

Parish Liaison Sub-Committee – 27 September 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Parish Liaison Sub-Committee** held on **27 September 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs M J Webster

Cllr P A Capon
Cllr T Livings

Cllr J R F Mason

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr D G Stansby

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Paglesham Parish Council and S Thallon, Area Co-ordinator South Essex, Essex County Council.

DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT

D Deeks	- Head of Financial Services
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

COUNTY COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT

J Symonds	- Area Co-ordinator Mid-Essex, Essex County Council
-----------	---

TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

Cllr P Lonergan	- Ashingdon Parish Council
Cllr J Smith	- Canewdon Parish Council
Cllr B Wilkins	- Great Wakering Parish Council
Cllr V Leach	- Hawkwell Parish Council
Cllr P Ruse	- Hockley Parish Council
Cllr L Daley	- Hullbridge Parish Council
Cllr R Adams	- Rayleigh Town Council
Cllr K Attridge	- Rochford Parish Council

11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 February 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T Livings declared a personal interest in the items under discussion by virtue of being a Member of Rayleigh Town Council.

Councillor D G Stansby declared a personal interest in the items under discussion by virtue of being the Chairman of the District Council's Playspace Sub-Committee and a Member of the Heritage Sub-Committee.

Councillor J R F Mason declared a personal interest in the items under discussion by virtue of being a Member of Hawkwell Parish Council.

13 PROGRESS TO DATE/OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services on progress to date and outstanding issues.

In introducing this item, the Head of Financial Services was pleased to advise that Rochford Parish Council had now been awarded Quality Parish Status and that presentation of the Award would be made at the next Full Meeting of the District Council. It was agreed that the Parish Council should be congratulated on this success.

The Sub-Committee proceeded to review the report of the Head of Financial Services on an item by item basis:-

Playspaces

Responding to questions, the Head of Financial Services advised that the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) and the Council's Property and Highways Maintenance Manager were in the process of contacting Parishes to hold individual meetings. Although the District was keen for the Parishes to take over where possible, and a number of advantages could be associated with localised involvement, officers were aware that there can be issues around the size/capacity of some Parishes. That said, it may be that finalised arrangements would not necessarily involve day to day input from an individual Parish.

It could be recognised that Parishes may have individual issues around specific playspaces. However, it was noted that the remit of the Sub-Committee involved the consideration of processes rather than individual issues. The proposed meetings would be an opportunity to raise any specific concerns that the Parishes have, such as the Sutton Road playspace and the swings at the Rowan Walk Playspace.

Trust Status for Public Openspace and Recreational Land

It was noted that the District Council's Head of Legal Services had written to the Parishes asking for views on the principle of establishing Trust status for land currently leased to the Parishes. Observations made during discussion included that there were two village greens within Canewdon that could be worthy of consideration and that Magnolia is partly a nature reserve and partly open space. A specific observation was made about the importance of retaining the green buffer zone around the London Southend Airport and the issue of woodlands.

Responding to questions, the Head of Financial Services provided some detail on the nature of transfer and confirmed that officers could make sure that the green buffer zone around the airport would be included in deliberations. However, this exercise was aimed at land in either Council or Parish ownership.

Rochford District Council Telephone Lists

The Head of Financial Services requested that individual Parishes report back if they have not now received updates on the telephone list.

Out of Hours Cover

Following the survey of Parishes the Council's Contingency Planning and Safety Manager would be requesting a meeting with Parish Clerks. The Chairman referred to the value that can be associated with all Councils making themselves available for briefing/training sessions on emergency planning, particularly given the proximity of London.

Standards Board/Code of Conduct

The Head of Financial Services outlined how this area had now been addressed with many actions involving the Parishes. The Chairman confirmed that any Parishes that still felt there was a training need in this area should contact the District.

Review of Charter

It was noted that the District Council was intending to produce a revised draft for comment by the individual Parishes.

Committee Reports

In introducing this item, the Head of Financial Services confirmed that it appeared that there could be advantages to both the District and Parishes if consideration is given to the electronic facilities available for viewing documents. The District Council had a Committee Management Information System, which meant that all its Agendas, Minutes and Reports were now available on-line and could be searched. Some Parishes had already indicated that they would not perhaps wish to receive as much hard copy information as they do currently and there would be merit in consideration being given to a move in the electronic direction.

A Parish Member indicated that the Parish would prefer to see any amendments to plans associated with planning applications identified in a different colour and asked about the possibility of further grant monies that could be applied to IT. The Head of Financial Services advised that the possibility of access to further grant monies was something that would have to be given further consideration in consultation with the County Council. The suggestion on planning applications could be referred to the Head of Planning Services.

Recycling and Environmental Issues

It was recognised that the minimal size of the budgets available to some Parishes could influence their ability to help fund environmental projects.

Noting that the District Council had now moved to five year strategic budget, it was agreed that it could be of value to introduce a mechanism whereby, each year, any suggestions where Parish assistance could be of value are fed into the budget strategy process. The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be advised accordingly.

Reference was made to the value of the District Council being mindful of its strategic responsibilities in this area, with liaison with the Parishes being seen as an enhancement to initiatives beyond minimum statutory requirement.

St George's Day/Heritage

The Chairman reported on the background to the District Council's arrangements for celebrating St George's Day and the forthcoming arrangements for Trafalgar Day. These included the planting of trees at the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.

The Chairman confirmed that any Parishes interested in holding a celebratory event for Trafalgar Day should contact the District Council's Civic and Public Relations Officer.

Essex County Council Website Developments

This matter was covered under the next item on the Agenda (Minute 14 refers).

14 ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

The Sub-Committee welcomed John Symonds of Essex County Council to the Meeting.

Referring to Rochford Parish Council's Quality Parish Award, John Symonds advised that there were more Quality Parishes within the County of Essex than any other County.

Since the May Elections, the County Council had decided that 'localism' would be a priority. The County was keen to make sure that, where possible, services are delivered locally and that it listens to Local Councils.

To date, initiatives had included:-

- The issue of a £1,000 grant to each Parish Council with a suggestion that the grant be applied to IT enhancements.

- An increase in the annual grant to the Essex Association of Local Councils and an additional grant for training provided to Parish Clerks/Councillors.
- Work to address problems that can be associated with the enormous amount of information supplied by the County. Ideas have included the introduction of short summaries of information available to Parish Councils and a facility for Parishes to choose how they wish to view them (email/CD Rom/paper).
- The establishment of a new part-time post with a remit to address the needs of the parishes across Essex.
- The introduction of a free website facility located in Essexinfo.net and a limited amount of grant funding to help parishes create new websites or enhance existing ones (on a first come first served basis).
- The appointment of a Member with specific responsibility for localism. As of tomorrow, the County would be introducing a grant fund of £5M over the next 3 years. It will be known as the “Community Initiatives Fund”. The sum of £150,000 would be available to each District Council area. Parish/Town Councils and other properly constituted community groups would be able to apply for capital funding that can be available up to 2008. Essex County Council wish to see a local decision making body that will approve applications for funding. Within the criteria there would be a matched funding requirement. The South Essex area Co-ordinator would be liaising with the District Council’s Head of Financial Services on the setting up of arrangements to facilitate decisions on grant distribution. Up to £20,000 could be available for a specific project.

Responding to questions, John Symonds advised that:-

- Both Sally Thallon and John Zammit at the County Council would be happy to offer advice to Parishes on potential sources of matched funding.
- Given the localism agenda, successful applications are likely to be in line with those of County priorities
- The County would recognise that smaller parishes can have issues of capacity and it would be possible to use a grant to develop further grant proposals.
- Grant monies would only be paid once it has been agreed that a facility is to be provided.
- Whilst details are still to be finalised, the new post is about ensuring that County information is readily available and that inter-authority communications are effective. The post appointee can be asked to consider the best practice aspects of the County’s service for communicating with school governors and how this could be adapted for interaction with the parishes.

The Sub-Committee endorsed the observation of a Member that the emphasis on localism could be welcomed in the context of what is happening in other parts of the public sector, such as with the NHS. Some concern was expressed that there is the potential to make the whole process over complicated.

15 ISSUES TO BE RAISED BY TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

It was recognised that each Parish often had specific issues relating to planning. The Head of Financial Services confirmed that these are best raised via the Parish and Town Council Planning Forum, the work of the Sub-Committee being more about broad relationships than detail. Notwithstanding this, officers would raise with the Head of Planning Services an observation that all Parish submissions relating to planning applications should be included in reports to the Planning Services Committee.

It was observed that, whilst it is sometimes difficult to set an ideal size for a body, the arrangement whereby one representative from each Parish/Town Council is invited to attend Sub-Committee Meetings appeared to be the most appropriate.

The meeting closed at 9.50pm.

Chairman

Date