

Parish Liaison Sub-Committee – 6 October 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Parish Liaison Sub-Committee** held on **6 October 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr Mrs M J Webster (Chairman)

Cllr P A Capon
Cllr T Livings

Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr D G Stansby

DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT

D Deeks - Head of Financial Services
M Martin - Committee Administrator

COUNTY COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT

J Symonds - Area Co-Ordinator, Mid Essex

TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

Cllr R Adams - Rayleigh Town Council
Cllr K Attridge - Rochford Parish Council
Cllr P A Capon - Stambridge Parish Council
Cllr V Leach - Hawkwell Parish Council
Cllr J Smith - Canewdon Parish Council
P Stanley - Clerk, Hockley Parish Council
Cllr B Wright - Great Wakering Parish Council

5 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to noting that Cllr D G Stansby had not declared a personal interest.

6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Mrs M J Webster declared a personal interest by virtue of being a County Councillor.

Cllrs P A Capon, T Livings, C J Lumley and Mrs C A Weston each declared a personal interest by virtue of being a Town/Parish Councillor.

7 PARISH COUNCIL PARTNERSHIP

The Chairman welcomed representatives from the County/Town and Parish Councils but expressed her disappointment that so few Parish Councils had been represented.

The Head of Financial Services reported that he was grateful for the co-operation of the Town/Parish Clerks at the meeting held in May. It had been a constructive meeting at which a number of issues had been identified.

Broad agreement had been reached that the Parishes and District should work around the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme by using the document as an indication of best practice, but without seeking quality status.

The existing Consultation Charter and Code of Practice between the District Council and Town/Parishes would need to be updated to take account of the recommendations of this Sub-Committee and to ensure that it remained a 'live' document. The Head of Service agreed to circulate a copy of the current Charter to Parishes.

The Head of Service advised that an Action Plan would be drawn up following discussions at this meeting and that consideration should be given to those partners to be invited to future meetings. This would probably depend on the topics being discussed and would be by invitation.

It was generally felt that meetings of this Sub-Committee should initially be held quarterly.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

Websites

- Several Parishes reported the need for help in setting up a Parish web site. Mr Symonds advised that the County Council were undertaking a pilot project which involved assisting 3 Parishes to set up web sites. The main problem areas identified were the type of hardware and software currently used by Parishes which is frequently not compatible with that of the County Council. However, the model the County were looking at had proved simple to use and a clerk/councillor would be able to maintain the web site with little or no training. Members were advised of a County officer who they should contact for advice. The Chairman requested that the County Council provide Town/Parishes with all the latest information relating to this project.
- Some Parishes were having difficulty in setting up e-mail with the .gov address. Information was requested as to the procedure involved.
- Hockley Parish Council advised that their web site had been running for two years and the Clerk offered assistance in this respect to any Town/Parish Council.

- Other issues identified relating to the setting up of web sites were primarily those of funding and the expertise necessary to maintain the web site. Mr Symonds confirmed that the County Council were currently seeking to draw down funding to ensure that high speed Broadband connections were available throughout the County, although it was noted that some smaller Parishes across the County do not have an office or their own personal computer.

Partnership Working

- With regard to the possible appointment of a Parish Liaison officer, it was noted that although there is good networking amongst the Clerks, they were nevertheless very isolated. The view of the meeting was that Town/Parishes would probably find it difficult to contribute in terms of funding for such a position. Town/Parish Councillors are able to liaise with District Councillors on issues of common interest.
- It was agreed that any decision on this should be deferred at the present time.
- Representatives requested a list of District Council officer contacts.

Paperwork

- It was noted that the Essex Association of Local Councils tries to maintain an up-to-date list of IT equipment held by Town/Parish Councils. Parishes could be offered the opportunity to receive via e-mail much of the paperwork which is currently sent to them. This would enable them to limit paperwork to only that which was really needed.

Planning

- The issue was raised that comments made by Town/Parish councils in relation to consultation on planning applications were sometimes omitted from the Weekly List. Inserting the words “No comment” if none had been received might be a solution.
- It would also would be helpful if Parishes could be advised of progress on enforcement issues.

The Head of Service agreed to raise these issues with the Head of Planning Services.

Playspaces

Note: Cllr D G Stansby declared a personal interest by virtue of being the Chairman of the Playspace Sub-Committee.

- The District Council had looked at constructing a possible funding formula should the Parishes decide to retain a playspace in line with current usage. This would only relate to repairs and maintenance as the District intended to continue with the rolling renovation programme.
- The overriding issue was to protect the areas and the Playspace Sub-Committee had requested that the District investigate whether trust status

could be obtained to protect open spaces and play areas from development.

- The District Council had already been informed that the site at Rowan Way should be closed. Parishes were requested to notify the District Council if any other playspaces were no longer valued facilities.
- It was recognised that some Parishes would soon be in their budgetary cycle and that budgets for the forthcoming financial year would be set.
- It was confirmed that officers would continue to work on a contribution formula. This would be sent out to Parishes and could then form the basis for future discussion.

Members agreed to meet again early in the New Year.

Resolved

That an Action Plan listing the outcomes of the meeting be submitted to Parishes. (HFS)

The meeting closed at 9.22 pm.

Chairman

Date