brown		Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr T E Goodwin		Cllr P K Savill
Cllr Mrs L Hungate		Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr C C Langlands		Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley		Cllr Mrs M J Wilkins
Cllr J R F Mason		

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr R A Amner

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Woolhouse	Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
Mrs H Drye	Corporate Policy Manager
Mrs M Martin	Committee Administrator

99 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2003 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

100 ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

(1) Skateboarding Events

The Committee considered the report of the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee on Skateboarding Events.

Members noted that Officers had been able to make provisional bookings, as follows:-

- 14 April – Market Car Park, Rayleigh
- 22 April – Swayne Park School, Rayleigh
- 24 April - Freight House, Rochford.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the charge could be £3.50 per head for a five hour session.

Members were concerned that the provision of only 20 sets of safety equipment and the time which participants would be permitted to use the facilities would limit the number of young people who would be able to take part in these sessions

and requested that the Leisure & Contracts Manager provide full details of the organisation of these events through the Members' Bulletin.

On a Motion moved by Cllr P K Savill and seconded by Mrs R Brown it was

Resolved

That Officers arrange 3 skateboarding events to be held over the Easter period; one in the centre of Rayleigh, one in Rochford and one at the Sweyne Park School, Rayleigh, at a charge of £3.50 per person for a five hour session.
(CD(F&ES))

(2) Rodent Services

The Committee considered the report of the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee on Rodent Services.

It was noted that Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had felt that the introduction of a charge for the rodent service could deter residents from dealing with this serious issue.

In response to Member questions/concerns, the Head of Service confirmed that:-

- in addition to the cost to this Council of £17,000 for this contract during 2002/03, there is some Officer time involved in monitoring the contract.
- the service is highly thought of by residents and very well used.
- in addition to the rodent control service, residents can obtain discounted insect treatment.
- between 300 and 400 queries are dealt with each year, when Officers give general advice on treating infestations.
- a Press Notice could be issued pointing out the harm that can be caused to other wildlife if these issues are not dealt with by professionals.

Resolved

- (1) That this Council continues to offer a free rodent service to residents of the District.
- (2) That a Press Release be issued pointing out the harm that can be caused to other wildlife if these issues are not dealt with by professionals.
(HHHCC)

101 HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care which invited Members to approve the Health and Safety Service Plan 2002/03.

Members noted that in September 2001, the Health & Safety Commission (HSC) had issued "Section 18 Guidance to Local Authorities" which had replaced all previous enforcement guidance made under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974. This guidance included a requirement to produce an annual service plan. The plan appended to the report was the first one for the year 2002/03.

Members also noted that:-

- the service plan for the forthcoming year would come before the Committee in June 2003.
- a copy of the plan had been sent to the Chambers of Trade and Federation of Small Businesses for comment, but no responses had been received.
- Regular meetings do take place with business representatives, and it is planned to hold a seminar for local businesses on HSC priority themes.
- the health and safety service is funded as part of the overall Environmental Health budget.

Resolved

- (1) That the Health and Safety Service Plan 2002/03 be approved.
- (2) That a copy of the approved plan be sent to the Health & Safety Executive. (HHHCC)

102 BRITISH TELECOM REVIEW OF THE NUMBER OF STREET TELEPHONE BOXES

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which advised Members of a review being undertaken by British Telecom (BT) of the number of street telephone boxes within the District.

BT had advised the Council that the review was necessary because of a drop in their use by more than a third. Its stated intention was to ensure that a basic service would be protected and to thin out payphones where there were too many boxes.

From the review they had carried out, BT had identified 16 street payphones within the District for removal. Details of these had been appended to the report. They had stated that the Council had until 7 March 2003 to respond with any

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comments. As part of the process, the Council had contacted all parish and town councils and their comments would be reflected in this Council's response to BT.

Members noted with concern that the telephone box outside 141 Ferry Road, Hullbridge had already been removed and that the site had been left in an unsafe condition. Whilst recognizing that the forecourt owner may well be responsible in this particular case, it was considered that it should be BT's responsibility to ensure that work was carried out to make good the area, as soon as a telephone box was removed.

In response to the consultation undertaken with the parish/town Councils, Members noted that:-

- Hullbridge Parish Council had no objections to the proposals.
- Rochford Parish Council objected to the removal of the telephone box at the junction of Ormonde Ave and Percy Cottis Road
- Rawreth Parish Council were concerned that some of their telephone boxes fall within the boundary of the Basildon postcode area and thus they may miss out on consultation.
- Ashingdon Parish Council, whilst understanding BT's position, would not wish to see any of the boxes within their area removed
- Rayleigh Town Council believed that telephone kiosks identified continued to be well used, and without comparable information as evidence could make no further comment.

Whilst Members recognized that telephone boxes are susceptible to vandalism and that the use of mobile telephones was rapidly replacing the use of the telephone boxes, Members were concerned at the statement made by BT that 30,000 telephone boxes across the country no longer meet the needs of customers and requested that BT be invited to explain what justification, based on those needs they had in reaching this conclusion.

On a Motion moved by Cllr Mrs R Brown and seconded by Cllr P K Savill and a further Motion moved by Cllr J R F Mason, seconded by Cllr Mrs M S Vince and won on a show of hands, it was:-

Resolved

That the response to the consultation document from British Telecom on the number of street telephone boxes be as follows :-

- (1) That this Council requests an assurance from British Telecom that they will not remove any telephone box without ensuring that the site is made good, in particular the site at 141 Ferry Road, Hullbridge, which has been left in an unsafe condition.

- (2) That this Council will not agree to the removal of any telephone boxes until British Telecom can provide justification for doing so. (CE)

103 BUSINESS CRIME CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which identified the issues of business crime following consultation with the Chambers of Trade and Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses in response to a consultation being carried out by the Home Office.

The Council had invited local business representatives to comment on the Home Office proposals at a regular Chamber of Trade and Commerce liaison meeting. A summary of their comments had been forwarded to the Home Office, and were appended to the report. These comments would also be taken forward to the Rochford Crime and Disorder Partnership.

Members welcomed the comments of the business community, whilst noting with disappointment their general concerns over the lack of police response to reported incidents and lack of patrol officers in and around industrial areas, to the extent that some had felt they would be prepared to pay for a visible police presence in addition to the National Non Domestic Rate already paid.

Business representatives had commented that it would be useful to have a police officer dedicated to liaising with them on business related crime and Members noted that a copy of the comments would be forwarded to the Police.

In the interests of improving the relationship between the Police and this Council, Members of the Committee noted that there had been an invitation from the Police to go and visit them and the Corporate Policy Manager agreed to arrange a meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the comments made by the business community to the Home Office consultation be endorsed.
- (2) That a copy of the comments be forwarded to the Rayleigh Police Division Community Safety Inspector. (CE)

104 CONSULTATION BY ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ON THE QUALIFYING DISTANCE FOR THE TRANSPORT TO SCHOOL OF CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which sought Members' comments in respect of proposals being put forward by the County Council to alter the "qualifying distance" criteria for primary school children.

Members noted that:-

- it was the present policy of the County Council to provide free home to school transport for children of primary school age to the designated school from their home address where they met the "qualifying distance" criteria
- currently the "qualifying distance" in Essex is more generous than that required by law
- the County's expenditure on home to school transport was increasing above the rate of inflation and that some of these funds could be released to be spent on the provision of other facilities for children, if the statutory requirement were adopted.
- the County Council was, therefore, consulting on its intention to change the policy with effect from September 2003.

It was further noted that the latest figures indicated that there were 66 children aged under eight and 73 aged over eight living within the District who would be affected. These figures increased to 102 under the age of eight and 116 over eight when taking into account those who travel in from outside the District's boundary.

Of particular concern to Members were the following :-

- the statutory requirements allowed for children as young as eight to walk up to three miles to school before qualifying for free home to school transport.
- The County Council had not considered leaving the "qualifying distance" as 1.5 miles for those aged under eight.
- The adoption of the statutory requirement would mean an increase in distance before qualifying of 0.5 miles for those aged under eight and one mile for those aged over eight.
- Any change in policy might affect school catchments and result in more traffic generated movements by parents.

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Resolved

That, whilst this Council appreciates the background of budgetary considerations, it wishes to express its concerns, based on the above comments, at the County Council's proposal to reduce the qualifying distances for the transport to school of children of primary school age. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm

Chairman

Date