

Review Committee – 11 January 2011

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **11 January 2011** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: Cllr M Maddocks

Cllr Mrs P Aves
Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn

Cllr T Livings
Cllr Mrs G A Lucas-Gill
Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllr C I Black
Cllr Mrs L A Butcher

OFFICERS PRESENT

J Bourne	-	Head of Community Services
P Gowers	-	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting on 7 December 2010 were agreed and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:-

In respect of the first bullet point on page 4 it should be noted that no tenders had been sought for undertaking the fencing works.

In the second paragraph of Minute 305 it should be added that the cost of employing an external consultant was covered by staff savings.

2 PROVISION OF FACILITIES AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Community Services, which gave a summary of the services provided to children and young people within the District.

In response to questions from Members the following was noted:-

- The Council's strategic role in the development of children's services in the District has increased since the review undertaken by the former Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee a number of years previously. Direct provision of services has also developed and there is increased access to external funding, the sourcing of which falls primarily within the role of the Council's Leisure and Cultural Services section..

- The Great Wakering teen café has now been established as a charitable trust and receives some funding from Essex County Council Local Priority Fund. The cafe operates in a suitably-sized site at Great Wakering Primary School. Possible expansion to a third night would entail operational decisions in terms of demand, funding and volunteers. A pilot scheme is currently running which extends the facilities to a different age group.
- In respect of other areas in the District, the Massive Project provides a teen 'drop in' service in Hockley, and Legacy Rayleigh and the Warehouse Centre, Rayleigh operate in Rayleigh for teens. It was confirmed that the Warehouse Centre is available to all young people and not restricted to Christians. A teen café operates in St Marks Hall in Rochford. The Youth Service liaises with Rochford District Council around the provision of youth services.
- The Council's procedures make provision for staff training in relation to the safeguarding of children.
- It is anticipated that the Sweyne Park, Rayleigh football pitches to the rear of Rayleigh Leisure Centre will be ready for use in early March this year. The furrows in the grass surface of the pitches, following last summer's dry weather, have been in-filled with sand. Drainage and seeding of the pitches is now complete.
- The London Bus Theatre Company has very successfully run schemes in local schools to explore issues such as domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse. Schemes such as these are externally funded and it will be up to individual schools to decide whether they wish to provide these schemes.

3 CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE – OPEN SPACES AND CHERRY ORCHARD COUNTRY PARK

The Committee heard from the Head of Community Services on the terms of the agreement with Essex County Council (ECC), when it was decided that a natural play area would be established, and the implications of fencing an open, natural play area. This aspect of an Executive decision had been called-in for scrutiny and discussed at the Review Committee meeting on 7 December 2010.

The Head of Community Services confirmed that the play area had been funded fully to the amount of £50,000 from the Central Government Play Builder fund, which was administered by ECC. The remit was that the play area be designed around open play and access and should fit in with the surrounding natural landscape. ECC had asked District/Borough Councils in Essex to identify suitable sites. Although Rochford District Council's Portfolio Holder for Young Persons had been aware of the proposed scheme, the proposal had not been put before Members generally due to the fact that there was no financial input required from Rochford District Council. It was noted that

one of the Ward Councillors for the area where the play area is situated had not been made aware of the proposals at the time.

The site identified by Rochford District Council was considered suitable as it has a car park, it is in an open space and there are football pitches and other play spaces and equipment in the location. Mounds and banks of earth have been established and wooden play equipment erected. Essex County Council has confirmed that fencing the area in order to combat the issue of dog fouling would not contravene the terms of the original Play Builder grant.

Some of the Members of the Review Committee had visited the site following the Committee's December meeting. There was a general feeling that it would not be appropriate to fence this play area as this may restrict children's free play. Furthermore, it was felt that fencing will not stop wild animals, such as foxes and badgers, from entering the play area.

The complaints of dog fouling in the play area had emanated from the Council's environmental contractors. There appeared to have been no complaints in this respect from residents. It was requested that dog waste bins are put in this area. In conclusion, it was:-

Recommended to the Portfolio Holder for the Environment

That, as a result of Members' visits to the play area and following information received at the meeting, the decision is reconsidered and the site remains unfenced so that it remains a natural play area as originally built.

It was further:-

Recommended to the Executive

That the relevant Ward Councillors be included in the consultation process for items of spending of £50,000 or more, irrespective of the source of funding, and that all items of £50,000 or more be included in the Forward Plan.

4 THE AREA COMMITTEE REVIEW

The Committee considered the final report of the project team on the Area Committee Review.

In response to Member questions, the following was noted:-

- Public response to the questionnaire had been low. Feedback from members of the public indicated a general dissatisfaction with the current format of the Area Committees, the bureaucracy surrounding the submission of questions and the delay in receiving responses to questions. Many of the public wished to see the Community Forum part of the meeting extended and there to be no Committee meeting. This may have been a contributing factor in reduced attendances at Area Committees.

- The Committee expressed its disappointment that only 21 out of a possible 39 Members had responded to the questionnaire.
- Whilst it was appreciated that members of the public can contact District or Parish/Town Councillors direct, establishing Community Forums would give further opportunity for the public to have a voice, as well as providing a platform for public consultations.
- Members felt it was important that non-Executive District Council Members have a continued involvement in the Community Forums. It was felt that a Chairman for the Community Forum should be elected at Annual Council and that District Councillors for the relevant wards should be part of the panel. The exact boundary details between the west and east forums could be established at a later date, should the other recommendations be agreed. It was suggested that Recommendation no. 5 be divided into two separate recommendations.
- It was noted that Parish/Town Council Members will be able to ask questions as members of the public.
- Members requested that the findings from other authorities operating Community Forums be included in the report.

In conclusion, it was:-

Recommended to the Executive

- (1) That the Area Committees cease at the end of the Municipal Year.
- (2) That Community Forums are established from the start of the next Municipal Year.
- (3) That there are two Community Forums for the District. The East Forum, would be held in or near Rochford, and the West Forum, would normally be held at the Civic Suite Rayleigh.
- (4) That each Community Forum is scheduled three times a year and additionally for specific issues if required.
- (5) That relevant Portfolio Holders and appropriate Ward Councillors for the area sit on the Forum Panel to answer questions.
- (6) That the Chairman of the Community Forum is decided at Annual Council.
- (7) That the Council's partners are approached to see if they would wish to attend the meetings.
- (8) That the Chairman of the Community Forum will be able to reject a question submitted by a member of the public if it is substantially the same as a question that has been asked at a Community Forum in the past six months.

5 REVIEW OF THE MEMBER ROLE ON OUTSIDE BODIES/BENEFIT TO THE COUNCIL/OUTSIDE BODY

It was agreed that this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Review Committee, pending additional information being distributed to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.42 pm.

Chairman

Date

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