

1. How well does the Council contribute to the management of the physical environment

With a mix of town and country, Rochford seeks to manage the physical environment in a way that reflects the character of its urban and rural areas without one imposing on the other. Feedback from the emerging Community Plan consultation puts environmental issues high on the agenda.

Within the corporate property strategy, four areas of surplus land have been identified for development through Registered Social Landlord schemes, funded through the Housing Corporation, to provide much needed social housing. These sites are now subject to public consultation.

Bland town-centres with ageing facilities and concerns for safer communities, have been addressed in a programme of regeneration through partnership. Three schemes have been completed with one to be finished by mid 2004. Deteriorating properties in Rochford town centre have been compulsorily acquired for refurbishment in partnership with Southend Building Trust to return them to residential use. CCTV and improved street lighting has been introduced in Town Centres as part of the Crime and Disorder strategy to reduce the fear of crime.

A programme of refurbishment of Public conveniences is underway. Two schemes were completed in 2001 and won national awards for their design. Four more are programmed for 2003/04 and 2004/05. Most are in town centre locations integral to the appearance of the area.

The management of parking on public highways passes to the Council in October 2004. Illegal and inconsiderate parking is an issue identified by the Community Safety Team and new patrol officers will improve parking standards in the district.

The Council manages a number of Woodlands sites, including Hockley Woods, an ancient woodland of over 130 hectares, and designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by English nature. The woodlands are a valued area of recreation. Modern management reconciles the demands of recreation, education and nature conservation.

The Council's open spaces totalling 2.38 square kilometres were audited through a Best Value Review of Asset Management and a playing pitch assessment. Information gathered has been used in the replacement Local Plan and to programme work, primarily around pitch drainage and improvements to two playing fields. In Great Wakering, consultation identified the need for new open space for play provision. Subsequently new infant and senior play areas were constructed and opened in 2002 on land acquired for MOD. There is a rolling programme of play space refurbishment. The Council has transferred a number of recreation grounds and playspaces to the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) thereby safeguarding their future.

There is a rolling programme of playspace refurbishment, and two new skateboarding facilities have been created through this programme following consultation with the Parish Councils and the public in Canewdon, and Hullbridge. Signage to playspaces provides Council and emergency contact details for reporting repairs or other problems, the location of the nearest telephone and safety advice. Funding has been identified to improve the standard and extent of Woodlands signage. Further skateboarding facilities will be provided with the new Leisure Centre at the former Park School site.

The closure of Park School, Rayleigh, in which the Council had a shared leisure facility with Essex County, has provided an opportunity to improve leisure facilities and provide further open space in the Rayleigh area. The planning agreement provided the land for the creation of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, and already potential expansion of the site has been identified with funding allocated in 2003/2004/05. Additional funding is also being sought through partnership. Thames Gateway SE has already provided £50,000 for construction of a lake within the site in 2002/03 and further funding is likely in 2003/04.

Following a full Disability Access audit of Council buildings in 2000, funding has been provided in 2002/03/04 to address the issues identified. Priority is being given to public areas (mainly receptions) to coincide with an office accommodation review. Interim reception facilities that are fully DDA accessible will be provided at Rochford early in 2004. A survey and report has been prepared to improve access to playing fields and changing pavilions. Public toilets in the District are fully accessible and have disabled facilities. The Council's Disability Access Officer has regular meetings with the Rochford Access Committee for the Disabled on access issues and design implications of Council schemes. Leisure buildings will meet full access standards through refurbishment programmes within the Leisure contract to be completed by July 2004.

An LA21 strategy was prepared and adopted by the Council in 2000. This is now being incorporated in the emerging Community Strategy and the replacement Local Plan.

Through the Council's planning policy framework, design guidance notes, development control service, and design and heritage awards, the Council has been very proactive in encouraging quality in recent developments in the district and provides extensive advice to developers in various formats; it is particularly keen on promoting the importance of pre-application advice. It has a wide range of advice available in the form of Supplementary Planning Guidance. S106 agreements are used as a positive mechanism to obtain economic, social and environmental improvements.

Estate development is subject to detailed consultation with the Police Authority and assessed against the "secured by design" guidelines. Consideration is given to the potential for applications to enhance the street-scene. Walking and cycling issues are addressed and in a number of cases, development schemes have resulted in the provision of new open space or have contributed towards enhancement. Extensive cycling schemes introduced by Essex County Council the highway authority for the District, have resulted in physical improvements for both pedestrians and cyclists

The Council is a member of the Essex Environmental Protection Study Group, Contaminated Land Study groups, South East Essex Environmental Protection Committee (SEEPS), the Air Quality Consortium and the Bradwell Liaison Committee Comment on Central Government consultations: Nuclear Waste Disposal, Odours and other nuisances from sewage works and liaises with the Environment Agency. The Council also works with Rivercare, a voluntary group who carry out river bank cleaning.

With regard to air quality and contaminated land, Essex Air Quality Consortium has recruited a member of staff to co-ordinate air quality monitoring and assessment across the county. The consortium also employed external consultants to carry out their second air quality review and assessment for Essex. RDC's first review and assessment in 2000 concluded that there were no likely exceedances of air quality objectives within the District. The Essex Contaminated Land Study Group is producing guidance on contaminated land to assist planning agents and developers.

Areas of the district are at or below sea level. Some built improvements have been carried out to existing flood defences, but the eastern part of the District is high quality farm land with few residential properties. The risk of fluvial flooding to properties is small and those properties at risk have been identified and assisted. Drainage improvements are progressing through the Council's own resources, the EA, and in consultation with local landowners to provide additional capacity within the ditch network, as the outfalls are tidal.

Statutory nuisances are investigated in line with Enforcement Policy. Public entertainment licences are used to regulate noise levels from entertainment venues and control new venues. Officers respond promptly to pollution incidents.

A tree survey was carried out in 2002/3 to provide information on all trees in public areas, excluding highways. Where trees in private ownership are found to be dangerous, enforcement action is taken. Maintenance plans for woodlands sites are agreed with The Forestry Authority and English nature, to ensure grants are available for these sites. Although Highway Trees are managed by the Highway Authority a one stop approach is taken to ensure that the public can report problems through the Council.

The use of pesticides is managed closely to ensure that these cause no environmental problems. The use of peat products is forbidden within the Council's contracts. Planting in public open spaces is primarily indigenous plants.

2. Does the Council help keep the locality clean?

The Council seeks to ensure that the public highway and both public and private land is kept clean. Physical cleansing is managed under a 7 year contract that commenced in April 2001. Mechanical sweepers enhance the cleansing of town centres, with extra work on market days. A mix of Environmental Protection Act standards and some scheduled works, where more appropriate, are monitored daily. As part of programmed improvements, new cleansing schedules have been agreed for Public Conveniences, commencing in 2004.

Three contract monitoring officers (CMO) and a Parks Officer supervise street cleansing and grounds maintenance and monitor the refuse contract. This work includes regular highway inspection and investigation of abandoned vehicles, fly-tipping and other environmental issues. Litter bins and dog waste bins are also maintained, with bin sizes or collection frequency varied as necessary. Planned maintenance programmes ensure that the overall environment is maintained to both EPA standards and those set by

RDC. Public surveys are used to identify and address shortfalls in provision. Housing Estate managers inspect estates and report maintenance issues. The Council caretaker carries out estate cleaning, monitoring and inspection.

Following the Asset Management Best Value Review, dog fouling was identified as an issue on open spaces. New signage and installation of extra dog waste bins have been provided at locations identified as problem areas through a Sponsorship agreement with Bayer. Health & Safety leaflets concerning toxicaria are displayed on Parks notice boards where circumstances suggest an area problem. The Council also adopted the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 and is looking to introduce street wardens to enforce this Act. This has also been identified through the Enforcement Best Value Review, and additional staff and financial resources are being sought.

As a member of the Waste Management Advisory Board (WMAB), the Council is playing an active part in the production of the Essex Waste Management Strategy. This is at the draft stage but includes a number of key elements such as waste minimisation and avoidance, review of markets, education and awareness and recycling and recovery objectives.

The Council promotes litter partnership initiatives with local community groups. The Council also provides advice on pest control to the public and there is a free pest control service for vermin affecting residential properties and a reduced rate for insect infestations

The Council operates a kerbside recycling scheme for approximately 18% of the households in the District, currently producing a recycling rate of about 11%. A composting scheme operates in conjunction with Essex County Council and those properties with kerbside recycling also have a green waste collection. The recycling standard for 2004 has been met in 2003, and expansion commenced in September 2003 with the addition of a further half round. The Council is investigating partnership opportunities to recycle/reuse electrical/electronic goods in accordance with the WEE regulations.

A "Scrap Heap" Sculpture at St Marks Field Hall during Easter 2003, was part of an educational project on recycling. Frequent advertising of the Council's collection scheme for bulky household items, white goods and fridges has reduced incidents of household goods fly-tipping in public areas.

A fly tipping Protocol has been adopted and the Council works closely with the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and Parishes in dealing with the nuisance. With regard to private land action is taken through planning enforcement if the landowner is unwilling to resolve the problem.

The Council promoted an initiative for dealing with Abandoned Vehicles and established a training project, taken up by 10 Districts, Parish Councils and other public bodies. This led to an Essex Working Party on Abandoned Vehicles, and resulted in a Countywide Agreement on Disposal arrangements.

Graffiti is taken in context and location – that which is offensive e.g. racial/sexual – is removed quickly. However graffiti that is not abusive and is part of a culture e.g. in skateboarding, can engender ownership of a scheme and will be left. A graffiti problem at Rochford Garden Way was resolved by a spray can art project involving a local artist and a group of youths that resulted in no further graffiti in this location. This scheme will be updated following refurbishment works at Rochford Garden Way, in consultation with tenants.

3. Does the Council work with partners to improve community safety?

Although statistically Rochford is one of the safest Districts in the country, perception of crime remains high and we are not crime free. One Police Division covers Rochford and Castle Point and a PCT straddles both areas providing a compelling driver to joint working.

Partnership working has been developed further in the revised Crime & Disorder Strategy (C&D) covering 2002-05. Partners are; the Police and Policy authority, Fire Service, Probation Service, ECC Youth and Social Services, local Primary Care Trust, Chambers of Trade, Secondary Schools (4), Parish Councils, Housing Associations and Schemes and representatives from the voluntary sector representing a range of interests and age groups.

Meetings are held every 2 months with a formal agenda and minutes. Nevertheless, a more rigorous and effective administrative process is proposed for 2004 in preparation for a new 3-year strategy. Outcomes from the current strategy include; CCTV schemes, road safety initiatives for young people, PACT (a

networking project for young people, from a small voluntary sector sub-partnership), Parish Conferences with a Community Safety focus, business initiatives, calls on citizens around crime prevention, and post crime to provide both comfort and alarms or spy holes, a Domestic Violence information service in Rochford in partnership with a local voluntary group, a handyman service for older people with a Housing Association, presentations to Schools and attendance at outside public events with our mobile unit.

A Drug and Alcohol Reference Group acts as a driver for a number of events concerning drug abuse that stand-alone or dovetail with general C&D events and seeks to identify additional strategies to promote safer living for young people.

Whilst the Council manages Home Office and other funding streams and the administration for the Rochford C&D partnership, it also ensures that other agencies are engaged where appropriate. The Council consults and often pools its resources with other agencies for many activities relating to C&D. It also provides its own C&D programme around leisure, planning and public awareness initiatives.

All Council Departments understand the need to build C&D into their plans and strategies, and C&D implications appear on all committee reports. Areas of improvements, such as staff induction to community safety and departmental information sharing, are being explored.

Anti-social behaviour, e.g. youth nuisance, is being carefully evaluated and reporting of incidents of 'Hate Crime' is encouraged. Specific liaison activities with the Police involve a revised protocol around use of CCTV data as evidence, and an ASBO protocol is in place. A database of incidents has also been developed.

4. Does the Council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?

A programme of sport, arts and cultural activities is provided throughout the year, especially during school holidays. This is widely advertised in the Council's Newspaper and Web Site and through flyers distributed in schools. Participation has grown steadily since 1999, and in excess of 4,300 children took part in events in 2002/3. The programme looks to expand the range of activities annually, and the take up of new events is carefully monitored. User Surveys are carried out after all events, to help decide on future programmes. Take up of places at a recent Festival of Sport offering taster sessions, held in conjunction with Holmes Place at Clements Hall, was almost fully subscribed with 476 children taking part. As far as possible, young people are consulted and activities aimed at specific groups, whether by age, sex or ability. Locations are chosen for suitability of venue for the activity and timed to coincide with school holidays or after school.

Activities are provided in partnership with Holmes Place, local sports clubs and arts organisations, Essex County Youth services and other organisations, to promote sport and encourage children to join local clubs and provide thriving community activities. Schools are principal partners in providing activities for children and young people, hosting activities and assisting with consultation. Parish Councils help in consulting with young people and have contributed funding towards activities. Parish Council newsletters, school newsletters, direct mailing and local libraries are used to publicise events as well as local newspapers. Playschemes for children with disabilities have been provided and lessons learned. The Council is looking to expand this provision in the future.

In addition to presentations to Schools, the Community Safety Team works with the CDRP on a number of diversionary projects, examples of which are the Stambridge Basketball Court, a DJ Project, and "Crucial Crew" for older young people. The Youth Service has piggybacked drugs awareness sessions onto Council managed summer holiday sport activities. Last year, funding was provided to Essex Police for transport for schools to enable attendance at a "2smart4 drugs" road show. This will be repeated in 2004, with ambitions to drive the message home in subsequent years. Other future CDRP plans will involve the Fire Service with a youth initiative covering fire safety, and some funding for an Essex Young Persons Drugs Advisory Service.

The Council in partnership with Essex County and Rochford Parish provides a drop in centre and youth project in Rochford at 57 South Street. The Council is also a member of the Youth Strategy Forum which brings together Connexions (ECC), the Youth Service, Individuals, and Rochford Members looking at improvements to youth provision. The Council has also been participating in promoting the Essex Youth Assembly which will be holding elections in January 2004. The Council will be looking at youth services, provision and policies through Overview and Scrutiny in the New Year.

The Council is working on a child protection policy to be adopted by early 2004. In the meantime coaches and volunteers must have CRB checks.