

Review Committee – 16 June 2009

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **16 June 2009** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: Cllr M Maddocks

Cllr T Livings
Cllr M J Steptoe

Cllr J Thomass

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr Mrs T Capon

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs K A Gibbs and Mrs G A Lucas-Gill.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
S Scrutton	-	Head of Planning & Transportation
J Bourne	-	Head of Community Services
P Gowers	-	Overview & Scrutiny Officer
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

ALSO PRESENT

B Gammie - Essex County Council

148 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

149 CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

In order to build the Committee's capacity and expertise in the field of scrutiny, a presentation on the four areas of challenge, engagement, leadership and performance management had been delivered recently by the Overview & Scrutiny officer.

In respect of the work programme for the previous year 2008/09, the following items were outstanding and would continue to be reviewed by the Committee during the current year: Surface Rainwater Drainage Systems; the Council's Community Halls/Assets; Performance of the New Environmental Contracts and the Rochford Housing Association (RHA) Housing Transfer process. Work would also be undertaken on Partnerships, including the Local Strategic

Partnership (LSP) and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP).

Following a request from two Members of the Committee, it was agreed that the next Review Committee meeting should be held on 8 July 2009 instead of the scheduled date of 14 July.

150 SECTION 106 MONIES

The Committee received a presentation from Blaise Gammie, the Strategic Planning Officer, School Organisation and Planning at Essex County Council on the allocation and use of Section 106 monies in relation to education within the District.

In response to Member questions, Mr Gammie replied as follows:-

- Teachers had stated that involvement in Children Centres (CCI's) would often result in a significant increase in children's confidence. To date CCI's had been established only in the most deprived areas in the country.
- Schools were often aware of the availability of Section 106 monies and would apply for funding for projects accordingly. The County Council would also contact schools advising that the monies may be suitable for specific proposed projects.
- For a project to be eligible for Section 106 monies it had to show a net increase in work spaces available in the school according to the net capacity schedules produced by the County Council. Car parking projects would not, therefore, be eligible.
- Although some developer contributions may be insufficient to fund a whole project, to date no Section 106 contributions have been returned to developers. Most unspent funds have potential projects identified.

151 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the Forward Plan.

Item 12/08 Potential of shared service working – Revenues & Benefits

The Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services provided an update on Forward Plan item no. 12/08.

The item had been on the Council's agenda for some time and Castle Point Borough Council was being considered as a potential partner for shared service working as it was a similar sized authority, with a similar geography and population size. Caseload size and processing times were also similar for

both authorities. Castle Point Council had indicated an interest in the possibility of joint working and officers are looking to commission an external consultant to ascertain the different levels of joint working available and to undertake a feasibility study, the results of which were likely to be available by the end of July. The feasibility study would be specific to the needs of Rochford District and Castle Point Borough Councils and would evaluate the likely impact of joint working on services and costs. A major consideration was that joint working must not adversely affect the services provided to residents or impact negatively on the Council's staff. A meeting was scheduled with Castle Point Borough Council later in the week to discuss the matter further, including budget issues. There is a budget available of £20,000 for investigating the business case; the estimated cost of the feasibility study is £7,000, which would potentially be shared with Castle Point Borough Council. A report, which would include all potential options, would be made to the Executive in September 2009.

Choice Based Lettings – the Way Forward

The Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services provided an update on progress of implementation of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme.

The Portfolio Holder advised that she was undergoing mentoring training with the Leader of a Council that had recently introduced a CBL scheme, and this had provided relevant background information. The system had to be in place by April 2010 and the IT system was now being chosen. It was important to choose a system that would deliver the desired processes. 'Abritas' is one of three possible options, and was used by other authorities with relatively small numbers of lets, and is also used by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. The purchase of the system had been delegated to the Portfolio Holder and had been allocated a capital budget of £20,000 and a revenue budget of £4,000 towards annual maintenance. It was anticipated that capital costs for this system would be considerably less than the budget figure and maintenance costs would be kept within the £4,000 budget. An implementation plan was currently being devised.

So that residents could be kept fully aware of the details of the available properties, it was of vital importance that advertising is accessible to all residents, including those with a disability and that adequate support was given to residents where necessary. One of the main intentions of a CBL scheme is that it would provide more potential choice for residents and that the system would be open and transparent. A 'trial run' of the new scheme would be arranged with a panel of tenants prior to introduction of the scheme.

In response to a question on cross border nominations within the Thames Gateway region, Members were advised that although each of the five authorities within the region (Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-sea and Thurrock) were developing their own schemes, the group continued

to meet to discuss issues surrounding choice-based lettings. Future decisions relating to cross border nominations would be made by the Portfolio Holder.

152 OVERALL WORK PROGRAMME

(Note: Councillors T Livings and M J Steptoe declared an interest in this item due to their membership of the Audit Committee.)

The Committee gave consideration to a number of topics for consideration by the Review Committee for its 2009/10 programme. These suggestions for Reviews had originated from various sources, including the Chief Executive report to Council on 26 February 2009 on the Key Policies and Actions for 2009/10, a referral from the Audit Committee on 29 April 2009 and a request from two residents of the District for review of a topic that is causing them concern.

The Committee's review of Surface Water Drainage in the District had been put on hold pending Government response to the findings of the Pitt Review. A smaller team from the Review Committee would complete this review and an informal meeting would be arranged with the Environment Agency and Essex County Council.

Following Member discussion, it was decided that the following topics would be reviewed:-

- Car Parking, including charges, operation, provision and enforcement, street parking and options for resident parking etc. This would be a whole Committee review, with smaller task groups for specific aspects of the review. It was appreciated that it may not be possible to complete the review within 2009/10 but that if this were the case, the Review could be taken forward to next year if necessary. The Chamber of Trade had expressed concern about the cost of parking and provision in the District, and scoping would need to identify specific areas of concern.
- Service Provision for our Ageing Population. This topic came out of the Council's Key Policies and Actions for 2009/10. Rochford District's fastest growing area of population in percentage terms will be the over 80 age group and the Committee could use its policy development role to investigate what services might need to be provided and how they should be provided to deal with the requirements of an ageing population
- The level of initial charge for the bulky waste and waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) charges. Two residents had contacted the Committee with concerns relating to this newly introduced scheme. The Portfolio Holder for the Environment would be invited to attend a meeting of the Review Committee to provide information.
- Budgets for Area Committees. This Review could include whether a budget would be appropriate/useful, the areas to which the budget could

be spent and where funding for the budgets would come from.

In respect of the request from the Audit Committee for a review of the Handyman and Gardening Services, the Committee noted the request but asked that the request be referred back to the Portfolio Holder in the first instance for resolution.

153 METHODOLOGY

The Committee gave consideration to the methodology it proposed adopting in order to achieve its work programme.

Following Member discussion, the following was noted:-

- The reviews would be undertaken by the Committee as a whole and within that task groups would be formed to review different aspects of the review, as appropriate.
- The Surface Drainage review would be undertaken by a task group.
- The Ageing review would be undertaken by task groups.
- The Portfolio Holder for the Environment would be asked to report on the initial charge for the bulky waste and WEEE at either the September or October 2009 meeting of the Review Committee. Issues to be discussed at the meeting would be prepared by Members in advance of the meeting.
- The task group to undertake the Budgets for Area Committees review would comprise: Cllrs Mrs J R Lumley, M Maddocks and M J Steptoe (a representative from each of the three Area Committees). Scoping for this review would be emailed to the task group Members in advance of the next meeting.
- It was suggested that a mechanism be devised to deal with requests from other Members wishing to become involved in the work of a task group either as a witness or as a member of a task group. It was agreed that a letter be written to all Members of the Council detailing the Committee's work programme for 2009/10 and inviting those Members who feel they have a contribution to write to register their interest and to specify the contribution they would like to make. It was agreed that role profiles for members of the task groups established would be useful.

154 REVIEW OF THE CHANGES TO THE NO 7 AND 8 BUS SERVICES

The Head of Planning and Transportation requested an amendment to the wording of Recommendation No 1. In respect of bus consultations, the usual procedure was for bus companies to go through the registration process and to notify the traffic commissioner of proposed changes. Essex County Council

would then write to the District Council and to Parish Councils via the Parish Clerk to notify them of the proposed changes.

Recommended to the Head of Planning & Transportation:-

- (1) That, if approached by a bus company, bus consultations are conducted with the relevant Parish Councils, as well as the District Council Members to ensure the widest of possible consultations.
- (2) That, wherever possible, if approached by a bus company consultations are conducted by letter rather than email and that they indicate the full extent of implications to the restructuring of the service and include a map of the route.

It was agreed that the text of the report could be changed to reflect changes in the recommendations, if necessary, and agreed with Chairman.

It was noted that an extension of no 7 service had been achieved for residents for a period of 6 months as a result of the review being undertaken.

Resolved

- (1) That the continued use of clearly defined Portfolio Holder letter templates by Portfolio Holders be endorsed.
- (2) That a letter of support in favour of providing a subsidised daily service during the week be sent to the Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.56 pm.

Chairman

Date

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