

West Area Committee – 15 September 2009

Minutes of the meeting of the **West Area Committee** held on **15 September 2009** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr J M Pullen
Vice-Chairman: Cllr S P Smith

Cllr Mrs P Aves	Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr C I Black	Cllr D Merrick
Cllr Mrs J Dillnutt	Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr A J Humphries	Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr C J Lumley	Cllr P F A Webster

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr D Sperring	- Rayleigh Town Council
Cllr A Matthews	- Rawreth Parish Council
M Hardingham	- County Fire and Rescue Service
B Wahl	- County Fire and Rescue Service
Insp A Parkman	- Essex Police

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Fowler	- Head of Information and Customer Services
S Scrutton	- Head of Planning and Transportation
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

205 AREA COMMITTEE – INITIAL BUSINESS

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr T Livings.

Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

At this point the Committee adjourned the formal meeting to move into the community forum to hear contributions from members of the public.

206 COMMUNITY FORUM

Questions raised during the Community Forum and the responses given are summarised in the appendix to the Minutes.

By way of supplementary information relating to the question raised relating to recent instances of vandalism at St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Rawreth, the head teacher advised the meeting that there had been 5

acts of vandalism at the school since 17 July. The latest incident took place on Sunday at around midnight. CCTV footage showed three youngsters aged approximately 15 years. This footage will be shared with other schools in an attempt to identify the perpetrators. On this occasion, all the windows and a glass canopy were smashed.

Inspector Parkman advised that the vandalism would be publicised in the local media, including the *Evening Echo*, to raise local awareness. The Police would put in place there some high visibility patrols and were also willing to conduct covert observation work in the future. This would, however, be subject to Police resources not being needed elsewhere at weekends. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that there was an area of un-made land near the school that was covered in rubble; the youngsters appeared to be using the rubble to throw at the school buildings. The Police were in discussions with the landowner with a view to clearing away this rubble.

It was noted that the issue of clearing rubble from land in the vicinity of St Nicholas Primary School would be referred to the next meeting of the Executive.

At this point the Committee re-convened into formal session.

207 SPOTLIGHT ISSUES

(1) Arrangements for Future Fire Cover for the Rayleigh Area

The Committee welcomed Mark Hardingham and Bob Wahl from Essex County Fire and Rescue Service who were in attendance to provide details on arrangements for future fire cover for the Rayleigh area.

Mr Hardingham advised that a 12-week long public consultation was launched in November 2006, following publication of the Essex Fire Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan. It was disappointing that, out of 4,500 copies sent out, only 26 responses to the consultation were received from outside the Fire Service. The consultation document had generated interest in the local media.

The existing fire station in Castle Road, Rayleigh handles around 500 incidents per annum; it is one of the busiest part-time fire stations in Essex. The new fire station at Rayleigh Weir is less than a mile away and the Service considered keeping both stations open, however, it quickly became clear that the existing Castle Road station would respond to less than 30 incidents per annum.

The new station will be crewed by full-time fire fighters, thus staffed all the time. The Castle Road station, however, is crewed by part-time fire fighters; the Fire Service is not their primary employer. The part-time staff are issued with pagers and are required to be able to reach the Castle Road station within 5 minutes, in order to respond to any incidents.

Robust data has identified that it will take 2 fire appliances based at the new Rayleigh Weir station 3 minutes to respond to a reported incident in, eg, Berry's Arcade, Rayleigh, compared to 6 minutes from the Castle Road station. It is anticipated that the Rayleigh Weir fire station will respond to about 1900 incidents per annum, which is lower than similar fire stations in the county, suggesting that the station will be able to cover the local area appropriately.

There were 10 part-time fire fighters based at the Castle Road station; 7 of these have accepted offers of full-time employment as fire fighters at other fire stations. Of the 3 remaining, 2 are already full-time fire fighters and the final one will be taking redundancy.

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- Within the past 12 months there have been only seven occasions when appliances from the Hadleigh area have been unable to attend to incidents in Rayleigh as they were already at other incidents; in all these cases the incidents turned out to be false alarms; however, the new Rayleigh Weir station will be supported from surrounding fire stations, including, eg, Leigh, Wickford and Hawkwell stations. The new Rayleigh Weir station is categorised as a key station and, as such, if both appliances were called out to a major incident and detained, or were detained at an incident, another fire engine would be called upon to cover the Rayleigh Weir station.
- Plans for new housing across Essex in the future will undoubtedly place an additional burden on the Fire Service. However, the Fire Service is undertaking a lot of work on fire protection for new houses being built in order to reduce the instances of house fires. In addition, the new Rayleigh Fire Station is one of the largest in Essex and has a very good response times to the Rayleigh area.
- It was anticipated that the Rayleigh Weir fire station would open around the end of October.
- The Fire Service was considering a request made to keep the Castle Road fire station open during the gas mains replacement works. This is being considered, however, most of the retained fire fighters based there would transfer to full-time posts in other fire stations in a month's time; there would be insufficient officers based there to crew the fire appliances.
- There was no doubt that the gas works, particularly during rush hour traffic, did cause difficulties for fire appliances to get to and from Rayleigh. It was the usual practice for fire appliance drivers to take different routes to get to an incident; all drivers were used to driving through heavy traffic with blue lights and sirens.

- The transport infrastructure around Rayleigh Weir is such that vehicles based at the new station will be able to reach a significant part of the county in good time. It was anticipated that specialist fire appliances would be relocated to Rayleigh Weir in the future in addition to the 2 standard fire appliances; the 4 available fire appliance bays were likely to be full by early next year.
- There were currently no plans within the Fire Service to close Leigh fire station.
- Fire cover was proportionate, based upon the risk to the surrounding area; fire cover was not provided to an area in isolation.
- The Fire Service, like a number of organisations, is always exploring ways of improving the response to public consultation. The Service recently launched a new system, Activ8, inviting members of the public to join a consultation group who can be targeted for any future public consultations.
- The Fire Service owned the land at Castle Road; the Service's property department would deal with disposal of the land post-closure. An update on the process for disposal would be provided to Members outside the meeting.

The Fire Service officers expressed interest in liaising with District Council officers on possibilities for using the Council website and *Rochford District Matters* for future Fire Service public consultation exercises.

In response to a Member concern relating to the need for the Fire Service to make cuts in staffing, Mr Hardingham advised that the economic downturn and potential restrictions on public spending may lead to the Service having to review its functions. The Service is, however, keen to maintain the performance of its front line services.

(2) Update on Crime and Disorder in Rawreth and Rayleigh

Inspector Parkman provided a verbal update on crime and disorder within Rawreth and Rayleigh. A summary sheet of reported crime statistics for the West Area had been circulated to all those present.

Responding to a Member concern relating to recent serious crimes in Rayleigh, including a stabbing at King George's playing fields in the middle of the day, Inspector Parkman stressed that Rayleigh was a safe place to live. The shooting at Rayleigh railway station two years ago, which was investigated by British Transport Police, had resulted in the conviction of someone who was involved in crime in an area that was believed to extend to east London. A youth had been charged with the stabbing and it was not possible to discuss any details of the case in public, given sub judice rules.

Inspector Parkman emphasised that there had been a significant reduction in crime within the Rochford District within the past five years. There were 4,291 reported offences in the District in 2004, 4,140 in 2005, 3,780 in 2006, 3,200 in 2007, 3,077 in 2008 and 2,802 in 2009. The crime reduction target for 2009/10 had been set at 2,655, ie, a 5% reduction in the number of reported crimes since 2008. On an accumulative basis there were 1,218 offences in 2009 and the actual number of recorded offences was 1,189. In Rayleigh, the total of all crimes in 2007 was 1,247, in 2008 it was 1,126 and, in 2009, 1,081. In terms of serious crimes, which includes serious violence and wounding, there were 127 in 2007, 125 in 2008 and 99 in 2009, ie, it was steadily decreasing.

Inspector Parkman stressed that there was not an underlying problem in Rayleigh that could result in tragedy; there were particular circumstances associated with the two serious crimes mentioned, that indicated they were not common to Rayleigh. He further advised that he had compiled a Community Impact Assessment in relation to the stabbing incident and had spoken directly to the TASC (Team around the School, Children and Communities) team manager had spoken to representatives from the Holy Trinity Church Legacy Project and to the District Council's Community Safety team after the stabbing but had not picked up on any significant concerns.

In response to a Member question relating to Police patrols in Sweyne Park ward, Inspector Parkman advised that, via Operation Lark, additional Police officers were funded to carry out patrols on Friday and Saturday evenings. There was not the capacity to increase patrols during Sunday to Thursday; resources were focused on the weekends when there was most need.

Inspector Parkman advised, in response to a question relating to a report of alleged drug dealing at King George's playing fields, that the statistics provided to the meeting did not relate to all recorded crimes, but to a basket of crimes; they did not include details of drug-related crimes. He confirmed that the Police gave priority to the supply of class A drugs; this was due to the fact that the harm caused by class A drugs was significantly higher than any associated with class C drugs, such as cannabis. He further confirmed that statistics on drug-related offences could be provided for the next meeting attended by the Police.

Responding to a concern raised about an increase in anti-social behaviour, Inspector Parkman emphasised that some of this increase could be attributed to administration in terms of call logging although the increase in reported incidents in Sweyne Park ward could not solely be explained by this. The Joint Action Group, a sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership, looked at a range of issues related to anti-social behaviour at its last meeting. There was an undertaking by the Essex County Council integrated youth service to deploy a mobile unit to areas experiencing instances of anti-social behaviour to do some work around diversion and education with the youngsters involved.

In response to a query about the possibility of an increase in neighbourhood policing, following the Rayleigh stabbing, Inspector Parkman advised that the Police Authority had made funding available that would fund 3 additional Police posts in Rayleigh and a further 3 in Rochford. Part of the role of these additional officers would be to patrol in plain clothes and to conduct high visibility patrols to try and give reassurance to residents. It was anticipated that these new posts will be in place in October, 3 of which would be based at Rayleigh police station.

Inspector Parkman confirmed, in response to a concern relating to instances of the Police having no record of reports of anti-social behaviour, that in a situation whereby there was a large group of youths congregating in one place, it was sometimes more practical and effective for the Police to move the group on than to take down the details of all the youngsters, given the time it would take to fully record details. Responding to a supplementary question relating to the crime statistics, he confirmed that these were not broken down by age group.

He further advised that the Police statistics did not break down whether or not reported incidents were alcohol-related; it was, however, probable that many reports relating to Friday/Saturday evenings were alcohol-related.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to dangerous parking, Inspector Parkman confirmed that District Council parking wardens did not have enforcement powers against motorists parking on footpaths or parking at a dangerous position. He encouraged residents to report any such instances to the Police. He further advised that a programme would shortly be underway to target inconsiderate parking outside schools within the Southend Borough and Rochford District.

Responding to a concern raised by a resident that vandalism in Rawreth was increasing, Inspector Parkman confirmed that the 3 additional posts based at Rayleigh police station could be directed to Rawreth if it turned out that there was the greatest need in this location.

208 WEST AREA UPDATE

The Committee received the West Area Update.

16/08 – Feasibility Study for a Pedestrian Crossing in Downhall Park Way (Minutes 131/08 and 269/09)

Members expressed concern with delays associated with this scheme; there appeared to be very little progress over a long period of time.

07/09 – Possible Extension to Rawreth Car Park (Minute 28/09)

It was noted that the Head of Environmental Services would be asked to contact Cllr Matthews outside the meeting to update him further on this scheme.

209 MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE/ISSUES TO REFER TO THE EXECUTIVE

Members concurred that the following item should be referred to the Executive:-

St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Rawreth

That the land in the vicinity of the Sweyne Park playing pitches be cleared of rubble as a matter of urgency, given the recent spate of vandalism at St Nicholas Church of England Primary School.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

Chairman

Date

If you would like these minutes in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.

Question

Response

C Cunningham,
Rayleigh

Why was a so-called public consultation held on the closure of Rayleigh Fire Station without the public being aware of it happening? It appears the first the people of the town realised that the fire station was closing was in a report in the Echo on 6 April 2009. Do you feel this makes the fire service look underhand by keeping this issue low key in an attempt to push through the closure?

The Service has gone to great lengths to be open about the development of the Rayleigh Weir site and the impact on Hadleigh and the retained fire station at Rayleigh. At no time has the Service sought to disguise its intentions on the future of the Castle Road station.

The Service's proposals related to the wider development of the site at Rayleigh Weir and impact on the fire stations at Rayleigh and Hadleigh has been underway from as far back as 2006. Since this time this has been subject to extensive discussion with stakeholders, Fire Service staff and the local media.

Legislative Background

To put the consultation into greater context, the provision of fire cover across Essex, Southend and Thurrock is dealt with by the Essex Fire Authority and prescribed in law under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 where sections 7(1), 7(2) deal with provision for fire fighting, sections 8(1), 8(2) deal with provision for Road Traffic Collisions and sections 9(1), 9(2) and 9(3) deal with provision for other emergencies.

Furthermore, section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act requires the Secretary of State to prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework for all fire and rescue authorities. This must set out priorities and objectives and may provide guidance.

The Fire and Rescue National Framework is a strategic plan outlining how the Public Service Agreement (i.e. agreed target for the reduction of deaths and arson) and other objectives can be delivered, but it is not prescriptive. It is intended to give fire authorities a firm foundation on which to build local solutions. Chapter 1 of the Framework covers work to prevent fires and manage risk, including the development of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP).

The intention, therefore, is that Essex Fire Authority shall develop its own local IRMP which has to be consistent with the overarching objectives but this is not prescribed.

Question

Response

The express intention of central government is to give fire and rescue authorities the flexibility they need to meet the specific needs of local communities.

Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP)

Since the introduction of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and Fire and Rescue National Framework, Essex Fire Authority has prepared a number of IRMP which set out proposals for fire cover across Essex, Southend and Thurrock. Each IRMP is subject to a very thorough and rigorous 12 week public consultation period.

On 21st November 2006 Essex Fire Authority published a consultation document seeking views on their IRMP 2007-2010 which set out proposals for opening a new fire station at Rayleigh Weir in 2009, in which a commitment to explore the opportunities for the future use of the existing Rayleigh fire station was made. The consultation on the IRMP 2007-10 concluded on 23rd January 2007. Over 4500 hard copies of the consultation document were distributed to external organisations including all local authorities, community groups, libraries and doctors surgeries. To try and facilitate a high response rate there were a range of ways in which people could respond to the consultation. A total of 26 responses were received from stakeholders external to Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

So, as Essex Fire Authority explored the options for Rayleigh fire station post the opening of the new Rayleigh Weir fire station it became absolutely clear that the existing fire station would be operationally obsolescent due to the fact that there would be an improved level of fire cover in this area from the new, permanently crewed facility located in the immediate vicinity.

The consultation which Essex Fire Authority carried out with the local community is part of the process of developing an IRMP but obviously does not override operational requirements during the life of the IRMP. The Act and the government guidance do not contain anything to indicate that an authority may not make adjustments to its IRMP during its run, but rather to indicate that individual authorities are intended to make their own local decisions provided that they meet the overarching objectives.

At the time that the operational requirements for the area were finalised and given the information set out above it was

Question

Response

established on behalf of Essex Fire Authority that there is not any impediment to replacing the service from the retained station at Rayleigh with a service from the new Rayleigh Weir fire station, notwithstanding that the change is not specifically mentioned in the IRMP.

In conclusion therefore the IRMP was first published in November 2006 and the formal consultation period ended in January 2007. Since that time as part of the project management process Officers within the Fire Service have been engaged with a number of internal and external stakeholders who have an interest in the immediate area.

Mr Rodgers, Rayleigh

With the potential closure of Rayleigh Fire Station, which currently receives over 500 call outs per year, one of the busiest in the county and Hadleigh, which would have considerably higher call out numbers, how is it going to be viable to cover an area with a population in the region of 150000 throughout South Benfleet all the way through to Hullbridge and Rawreth with only two appliances: Surely in line with ECFRS around the county already, every major full time station with high call outs has a retained station nearby within only 2 – 3 miles. Rayleigh is no different, so why is it closing?

The Service has looked very carefully at the operational cover in the Hadleigh, Benfleet and Rayleigh area. This work first started in 2006 when it quickly became clear that the continued use of the fire station at Rayleigh Weir was not viable.

You are correct inasmuch as the existing fire station at Rayleigh attends approximately 500 incidents per year. However with the new fire station at Rayleigh Weir being less than a mile away this new station would respond to virtually all of these 500 incidents without any requirement for support from the existing Rayleigh fire station. The outcome for the continued use of the Rayleigh fire station is that the number of incidents they attend would likely drop from 500 to less than 50, with most of these not being in the Rayleigh area. This would make them by far the quietest fire station in Essex.

In terms of Rayleigh being one of the busiest fire stations in the County, this is not the case. It is currently one of the busier retained fire stations but the Service has far busier full time stations. Based upon previous incidents for the 2008 calendar year, the Service expects the Rayleigh Weir fire station to respond to approximately 1900 incidents per year. This compares to other Essex fire stations listed below:

- Harlow – 2800
- Basildon – 3100
- Grays – 2600
- Chelmsford – 2450
- Southend – 3300

West Area Committee – 15 September 2009

Question

Response

- Colchester 3050

The South East of Essex is well provided for in terms of fire stations and fire engines. The new Rayleigh Weir fire station is able to draw upon support from surrounding fire stations. In particular the full time fire station at Leigh is only 3.9 miles away which is 9 minutes travel time and the part time fire station at Wickford which is 5.4 miles away and a travel time of 15 minutes (taking into account the additional 5 minutes to respond from home/work to the fire station).

Casting the net further afield there are 9 fire engines from surrounding fire stations that are able to attend incidents in the Rayleigh Weir area within 17 minutes from being called.

Mr A Radley,
Thundersley

For what reason, other than purely financial, is it proposed to close the Rayleigh Fire Station? Is it in the best interests of residents to have such a large area covered by just two appliances, based at the new station in Thundersley?

The decision to close Rayleigh fire station was not driven by finance. The Service has looked very carefully at the operational cover in the Hadleigh, Benfleet and Rayleigh area. This work first started in 2006 and it quickly became clear that the continued use of the fire station at Rayleigh was not viable.

The existing fire station at Rayleigh attends approximately 500 incidents per year. However with the new fire station at Rayleigh Weir being less than a mile away this new station would respond to virtually all of these 500 incidents without any requirement for support from the existing Rayleigh fire station. The outcome for the continued use of the Rayleigh fire station is that the number of incidents they attend would likely drop from 500 to less than 50, with most of these not being in the Rayleigh area. This would make them by far the quietest fire station in Essex.

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C Bright, Rayleigh

St Nicholas Church of England Primary School has been repeatedly targeted by vandals since 17 July. Despite good CCTV images the Police have been unable to identify them. Schools carry a £500 insurance excess, covered by the school budget. We are at the end of our tether. Is there anything the community can do to help us resolve this problem?

CCTV images provided by the school have been shared with other local schools to try and identify the culprits, but there has been no success to date. Police patrols have been directed towards the school but clearly cannot be there at all times; the offences have been happening from late evening to the middle of the night.

Part of the problem appears to be the availability of stones, rocks and other projectiles from an adjacent patch of unused land. The Police Schools Officer was working with District Council officers to get that area of land cleared.

Mr A Stone, Rayleigh

Can the possibility of creating a dedicated slip road at the Fairglen interchange from the southbound A1245 to the eastbound A127 be explored?

It is understood that work on the Rochford/Southend side of Fairglen is not a priority at present, but this matter will be raised with colleagues at County Highways and a full response will be forwarded to Mr Stone.