

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 19 September 2002

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **19 September 2002** when there were present:-

Cllr P A Capon (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs R Brown (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C I Black
Cllr C A Hungate

Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P K Savill.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
S Scrutton	Head of Planning Services
J Bourne	Leisure & Contracts Manager
M Martin	Committee Administrator
J Martyn	Essex County Council
L Harvey	Essex County Council

431 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2002 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

432 SERVICETEAM UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Gary Such, Regional Manager and David Beckham, Operations Manager from ServiceTeam who provided the Committee with an update on the progress of the refuse collection and street cleansing contracts within the District.

During debate and in response to Member questions/comment, the following was noted:-

- ServiceTeam had been taken over by Cleanaway who are owned by Brambles, a company who actively promote recycling.
- ServiceTeam have been delivering these contracts for 18 months and Members confirmed there appeared to be general satisfaction from members of the public.
- In response to concerns that some litter bins need emptying on a more frequent basis, Members were reassured that Service Team would be liaising with officers to upgrade some of the regimes.
- A copy of the schedule for emptying litter bins would be made available to Members of this Committee.
- All plastics, cans and glass from this district which are collected or deposited separately are recycled, unless contamination is detected.

433 MINUTES OF THE RAYLEIGH TOWN CENTRE SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received the Minutes of the Rayleigh Town Centre Sub-Committee and agreed the recommendations contained therein.

Resolved

- (1) That a report on monitoring officers' resources with respect to the removal of fly posters be considered at a meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee. (CD(F&ES))
- (2) That the upgrading of the pavement between Rayleigh Hi-Fi and Home Regal House be included in budget estimates at the time of the budget cycle. (CD(F&ES))
- (3) That a report on options for the removal of chewing gum from the pavements in Rayleigh Town Centre, together with costs, be considered at a meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee. (CD(F&ES))
- (4) That a report on a range of environmental enhancements proposed by G L Hearn Planning for Websters Way be considered at a meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee. (CD(F&ES))

434 ISSUES ARISING FROM PLANNING SERVICES COMMITTEE – 25 JULY 2002

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which had been referred to this Committee for scrutiny from the meeting of the Planning Services Committee held on 25 July 2002.

A copy of the Audit Commission's summary and recommendations relating to Building & Development Control had been appended to the report.

Members noted:-

- The figure of 0.08% quoted as the anticipated increase in population over the next ten years was incorrect.
- One of the key objectives in the Corporate Plan is that this Council should aspire to be within the top 25% in relation to performance.
- The introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) will provide the Government with a set of tools with which the actions of Local Authorities can be influenced.
- The Government had announced a grant package of £350 million which will be divided amongst those Planning Authorities which can show performance improvements.
- The Audit Commission's concerns in relation to the fact that this Council's Planning Services Committee comprises all Members of the Council.

In particular the Commission felt this may adversely affect the speed and consistency of decisions and may inhibit the training of Members in essential technical issues.

- If Members decided to retain an all Member Planning Committee, it would be necessary to demonstrate that this would not have any impact on the delivery and performance of the service.

Whilst noting that the average attendance at Planning Committees often falls short of the total, with less than the total present actually voting on decisions, the majority of Members of this Committee were of the view that the Planning Services Committee should continue to consist of all Members for the following reasons:-

- It is easier for members of the public if they are able to consult with any Member of the Council in relation to a planning issue.
- A smaller Committee might mean that more issues were referred on to meetings of Council for further discussion, which could slow the decision making process.

Members noted that a programme of training sessions was being organised and it was agreed that in order to address the Audit Commission's concerns about the consistency of decision making, the Standards Committee should consider the issue of what would be considered a reasonable level of attendance for each Member.

Members noted that the Audit Commission's recommendation relating to new arrangements for site visits had been actioned, together with the recommendation relating to the provision of more written information, advice and procedures. In addition, Members noted that a Team Leader for Local Plans had now been appointed.

Resolved

That the above comments form the basis of the response to the Audit Commission's final report on the Development and building Control Service and that it be further

Recommended to Standards Committee

That a required level of Councillor attendance at Planning Training sessions be determined. (HPS)

435 PUBLIC SPEAKING AT THE PLANNING SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which sought Members' views on the proposed arrangements for public speaking at the Planning Services Committee. The introduction of public speaking had been agreed by Council as part of the action plan for improving the planning services as agreed through the Best Value Review of Development Control and Building

Control. This had indicated that public speaking would commence in December 2002.

If Members agree the arrangements for public speaking at Planning meetings, the details would be published in an information leaflet, which would be widely available. A copy of an initial draft had been appended to the report.

Members noted the Audit Commission's conclusion, which had been appended to the report for the preceding Agenda item. This was that a lack of public speaking at Committee contributed to a low score on the ten point checklist which had been developed by the former Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). Members noted that whatever decision is ultimately taken, they would need to be able to justify their decisions and give reasons for not supporting this action.

However, during debate, the following Member concerns were noted:-

- The decision to implement public speaking at Planning meetings had been taken during the previous municipal year.
- Public speaking at these meetings might prolong the planning process.
- Members of the public may consider that speaking at a meeting would necessarily influence the decision.
- People who are not comfortable with making an initial written representation could feel disadvantaged by this process.
- Some people may find it difficult to register their attention to speak on the actual afternoon of the meeting or to arrive well in advance of the commencement of the meeting.

In support of the proposal the following was noted:-

- Parish/Town Councils would be provided with an additional opportunity to give their views.
- Ward Members would become more approachable to local residents.
- People should be encouraged and given the confidence to submit questions.
- It is not likely that the introduction of public speaking at Planning Committees would lead to a significant increase in either the length of Planning meetings or the planning process.
- Public questions can be posed at all other Committees.

Members agreed on a show of hands that a decision to proceed with the introduction of public speaking at meetings of the Planning Services Committee should not be taken by this Committee and it was

Recommended to Council

That Council reconsider its recommendation to introduce public speaking at meetings of the Planning Services Committee. (HPS)

436 THAMES GATEWAY – SOUTH ESSEX: OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which sought Members' view on those major themes and projects which they would like to see promoted or delivered in the District over the next 25 years, within the context of the strategic framework provided by the Thames Gateway designation.

Members agreed the suggestions listed in the report subject to the inclusion of one additional theme.

Resolved

That the officers' suggestions relating to the main themes and projects for this District in relation to long-term visioning related to the Thames Gateway – South Essex be agreed as in the report, with the following addition.

- Ensure that any job creation is predominantly for high value added employment. (CEX)

437 THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM : SOUTH EAST

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which sought Members' views on a Department of Transport consultation document on the future of air transport in the South East.

The Government had published a very detailed report into the future of air transport in the South East. The consultation document included a series of questions for consultees which had been appended to the report. A National Opinion Poll questionnaire had also been published by the Government and this had also been appended. The key concern related to forecasts of the levels of passenger traffic by 2030.

Members noted the various options contained in the report for Heathrow, Stansted, Luton and Cliffe, as well as other first and second tier airports in the South East, including Southend.

Resolved

That the following points form this Council's response to the Consultation Paper on "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom : South East":-

- (1) London Southend airport should be developed as a regional airport.
- (2) One additional runway should be provided at Stansted airport.
- (3) The site at Cliffe should not be considered for a new international airport. (HPS)

438 PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE PPG23 – PLANNING AND POLLUTION CONTROL – CONSULTATION PAPER

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which sought Members' views on revised Planning Policy Guidance in respect of Planning and Pollution Control.

Members noted that the current version of PPG23 had been published in 1994 and that the proposed revision was intended to replace those parts of the guidance dealing with pollution prevention and control. In addition to consulting on revisions to PPG23, the Government was also seeking views on the structure of the document, which had been reduced and was more focussed on policy in accordance with proposals included in the Planning Green Paper (Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change, December 2001).

Members noted that it was anticipated that any resource implications for this Council would be reflected in the level of grant settlement provided.

Resolved

That the response, as outlined in the report forms the basis of the Council's comments on the consultation paper on revisions to Planning Policy Guidance 23 – Planning and Pollution Control. (HPS)

439 STRATEGIC RAIL AUTHORITY – FUTURE FARES POLICY

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which sought Members' views on the future fares policy for Railways to take effect from 1st January 2004.

Members noted that:-

- the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has a duty to ensure that fares are reasonable. Fares regulation was introduced in 1996 and the SRA is now looking to see how fares policy could support the wider objectives in the Government's 10 year transport plan. They currently concentrate on protecting passengers from excessive pricing in areas where rail transport has a high degree of market power.
- If Members considered there was justification in continuing the controls over, for example, commuter travel, then it would be necessary to recommend a suggested level of intervention.
- Options which might be considered were listed in the report.

Members commented that it would be difficult to strike a balance between trying to increase rail use and reduce overcrowding on trains.

Resolved

- (1) That the comments above form the basis of this Council's views on the future fares policy for railways to take effect from 1 January 2004.
- (2) That the current situation be retained, whereby the rail authority continues to regulate all regulated fares at RPI – 1%. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 9 pm.

Chairman

Date