

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee

- 11 February 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **11 February 2003** when there were present:

Cllr M G B Starke (Chairman)
Cllr T Livings (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr P A Capon
Cllr Mrs T J Capon
Cllr T G Cutmore

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn
Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr Mrs M A Starke

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllr Mrs M A Weir

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
G Woolhouse	-	Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
Helen Drye	-	Corporate Policy Manager
Sandra Whitehead	-	Solicitor
J Kevany	-	Audit Officer
A Wilson	-	Supporting People Officer
Sarah Fowler	-	Head of Administrative & Member Services

56 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Mrs M A Starke and M G B Starke each declared a prejudicial interest by virtue of their involvement with contractors listed in the Audit report.

58 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the schedule relating to progress on previous decisions.

Outstanding matters would be carried forward.

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59 RAYLEIGH POLICE DIVISION - UPDATE ON OPERATIONS

The Committee was pleased to welcome back to the meeting Chief Superintendent John Mauger, Rayleigh Divisional Commander, to update the meeting on the implementation of new proposals for the operation of the Rayleigh Police Division which came into effect from 1 December 2002.

The Chief Superintendent advised that the Divisional Support Team had been enlarged to become a pro-active community team, and in December 2002 had made 20 arrests and in January 2003, 23 arrests. This represented more than the team had achieved over the previous 2 years. In terms of responding to calls, the Division was now meeting most of its targets. A priority was to focus on youth nuisance and this was being followed through, for example, in the areas around Clements Hall and the Spa at Hockley. Over £300,000 worth of stolen property had been recovered in this time period.

The Chief Superintendent said that the priorities of the Police were based on consultation and included increasing detection rates, reducing burglary, car crime and criminal damage. Sickness in the Division was being tackled and was now below the national average. He was currently compiling the policing plan on the business excellence model and a key objective would be to focus on youth nuisance and crime.

The Chief Superintendent provided details of the level of resources that he had available across the Division. There were 168 Police Officers and 64 support staff, covering a population of 165,000 and 82 square miles. Of these, there were 113 uniformed Police Constables and 14 Detective Constables. However, this included a vacancy factor of 14. In addition, 14 Officers were on restricted duties, 1 was suspended and 2 were on long-term sick leave. The Chief Superintendent explained that this was why it sometimes appeared that there were only a limited number of officers on patrol, which was why the response to calls had to be prioritised. He requested that Councillors contact the relevant Police Inspectors to raise any matters that were not being resolved.

Responding to questions, the Chief Superintendent advised that:-

- The Police were concerned about the level of some of the sentences that were passed, and he was aware that this was also of concern to officials in the Home Office.
- Details would be provided for Members of the exact areas that were covered by the Rayleigh and Rochford Inspectors. The local Police beats had now been made coterminous with ward boundaries.

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- The Police were concerned about youth nuisance and were taking action in terms of surveillance devices in certain key areas. The issue of the Police being able to take away unopened bottles from young people was being taken up by an MP.
- In response to a specific issue raised about the reporting of personal injury accidents by the Police to the Highways Authority, the Councillor concerned was requested to write directly to the Chief Superintendent.
- There were a number of senior officers in the Essex Force trained to respond to terrorist incidents, including the Chief Superintendent, and there were an additional 60 officers trained and funding had been used to purchase the necessary equipment.

The Chairman and Members of the Committee were delighted with the progress that was being made and thanked the Chief Superintendent for attending the meeting.

Resolved

That the Chief Superintendent be thanked for his informative presentation.

60 PARKS SPORTS CENTRE PROPOSALS

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) which provided details of the suggested facilities for the new Parks Sports Centre which had been formed following joint discussion between officers and Holmes Place Leisure Management.

The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor T G Cutmore and seconded by Councillor P A Capon, and it was:-

Resolved

That the matter be referred to Council on 25 February 2003 to enable a full discussion by all Members of the Council. (CD(F&ES))

61 HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLANS - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care which contained details of progress on the implementation of the housing strategy and homelessness action plans.

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The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor T G Cutmore and seconded by Councillor P A Capon, and it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That the new Member training programme to be introduced in May 2003 should contain training on housing strategy and policy.
- (2) That a Sub-Committee comprising four Members of the Conservative Group and one Member from the Minority Groups be set up to discuss in detail the homelessness, housing strategy, and housing management action plans.
(HHHCC/HRHM)

62 CHARGING POLICY FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN ESSEX

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care which contained details of the charging policy for supporting people in Essex, as had been requested at a previous meeting.

Members were advised that it had originally been intended by the administering authority (Essex County Council), under the "Fairer Charging Policy for Non-Residential Care Services", that those people who did not receive housing benefit would be able to apply for a separate, fairer charging assessment, to determine whether they could afford to pay all, some or none of their charges for services. However, the County was seeking to suspend this provision pending guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister around the funding. If funding was not approved by the Government, there would be a significant potential impact on the Council Tax for Essex. As an interim measure, the County Council had provided an assurance that all users would be protected with their current level of free service until the first service review. As a result, a meeting of the Member-level Commissioning Body would be held in the near future.

During debate, Members expressed concern that the majority of support under the Supporting People Programme would be directed to tenants in rented housing and not also those in private sector owner-occupied accommodation. It was felt that officers should do whatever possible to lobby the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the necessary funding.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the training, information and publicity programme timetable would need to be reviewed as a result of these proposed changes.

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Resolved

That the charging policy and information programme for Supporting People in Essex be noted. (HHHCC)

Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved

That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

63 AUDIT REPORT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive drawing attention to completed audited investigations and providing an update of previous audit recommendations.

During the course of discussion and in response to a question about the review of the communications and media strategy, it was agreed that Members would be sent the details requested. Members also requested information regarding the new look for Rochford District Matters and the delivery timescale.

Resolved

- (1) That the conclusions and results from the audits set out in the report be agreed.
- (2) That the updated information on the audit recommendations outlined in Appendix 2 of the report be agreed. (CEx)

The meeting closed at 8.44pm.

Chairman _____

Date: _____