

## **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 10 March 2005**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **10 March 2005** when there were present:

Cllr Mrs M A Starke (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

Cllr Mrs R Brown  
Cllr Mrs T J Capon  
Cllr C J Lumley

Cllr D G Stansby  
Cllr Mrs M S Vince  
Cllr P F A Webster

### **VISITING MEMBERS**

Cllrs G A Mockford, M G B Starke and Mrs M J Webster.

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs T Livings and P K Savill.

### **SUBSTITUTES**

Cllr J E Grey

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

G Woolhouse	- Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
J Bourne	- Leisure and Contracts Manager
A Law	- Solicitor
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

### **ALSO ATTENDING**

County Councillor Mr R Pearson – Essex County Council  
Mr Drew McBride, Head of Area – Post Office Counters  
Mr M Rush, Centre Manager, Operations – Royal Mail

### **104 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **105 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs J E Grey and C J Lumley each declared a personal interest in item 9 of the agenda by virtue of being Members of Rayleigh Town Council.

### **106 POST OFFICE COUNTERS/ROYAL MAIL**

The Committee welcomed Mr Drew McBride, Head of Area for Post Office

Counters and Mr Mark Rush, Royal Mail's Mail Centre Manager, Operations for the Essex area to the meeting. They were in attendance to answer Members' concerns relating to the general deterioration experienced by local residents in the standard of mail deliveries and the uncertainty surrounding delivery times subsequent to posting and to future policies relating to Sub Post Offices, following the recent closures in the Rochford and Southend areas.

Mr McBride advised that the programme of post office closures had now been completed and that no further closures were planned. The closures had been the result of the Post Office's Network Reinvention Programme, which was developed in order to address the fact that traditional Post Office business was in decline, with sweeping changes in benefit payments being introduced by the Government. The Post Office had had too many post office branches in urban areas chasing too few customers, with the result that branch managers had struggled to make their branches financially viable.

As part of the Network Reinvention Programme aimed at developing areas of diversification for the Post Office, a number of new products had been produced, purchasable from Post Office Counters, including personal loans, car and home insurance and personal banking.

Occasionally it might be necessary to temporarily close a post office, due to unforeseen circumstances. The Chase branch in Rayleigh was temporarily closed and the Post Office was currently trying to appoint a permanent sub post manager for the branch. It was, however, possible that the branch could be closed for 3 months.

Following a similar, temporary closure of the main post office in Rochford, a temporary sub post manager was currently in place. There had been positive feedback following this appointment.

Responding to a Member concern relating to the possible 3-month closure of The Chase post office, Mr McBride confirmed that the Post Office would do everything possible to expedite an earlier re-opening, but that it was dependant on the available applicants for the manager post.

Mr McBride noted Member concern relating to the difficulty experienced by mothers, with young children and buggies, and by frail, elderly residents in travelling further afield to obtain child benefit or pension payments using public transport in the event of the closure, temporary or permanent, of their local post office.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to the public's fear of more post office closures and dissatisfaction with delivery times, Mr McBride responded that research was regularly undertaken relating to customer satisfaction with the post office service and customer satisfaction was high with the service provided by post masters. The Post Office did, however, want to encourage new customers to use the service.

In response to a Member query relating to discrepancies between digital scale readings and Post Office scales, Mr McBride advised that many post office branches used manual scales, but that these were tested each week. People had to be charged postage based on the weight shown by the branch scales.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to personal banking, Mr McBride confirmed that people with bank accounts at Barclays, Lloyds TSB, Co-op, Clydesdale and Alliance & Leicester could cash cheques at post office branches and could also make deposits.

In response to a Member query with respect to large queues at post offices on Mondays, Mr McBride advised that this was largely due to the payment of benefits and pensions. The Post Office did, however, recognise that it needed to address the issue of queuing at branches. Responding to a supplementary concern expressed that queuing was more intense at post offices than banks, Mr McBride drew Members' attention to the post office extended opening hours, in comparison to those of banks.

Responding to a point raised by Members that many villages had no bank, and relied heavily on the post office, Mr McBride confirmed that there were far more post offices than banks in rural areas.

In response to a Member query relating to savings for youngsters similar to the former post office savings clubs and savings stamps, Mr McBride confirmed that the Post Office was exploring possibilities for an easy access bank account, which it hoped to launch within a year. Post Office savings had been launched, in £5 denominations, to be used to purchase any Post Office or retail product.

Mr Rush advised that over the past year Royal Mail had undergone a big programme of change. The previous 2-delivery structure had been replaced by a single daily delivery structure. Large changes had been made to the Royal Mail network in an attempt to improve delivery times. The aim was to deliver mail during the morning period up until and including lunchtime. It was possible that the same person would not always deliver mail, as might previously have been the case, as part of the change had resulted in delivery staff working 5, rather than 6 days per week.

Different volumes of mail received at delivery centres on different days could impact on the final delivery times of mail.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to personal contact, Mr Rush advised that Royal Mail placed great importance on personal contact; their post delivery staff played an important role in the community. The move towards a 5-day working week for delivery staff was in an attempt to improve the quality of their working week.

In response to a Member query about cover for sickness and annual leave, Mr

Rush confirmed that it was obligatory, in terms of delivery quality, for there to be reserve cover. There were occasions, accordingly, when it was necessary to bring in staff from different areas.

Responding to a Member concern relating to staff training, Mr Rush advised that all new delivery staff would be required to undergo a test and interview to establish that they were suitably qualified for the job. In addition, new staff had to undergo an induction training process. Security and vetting of new staff had also been improved during the past six months.

In response to a Member concern that it was pointless sending out mail first class, as it often took the same amount of time to be delivered as second class mail, Mr Rush advised that first class mail was always sorted and despatched first and that second class mail remained at the local delivery for 24 hours before being despatched for sorting.

Responding to a Member query about post codes, Mr Rush confirmed that the use of post codes on mail was of great importance.

In response to a final Member concern relating to a recent deterioration in the mail delivery service, Mr Rush advised that independent research has proven that the quality of service Royal Mail were currently providing to customers was at its highest level for ten years.

### **107 HOLMES PLACE PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services), to which was appended the latest progress report from Holmes Place Leisure Management on the progress and development of the leisure management contract.

Responding to Member concern about instances of petty vandalism at the Freight House and at the leisure centres, officers advised that Holmes Place were keen to do as much as practicable, within budget, to address the problem, as vandalism did not help to encourage business to the centres.

In response to Member concern about continued poor uptake of the Mill cinema officers confirmed that the Saturday morning cinema for children had not been successful in attracting an audience. It might be more beneficial to show films aimed at children during the school holidays. In addition, it appeared that there could be merit in the Mill cinema being re-launched to show a different genre of film, rather than attempting to compete with commercial cinemas.

Officers noted a concern relating to the air quality within the swimming pool and swimming pool changing room areas on Sunday mornings, which would be relayed to Holmes Place.

Members noted that there had been increased usage of the Freight House,

which was to be commended.

Concluding the debate, Members concurred that Holmes Place were to be congratulated on their hard work with respect to the leisure contract.

### **108 NHS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY STUDIES**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care inviting Members to consider topics for future NHS scrutiny studies in Essex.

Members welcomed County Councillor Mr R Pearson, who had been invited to attend the meeting for this item.

During debate, Members expressed concern that the decision had been taken that catering on the Rochford Hospital site would constitute cooked/chilled foods, rather than the use of fresh ingredients. There was a general consensus that the use of fresh ingredients for hospital patients would be no more expensive than using cooked/chilled foods, but that the health benefits for patients would be considerably higher.

Members expressed concern relating to whether the recommendations contained within the studies were implemented, given that the studies were undoubtedly expensive to produce. Members concurred that there would be merit in inviting a senior County Council officer to attend a future meeting of the Committee to provide information relating to the costs of producing studies, and whether subsequent reports were made relating to the implementation of recommendations.

Members identified a number of subjects that would be of interest as topics for studies.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That a letter be sent to the Chief Executive of the South Essex Partnership NHS Trust expressing concern about the decision to provide patients at the Rochford Hospital site with cooked/chilled foods rather than fresh ingredients.
- (2) That Essex County Council be advised that this Council wishes to see the following topics considered for future health scrutiny:-
  - hospital acquired infections, including basic hygiene and cleaning practices.
  - nutrition, including nutrition of elderly and other hospital in-patients unable to feed themselves (including fluid intake)
- (3) That the primary care study, already agreed, should include:-
  - out of hours GP cover

- NHS dentistry

- (4) That an appropriate County Council officer be invited to a future meeting of this Committee to explain the process and status of the studies. (HHHCC)

### **109 UPDATE REGARDING NOISE COMPLAINTS AT SKATEBOARDING FACILITY, KING GEORGE'S PLAYING FIELD, RAYLEIGH**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care updating Members about the investigation into allegations of noise disturbance arising from use of the skateboarding facility in King George's Playing Field, Rayleigh.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to the noise investigations, officers confirmed that monitoring specifically related to skateboarding noise from the skateboarding facility at the corner of the park; investigations had not included the area by the doctor's surgery or the vicinity of Somerfield's.

During debate, Members expressed disappointment that the Police were not acting on complaints from residents relating to skateboarding in the High Street.

On a Motion moved by Cllr P F A Webster and seconded by Cllr Mrs R Brown, it was:-

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That it be noted that no statutory nuisance was found to occur during investigations carried out between May and October 2004 into noise arising from use of the skateboarding facility in King George's Playing Field, Rayleigh.
- (2) That a Member level meeting be arranged between Rochford District Council and Rayleigh Town Council concerning any future action relating to the skateboarding facility in King George's Playing Field, Rayleigh. (HHHCC)

### **110 LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND HSE WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care requesting Members to endorse a Statement of Intent to improve health and safety at work.

#### **Resolved**

That this Council signs the Statement of Intent with the Health and Safety

Executive. (HHHCC)

### **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

#### **Resolved**

That the public and press be excluded from the Meeting for the remaining items of business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

### **111 REPORT OF THE HOUSING BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered the report of the Housing Best Value Sub-Committee on recommendations made at its meeting on 14 February 2005.

Members congratulated officers for their objective analysis of such an important issue.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Rochford Housing Options Appraisal Board be advised of the consultant's conclusions.
- (2) That, following Council's agreement to the future option for housing, the Housing Best Value Sub-Committee be tasked with considering the policies relating to the Council's sheltered housing stock that the Council would wish to see in any future agreement relating to the provision of housing and all other issues that arise from the agreement.
- (3) That the Council's future housing care and support strategy be finalised once the future direction of the Local Authority sheltered housing schemes is determined. (HHHCC)

The meeting closed at 9.56 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....