

## **Parish Liaison Sub-Committee – 24 February 2005**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Parish Liaison Sub-Committee** held on **24 February 2005** when there were present:-

Cllr Mrs M J Webster (Chairman)

Cllr P A Capon  
Cllr T Livings

Cllr C J Lumley

### **VISITING MEMBER**

Cllr D G Stansby

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs J Smith, Canewdon Parish Council and Cllr C Morgan, Hullbridge Parish Council.

### **DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT**

R Crofts	- Corporate Director, (Finance & External Services)
M Martin	- Committee Administrator

### **COUNTY COUNCIL OFFICERS PRESENT**

S Thallon	- Area Co-ordinator South Essex, Essex County Council
I Hatton	- Policy and Programme Manager, Essex County Council

### **TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES**

Cllr P Lonergan	- Ashingdon Parish Council
Cllr V Leach	- Hawkwell Parish Council
Cllr R Adams	- Rayleigh Town Council
Cllr K Attridge	- Rochford Parish Council

## **8 MINUTES**

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

## **9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs T Livings and C J Lumley both declared a personal interest by virtue of being Members of Rayleigh Town Council.

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

Cllr D G Stansby declared a personal interest by virtue of being the Chairman of the District Council's Playspace Sub-Committee.

### **10 PARISH COUNCIL PARTNERSHIP**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services providing an update of previously agreed action and inviting the consideration of further work in connection with Parish Council partnerships.

#### **Partnership Action Plan**

During discussion of the Action Plan, the following points were noted/actions agreed:-

- The next update of District Council officer contacts would be circulated during March.
- The Sub-Committee was concerned to ensure that an appropriate procedure is put in place in respect of responses received from Town/Parish Councils with regard to planning applications. It was assumed that they are date stamped on arrival in the District Council. Members indicated that, whilst understanding that the details would not be published, if a response was received outside the statutory consultation period they still wished to know whether or not a Town/Parish Council response had been received. Officers agreed to bring further clarification to the next meeting of this Sub-Committee.
- Clarification was requested around the response that Essex County Council had been unable to supply current Parish website details as a meeting had been cancelled. County Council officers present at the meeting were unable to advise Members, but agreed to let the Sub-Committee have a response via the Chairman. This response would be circulated to the Town/Parish Councils.

#### **Parish IT Survey**

The summary of replies to the IT survey had been appended to the officer's report. Canewdon Parish Council had advised that their return would be sent back during March

The entry relating to Rochford Parish Council in the IT survey should have read 'Finance'.

#### **Playspaces**

Details relating to proposed cost sharing had been appended to the officer's report.

It was noted that:-

- The figures were as accurately apportioned as possible, based on a fixed costs of £900 for the following:-
  - The annual NPFA inspection
  - Inspections by the District Council
  - Grass cutting by the Council's contractor
- Added to this had been a figure of £268 per piece of equipment, excluding small items, for example, basketball hoops.
- Members had previously agreed that some sort of recompense should be made for those Town/Parish Councils with their own playspaces. A figure of £2,900 per playspace had been calculated as an average cost, regardless of the size of the playspace.
- Hockley Parish have playspaces of their own, obviating the need to make any contribution.
- It was reported that Canewdon Parish Council wish to have the swing at Rowan Way removed. This was to be reported back to the Playspace Sub-Committee.
- The District Council recognises that Town/Parish Councils have already set their precept figures and that these negotiations are with a view to any transfer of costs not being implemented until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006.
- The Town/Parish Councils are only being invited to pick up running costs.
- The Sutton Court/Warwick Drive playspace is the subject of further consideration and a meeting of the Playspace Sub-Committee will be convened shortly to enable discussions to continue.
- Detailed negotiations would take place with individual Town/Parish Councils.
- A £50,000 capital sum had been set aside for planned renovation.
- The District Council is currently investigating whether trust status could be obtained to protect open spaces and play areas from development. Where playspaces are leased to a Town/Parish Council, permission will be required for them to be put into trust. Any trust which is set up needs to be appropriate for the particular playspace.

### **Rochford District Council Budget**

Appended to the report was a summary of the budget strategy for 2005/06. Parishes had been invited to submit any comments on the priorities.

It was noted that the District Council tax for 2005/06 had been set at 4.93%.

The Corporate Director confirmed that there was a proposal for free parking being restricted to those blue badge holders who qualified for motor tax exemption. The statutory process of advertising and consulting on the proposed car parking charges was currently being undertaken. The Council would give serious consideration to all views in respect of the new car parking proposals before any final decisions were made.

Town/Parish representatives were pleased to note that the District Council wanted to generate community activity for St George's Day and it was hoped that all Town/Parish Councils would participate.

### **Essex County Council – Community Strategy 2004-2024**

Representatives from the County Council were welcomed to the meeting.

During discussion it was noted that:-

- The County Council are keen to build capacity in local communities in order that Town/Parish Councils are better enabled to serve their communities.
- To this end a grant of £1,000 per parish would be made available to be used for IT and other community projects.
- The County Council recognises that 'one size does not fit all' and want to tailor their services to meet individual needs. They also want to look at other ways of providing support, such as with procurement, and assistance with IT and other equipment, such as printing etc.
- Town/Parish Councillors expressed gratitude at the grant being allocated by the County Council and at the possibilities around accessing County-wide procurement channels. It was recognised that it is of the utmost importance to maintain good channels of communication between the three tiers of authority.
- County officers advised that they wanted to avoid overloading small Councils with too much information and provide officer support in the form of an on-demand information service. Feedback would be welcomed.
- In respect of IT, it would obviously be of value if Town/Parish Councils had systems that were compatible with the District and County.
- It was noted that in certain parts of the County, a Broadband connection is not available and that not all small Councils would necessarily choose this form of connection anyway. The County gave reassurance that communications would continue to be available in a variety of formats to suit the needs of individual Town/Parishes.

- Representatives from the Town/Parish Councils expressed particular concern at the high costs for a small Council of upgrading and running an IT system. County officers confirmed that they would take away these comments, but that the use of IT would remain an option for those who want to use it.
- If Clerks are trained in the use of technology, Councillors don't necessarily need training.

### **Out of Hours Cover**

Information is awaited from Town/Parish Councils relating to whether they have any out of hours response and how that is provided.

### **Issues for Parishes**

Town/Parish Clerks are invited to provide written submissions for anything for discussion at future meetings of this Sub-Committee.

### **Review of Consultation Charter**

The document "Working with Local Councils – Consultation Charter and Code of Practice" had been appended to the report and Town/Parish Council had been invited to consider the way the document is updated and the timetable.

It was agreed that Town/Parish Clerks should feedback their views which would be considered by the Sub-Committee at its next meeting. The views of the County would also be welcomed and it was agreed that they be invited to attend the next meeting.

In response to a Member question, it was noted that when spare capacity is available, the District Council's small in-house Architectural and Engineering Service is available to Town/Parish Councils for advice on small-scale projects.

A discussion took place around whether Town/Parish Councillors had sufficient understanding of the work of the Standard Boards for England. It was agreed that this should be considered in more detail at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

The next meeting of the Sub-Committee would be held in June 2005.

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The meeting convened at 7.30 pm and closed at 9.20 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....