

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 11 May 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **11 May 2004** when there were present:

Cllr T Livings (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs T J Capon (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr P K Savill
Cllr D G Stansby

Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr D G Stansby.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
S Clarkson	Head of Revenue and Housing Management
G Woolhouse	Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
C Nicholson	Solicitor
J Bradley	Trainee Solicitor
M Martin	Committee Administrator

ALSO ATTENDING

Cllr R A Pearson	Essex County Council
V Thomas	Head of Health Promotion, Castle Point and Rochford NHS Primary Care Trust

231 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

232 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Mrs M A Starke declared a personal interest in item 7 by virtue of being a member of the Castle Point & Rochford Health Partnership Board.

Cllr T Livings declared a personal interest in item 8 by virtue of being a member of the Parish Liaison Group for Transport and a regular user of local buses.

233 CHOOSING HEALTH? – CONSULTATION ON IMPROVING PEOPLE'S HEALTH

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health & Community Care which invited Members to consider a Government Consultation on improving public health.

The Chairman welcomed Ms Thomas to the meeting who advised Members that the feedback gained from the consultation would inform the Government's White Paper currently under preparation. Members noted that Government figures suggested that existing problems around obesity were set to have trebled in 20 years' time unless some action was taken.

Members noted that the key points which the consultation wished to address were as follows:-

- Whether or not the Government should intervene more in people's lives in order to improve public health.
- How to make it easier for people to make healthy choices.
- How to target those people who are more likely to experience ill health.
- Raise the profile of the effect that other people's lifestyles and actions have on others, such as in smoking or speeding.
- The need to involve a wide range of agencies.
- What the media and food industry promote.

During discussion of the consultation document, the following Member views were noted:-

- The Government had a responsibility to inform people of actions that would have implications on health, but then leave the individual to make the choice.
- Concern at increases in licensing hours and the effect that this could have on drink related problems. Members were advised, however, that evidence suggested that this should mean that people were less likely to indulge in 'binge' drinking.
- The issue of the cleanliness of hospitals ought to be considered as part of this consultation.
- The need to tackle the problem that existed where certain sections of the population, for example men, tended to ignore problems rather than seek early medical advice.
- More information was needed about what is really healthy, for example, low fat products might have a high sugar content that would be dangerous for a diabetes sufferer.
- Employers had a responsibility to their work forces to educate and provide guidance.
- Screening programmes and early detection were vitally important.

- The need to make a distinction between choices that harm only the individual and those that have the potential to harm others.
- Some Members were of the view that the consultation exercise was unlikely to have much effect and could lead to people being told what to do.
- The Government often gave mixed messages.
- There was a need to encourage healthy living styles from primary school age onwards in order to prevent the projected increase in obesity.
- Environmental air quality and vehicle pollution ought to be considered in view of its potential long term effect on health.

In response to a Member question, it was noted that the term 'Inequalities' related to the fact that those classed as disadvantaged were more likely to suffer from a range of health issues which raised the question as to whether more resources should be targeted at that sector of the population.

Members agreed that the Council should make a collective response to the consultation, but also include individual Member responses. The Head of Service agreed to forward to Members a copy of the summary document and questionnaire. He would then forward any individual responses received back on to the Primary Care Trust. Members noted that further details around the proposed White Paper would be brought back to the Committee later in the year.

Resolved

- (1) That the Head of Housing, Health & Community Care submit a corporate response to the consultation based on the composite view of this Committee.
- (2) That any individual responses received back from Members of the Committee also be submitted to the Primary Care Trust. (HHHCC)

234 HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY – NON-URGENT PATIENT TRANSPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care which apprised Members of the outcome of a health overview and scrutiny panel study into non-urgent patient transport for residents of Essex and Thurrock accessing health care at hospitals and day clinics.

Appended to the report were the outcomes of the study and its recommendations, which related to the four objectives defined for the study.

The Chairman welcomed County Cllr Pearson to the meeting, who reported that in carrying out the study a range of local hospitals and doctors surgeries had been visited. The views of a varied section of people had been taken into

consideration including administrative staff involved in organising patient transport and patients.

The findings of the study indicated that the majority of people travelled to hospital appointments by private car and therefore the biggest problems were around parking facilities close to hospitals.

However, common problems that existed where patient transport was utilised included that of patients who were not at home when the voluntary service called to collect, or who had failed to inform the service that they had cancelled their appointment, or simply no longer wished to attend their appointment.

Missed appointments were a common problem caused by a range of issues, such as forgetting it had been arranged, failure on the part of public transport, or perhaps, for example, through deafness, they were unable to hear the person calling at the door to collect them.

Members noted that a suggestion had been made that a park and ride facility be introduced for Southend Hospital and one site identified had been the parking facilities at London Southend Airport.

During debate the following Member comments were noted:-

- Broad agreement with the recommendations.
- It was essential that transport links needed to be available in remote areas of the district.
- Problems were frequently caused by delays in public transport.
- People needed to be made more aware of the consequence of their actions in simply failing to attend appointments. A reminder facility could be set up similar to that operated by some opticians and dentists.
- Government standards related to parking provision had been lowered.
- Provision of a separate Diagnostic and Treatment Centre at another site, together with a satellite facility within the District would start to alleviate some of the existing problems. However, it would be essential to ensure that adequate public transport facilities were provided from within the District.
- It would be sensible to investigate the operation of a similar scheme to the taxi voucher scheme, for use as patient transport.

Members were advised that the recommendation around integrating the ambulance voluntary car service and community transport into a single transport scheme was still under consideration.

The Head of Revenue and Housing Management advised Members that the half yearly report had demonstrated that the taxi voucher scheme, which operated as a chargeable service to the customer, was very well used. However, this would lead to people using up a sizeable proportion of their vouchers on hospital visits. Members were advised, however, that the

Community Transport bus was only working at around 35% capacity and that liaison with the County Council should be undertaken to see whether any integration was feasible.

Cllr Pearson advised Members that future studies by the County's health overview and scrutiny panel included diabetes, access to patient care services, and children's issues. He was in agreement with the Committee's recommendation that the issue of infections contracted whilst in hospital ought to be given a high priority.

Resolved

- (1) That the District Council liaise with the County Council around the use of the Community transport bus as a patient transport facility. (HRHM)
- (2) That the District Council write to the County Council requesting that the issue of hospital infections be given a high priority as a future study by the health overview and scrutiny panel. (HHHCC)

235 DE-REGULATION OF FRANCIS WALK, CROWN HILL, CLARENCE ROAD AND TENDRING AVENUE, RAYLEIGH

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management which invited Members to consider the de-regulation of flats at Francis Walk and Crown Hill, flats and bedsits in Clarence Road and flats in Tendring Avenue from Sheltered Housing to General Needs housing.

The Head of Service advised that there was an abundance of sheltered accommodation within the District with 650 pensioner-designated properties. This represented 40% of the Council's housing stock. Government bodies had expressed concern at the imbalance of pensioner-designated properties. Several were not ideally situated for a variety of reasons, such as steep steps, set on a slope or remote from town centres. Recent Post Office closures in more outlying areas had contributed to the need for elderly people to have to travel more frequently to town centres.

Members were advised that Government targets for the use of bed and breakfast accommodation had been met, but the Council now faced a considerable challenge to maintain the situation. Government guidance included maximising the supply of accommodation available through the Council's allocation scheme. Statutorily the Council had duties towards homeless people, some of whom could not access accommodation in the private sector and so for them, public sector housing was the only option.

In response to concerns, officers advised:-

- that the Council's Letting Policy would continue to be followed.

- that of 300 properties released about 18 months ago, none of the tenants had exercised their 'right to buy'. In total there had only been a take up of 109 since 1976.

Members referred to the ageing population and noted that within the District 88% of properties were owner occupied, and that those people could be in a position to release equity to purchase sheltered units.

The Committee were concerned that more detailed information was needed in order to be able to reach an informed decision and recommended that a Housing Management Sub-Committee be constituted.

Specific information requested by Members included:-

- detailed statistics around the balance of applicants beyond pensioners including how long they had lived in the District.
- estimated capital figure contained within privately owned property.
- lengths of time elderly residents had lived within the District.

The Head of Service invited Members to contact him requesting any further information which they would like the Sub-Committee to consider.

Members were advised that as officers would need time to gather together this information, the Sub-Committee would be constituted at Annual Council in June.

Resolved

That a Housing Management Sub-Committee comprising 5 Members; 3 Conservative, 1 Labour and 1 Liberal Democrat be constituted to consider in more detail the de-regulation of properties identified in the officer's report. (HRHM)

236 OUTCOMES FROM THE PLAYSPACE SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services), which advised Members of outcomes from the Playspace Sub-Committee of 8 April 2004, and sought authority to consider extending catering franchises in Open Spaces, and the consideration of putting open spaces into a trust status.

Members were advised that officers would be reporting back to a future meeting of the Playspace Sub-Committee on a formula that could be used to engage with Parish/Town Councils around the funding of maintenance costs and the outcome of any landowner discussions associated with one of the playspaces.

Resolved

That officers produce reports by September 2004 on:-

- (1) The possibilities for catering franchise arrangements at open spaces where potential exists. (CD(F&ES))
- (2) The possibilities of obtaining trust status for the Council's open spaces. (HLS)

237 TOURISM STUDY – A SUGGESTED WAY FORWARD

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, which sought Members' views in connection with progressing the tourism agenda and puts forward a suggestion as to how this year's budgetary allocation of £20,000 should be spent.

Members agreed with the recommendation that a study, as outlined in the report, be carried out and agreed that the consultant should be asked to identify the top six priorities. This should include suggestions around funding opportunities. Actions endorsed by Members could then be fed into the budget process in the Autumn.

Officers agreed to circulate to Members of the Committee a draft specification for the study, together with a short list of potential consultants together with details of their experience in the field of tourism. Better information was needed not only to attract visitors to the District, but to better inform residents of what was currently available.

Members identified the following list of suggestions to aid tourism in the District:-

- Better signage.
- Improved advertising using leaflets.
- Work in conjunction with other districts and bodies, particularly Thames Gateway and local Tourist offices.
- Emphasise our heritage.
- Provide information around facilities available close to tourist sites, such as food outlets and car parking.
- Provision of heritage/town walk leaflets

Recommended to Council

That a tourism study, as outlined in the report, be funded from the 2004/05 Budget allocation. (CE)

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The meeting closed at 9.21 pm.

Chairman

Date