

## **Community Services Committee – 3 November 2005**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Services Committee** held on **3 November 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr S P Smith  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr R A Amner

Cllr T G Cutmore  
Cllr K A Gibbs  
Cllr Mrs L Hungate  
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr J M Pullen  
Cllr Mrs M J Webster  
Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs H L A Glynn, Mrs J R Lumley and J Thomass.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	- Chief Executive
S Clarkson	- Head of Revenue and Housing Management
S Neville	- Residential Services Unit Manager
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

### **ALSO ATTENDING**

S Crouch, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Essex Fire Authority  
D Stevens, Community Commander, Essex Fire Authority  
N Fenwick, Local Station Commander, Essex Fire Authority

### **427 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of apologies from Cllr Mrs J R Lumley.

#### **Minute 371/05 – Issues Arising from Overview and Scrutiny – Sheltered Housing Review**

Members concurred that the Sheltered Housing Sub-Committee should be composed according to pro rata rules. It would accordingly comprise 5 Members, including Cllrs T G Cutmore, P K Savill, P F A Webster and Mrs C A Weston and 1 Member from the Liberal Democrat Group, to be advised.

### **428 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr T G Cutmore declared a personal interest in item 11 of the agenda, relating to demoted tenancies, by virtue of his mother-in-law being a Council tenant.

Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins declared a personal interest in item 12 of the agenda, relating to a County Council consultation on priorities to improve the lives of our children and young people, by virtue of being a practitioner in childcare.

### **429 ESSEX FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

The Committee welcomed Mr S Couch, Mr D Stevens and Mr N Fenwick from the Essex Fire Authority, who were in attendance to provide Members with an update on the Essex Fire and Rescue Service.

During the presentation, which gave Members an overview of the fire service in Essex, the following points were noted:-

- The Essex Service fire cover and community safety intervention work was managed via 7 community commands.
- The Service had 51 fire stations, 17 full-time and 34 part-time, which were strategically located in order to provide protection to the whole county.
- A new Chief Fire Officer had recently been appointed for the county.
- The Fire and Rescue Services Act was recently revised for the first time since 1947, and the new Fire Services Act 2004 came into force on 7 September 2004.
- As a result of the new Act the Essex Fire Authority annually publishes a national framework document which identifies priorities and targets for the forthcoming year.
- The Essex Fire Authority collaborates with other regional Fire Authorities on regional work streams.
- The Essex Fire Authority has been set a target of reducing the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20% and the number of deliberate fires by 10% by 2010. In the current year the Essex Service was well below both last year's rate and set targets, for the numbers of accidental dwelling fires and the numbers of injuries associated with such fires.
- The Essex Fire Authority was similarly on or below targets in the current year for the number of false alarms due to apparatus and the number of hoax 999 calls, but was currently experiencing difficulty in meeting current year targets with respect to call outs to road traffic collisions.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to recent Police proposals for re-structuring, the Fire Officers advised that, in response to the current trend for regionalisation encouraged by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Fire Service tried to collaborate regionally as much as possible, but had no plans to re-structure.

In response to a further query relating to whether the reorganisation of the Fire Service following past industrial relation problems had resulted in changes to the Service, Fire Officers confirmed that the 2002 dispute had been one of the main catalysts for the Fire Services Act 2004. A lot of changes had subsequently been introduced into the Fire Service; before implementation of the new legislation the Service had very much concentrated

on intervention. After the new Act, however, the focus of the Service was now very much on prevention. The Service had attained a 'fair' result in its comprehensive performance assessment and had consequently re-written its vision and strategy and consulted widely on the revisions. The Service had not experienced industrial relations problems since it had re-organised itself and its relationship with the unions was much improved.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to how data was measured, Fire Officers advised that a performance management framework had been established over the past 6 to 7 months and much work was being done on establishing local priorities and intelligence on what were the main risks to local people. More work was, however, being conducted on this, as there was a need to obtain more intelligence and to provide proper focus with a view to the culmination of a reduction in injuries and fire-related incidents. With respect to a further query associated with fire investigation, it was noted that Fire Officers worked closely with the Police and that information was collated through ODPM and eventually disseminated to insurance companies and manufacturers.

In response to a Member query about the potential use of motorbikes by the Fire Service in responding to incidents, Fire Officers advised that this was already happening in Merseyside; motorbikes were used for responding to false alarm calls to establish whether a bigger response was required. In this Region, however, a need had not yet been established for such use.

Responding to a question relating to data gathering, it was noted that one of the consequences of the Fire Services Act 2004 was widened responsibilities for commands. Emergency vehicles carry, for example, sophisticated listening devices and cameras and specialised equipment for a range of rescues, including water rescues and rescues from high or confined spaces. The Fire Service was also equipped to deal with any potential radioactive contamination; officers had received dedicated training and the Service had specialist equipment to deal with any such incidents.

Fire Officers confirmed, with respect to a Member query about licensing applications to sell alcohol on premises, that they would ask the Fire Service licensing officers to liaise more closely with Local Authorities on such matters.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to the possibility of a major event happening in the Rochford District, Fire Officers advised that there was the capacity for dealing with major, simultaneous incidents in, for example, Southend-on-Sea and in the north of the county, without resources being stretched.

In conclusion, the Fire Officers extended an open invitation for Members to visit the command centre or any of the local fire stations to see operations first hand. Members all concurred that there would be merit in a Member visit being arranged to the command centre.

### **430 CONSULTATION PAPER – “AMENDING THE DEFINITION OF A CARAVAN”**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care inviting Members to agree the Council’s response to a consultation paper issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on proposals to amend the definition of a caravan.

Mindful of officers’ recommendation to support the proposed amendment to the definition of a caravan, Members, although endorsing the concept of improved insulation and the associated benefits to the environment and the occupants of caravans nevertheless considered that the Green Belt should not be sacrificed in order to accommodate the much larger units, as proposed by ODPM.

Members expressed concern that the proposals to increase the size of such mobile homes could compromise minimum separation distances between these units. It was further perceived that there was the potential for substantial external cladding to look unsightly.

#### **Resolved**

That the ODPM be advised that the proposed amendment is not welcomed by this Council. Whilst improvements to the insulation of mobile homes will enable owners to maintain reasonable temperatures using less energy and will help reduce fuel poverty and improve energy conservation with the consequent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that will have environmental benefits, and mindful that under the Council’s Housing Renewal Assistance Policy residents in receipt of a qualifying benefit or on a low income may be eligible for a grant for the costs of insulating their mobile home, it was not acceptable that the Green Belt should be sacrificed in order to accommodate larger units. The definition of caravan, as per the caravan club, appears much smaller. Under these proposals there appears to be no commitment to maintain Model Standards minimum separation distances between caravans. Furthermore, external cladding could, potentially, be unsightly. (HHHCC)

### **431 DEMOTED TENANCIES**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management asking Members to consider using demoted tenancies for existing tenants of Council housing where it proves necessary.

During debate, Members commended the emphasis on working with tenants to change their behaviour and to keep their homes rather than to bring eviction proceedings against them.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to tenants’ right of appeal, officers confirmed that tenants would have the right to present their case to the

County Court. In response to a supplementary question relating to the period of demotion, officers advised that this would be for a 12-month period, but that an application could be made to extend this for a further 6 months, should the tenant not make any attempt to improve their behaviour during the demotion period.

Officers further confirmed that, in the event of a demoted tenant losing their home, they could make a homelessness application to the Council, but it was likely that such tenants would be found intentionally homeless.

### **Resolved**

That authority be included within the general delegation for the Head of Revenue and Housing Management to seek demotion orders in appropriate cases. (HRHM)

### **432 PRIORITIES TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking Members' views on the draft Children and Young People's Plan produced by Essex County Council, which would come into effect in April 2006.

During debate, there was a general consensus that, in light of his work on the District Youth Strategy Group, Cllr T Livings should be this Council's representative on the County Council Strategic Board for Children and Young People.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to how the Plan would dovetail with the District's Community Strategy, officers advised that the Children and Young People's Plan and the Community Strategy would both be greatly influenced by the Local Area Agreement process.

Members expressed concern that there should be clarification around the priorities given to each key area of activity highlighted within the draft Plan. There was a general consensus that priorities for reducing drug and alcohol abuse and reducing teenage pregnancies should be given high prominence.

Members, while recognising that the issue of reducing smoking among children and young people appeared to be addressed as part of the Local Area Agreement process, nevertheless felt it should be included within the Children and Young People's Plan.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That Cllr T Livings should be this Council's representative on the County Council Strategic Board for Children and Young People.

- (2) That, subject to the following Member comments, the content of the evolving Children and Young Persons' Strategy be noted:-
- Reducing drug and alcohol abuse and reducing teenage pregnancies were higher priorities than that of reducing obesity in children and young people.
  - The Strategy should also include the priority of reducing smoking among children and young people. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.46 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....