

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 1 July 2014

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.10 pm

Members Present: Councillors R Morgan (Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee) (Chairman) K Angold-Stephens (Vice-Chairman) G Chambers, K Chana, D Dorrell, L Girling, P Keska, Mrs J Lea, A Mitchell MBE, S Murray, Mrs M Sartin, Ms G Shiell, B Surtees, A Watts and D Wixley

Other Councillors: Councillors R Bassett, W Breare-Hall, R Butler, Mrs A Grigg, Ms H Kane, S Neville, J Philip, D Stallan, Ms S Stavrou and G Waller

Apologies: Councillors B Rolfe

Officers Present: G Chipp (Chief Executive), D Macnab (Director of Neighbourhoods), S G Hill (Assistant Director (Governance & Performance Management)), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation: P Morgan (Epping Forest College)

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members for the meeting.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 01 April 2014 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor W Breare-hall declared a non pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 – presentation on the strategic direction of Epping Forest College, by virtue of being the Chairman of Governors for Epping Forest College. He advised that he would remain in the meeting for the duration of the item.

5. PRESENTATION ON THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF EPPING FOREST COLLEGE

The Chairman welcomed Penny Morgan, the recently appointed Principal of Epping Forest College; she was appointed in December 2013. She was there to speak on the strategic direction of the college, its vision for the future and its relationship with the Community. She noted that she was working with the governors to create a long and short term strategy for the college. The college had made great strides over the last five years, taking in over 3,500 students each year and had hundreds of visitors that come in to use the college for various events etc. Over 85% of the students live within 10 miles of the college. The college was also a major employer for local people, over 59% of staff live within 10 miles of the college, thus contributing to the local economy.

They provided a wide range training, skills and educational provision, such as Business, Childcare, Construction, Media and Music, IT, Maths and English and Sport, ensuring that they were giving students the best opportunity to become work ready and gain employment. They also work with local employers and help to provide apprenticeships in local businesses, an achievement they were very proud off.

They had a 93.4% retention rate, putting them in the top 5% of FE Colleges in the country and an 87.7% success rate, putting them in the top 10% of FE colleges in the country. They were always striving to improve on the range of courses and opportunities offered to their clients whilst additional demands were placed on them by the government. They had about 417 students currently sitting their English and Maths GCSE and over 1800 students sitting functional skills. Needless to say Ofsted had included this in their grading for colleges. They will also continue with their 'A' level programme that compliments their full time courses, the students would need these 'A' levels to move on to university.

When the college was redeveloped some years ago the Debden library was situated just off the main reception area. The opening hours were somewhat limited and some members of the local community were not comfortable coming into such a busy area. Clearly they would want to assist as many people as possible to have access and are therefore considering a space that would give the library its own entrance and provide special offers at their restaurant and other facilities.

They were also forging closer ties with the Loughton Youth Centre establishing a whole breath of activities with the local community and were involved in a number of new joint initiatives with the LSP and other local organisations.

They were currently writing a report on the future of the college, targeting 2017; this had still to be submitted their board of governors for their consideration and as such she could not share its contents with the meeting just yet.

The meeting was then opened out to questions from the members of the committee.

Councillor Angold-Stephens asked that in view of the potential creation of the new 6th form consortium in the area involving Roding Valley High School, Debden Park School, King Harold School and St. Johns School, how did she see the future for 'A level' provision in the College going forward? Ms Morgan replied that she had looked at the post codes of the students attending her college and noted that there were about 50 'A' level students but only four were from local schools.

Councillor Murray noted that there would almost certainly be a 6th form consortium for the schools mentioned. As the bulk of students would not want to do 'A' levels, how

would you let them know that you also do vocational courses? Ms Morgan said that this was a big challenge for the college. They have a full time officer who goes to the schools to get the college's message across to the children about what they had to offer; but they were not always sure that they got their message across.

Councillor Lea asked what did she envisage for the future of the playing field opposite the College in Borders Lane and in what timescale? Ms Morgan noted that their growth area was sport, this also applied to the participation of the community. This area will have to go to the board of governors for discussion on its future.

Councillor Girling noted that the playing field had fallen into a state of disrepair over the years. Could she reassure the local residents that even without any development, that the area would be kept up? Ms Morgan said that this would form part of their discussion on the green.

Councillor Murray added that when this document was agreed by the governors, would it be acted upon or would it firstly go out to consultation. His advice was that it had never been public land but it had always been used as such. He would like to see sort of buffer strip of land put in for community use. Ms Morgan replied that it would be consulted upon and it would indeed include some form of communal land on it.

Councillor Sartin said that she had visited the College last year for an art exhibition and the opening of the hair salon and was impressed with the high standards. The achievements and standards of the College had risen significantly in recent years with the last Ofsted inspection rating the College as 'good'. Did she intend to continue the approach of her predecessor to improve standards still further or was she looking towards a change in focus for the College. Also, in the presentation you stated that the college had an 87% success rate, what did this mean? Ms Morgan replied that it meant that of the 93% retention rate, 87% were retained and had achieved their programme. They have now reviewed and developed strategic aims for the college. Two of these aims were focused around continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning within the organisation.

Councillor Wixley noted that some years ago the relationship between the College and local residents was poor. In recent years the College had made strenuous efforts, including a zero tolerance approach towards bad behaviour, in order to improve relations and significant progress had been made but there were still some lingering tensions which will take time to be resolved. Do you have any initiatives in mind to further break down barriers and continue to improve relations with residents? Ms Morgan noted that they were always working on this and continued to engage with the community. They are on the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and are involved in local projects and local youth groups such as E15.

Councillor Angold-Stephens asked if Ms Morgan could enlarge on the problem of the library. When the College was re-developed there was, it was thought, a good initiative to bring gown and town more together by locating the library in the College. Unfortunately this had not worked and it has proved difficult to get local people to step over the College threshold in order to enter the library even though it was more welcoming than its previous incarnation and they can even use the café if they wished! There are thought to be a number of reasons, including elderly people (who are likely to be amongst the biggest users) not feeling comfortable in the presence of younger, more boisterous people but also poor signage. Many local people do not seem to be aware that the library exists and that they would be welcome to enter without going through security. Although this was not a College responsibility, did you have any ideas on how this can be improved? Ms Morgan noted that the library

now has its own entrance and there was also an opportunity to move the library to the other end of the restaurant to give it its own entrance and also to use the Student Ambassadors to go out into the community to promote the use of the facilities.

Councillor Surtees commented that local social interaction was important in Loughton, but could she also engage with the local communities beyond Loughton. Ms Morgan agreed with the sentiment and added that part of their courses was to do voluntary work around the district and they were definitely encouraging that.

Councillor Girling noted that the upper site of the college was being developed and residents had reported some problems in the past about anti-social behaviour in the evenings; how had this been addressed? Ms Morgan agreed that the site had been vandalised and that they now have security guards that patrol the site. This area will form part of their upcoming accommodation strategy.

Councillor Wixley wanted to know what the college's current financial position was. Ms Morgan replied that they were not in deficit but it was challenging as funding had been reduced by about £600,000 over the year. They needed to grow and develop and look to the provision of part time courses and other new ways of providing their services.

Councillor Murray commented that had put paid to the much lauded governments policy to protect the education budget. He had an idea that could help the college in that residential development brought in money and that the district was desperate for 2 and 3 bedroom accommodation.

Councillor Sartin commented that it was pleasing to note that we now have a student from the college sitting on our Youth Council as an independent. We are looking forward to the 6th form consortium that may be part of future elections. Ms Morgan said she looked forward to that.

Councillor Surtees asked if she could say something about how multi-faith issues were dealt with within the college and also would she welcome a liaison between a multi-faith forum, this council and the students, with the aim of publicising the forum and getting people together, especially young people. Ms Morgan agreed they would like to do that and they did, through their 'enrichment team' work with multi-faith groups and anything we can do to grow that work and encourage joint partnership working.

Councillor Bassett made a personal statement on the work done by the food task force. He found it quite informative when the college worked with us to identify job opportunities and create the jobs and also working on creating the NVQ that went with it. Also they worked with the local employers and the schools and the Department of Works and Pensions and helped them work with young people and hopefully produce some 300 jobs over the next couple of years within the food industry. I would like to thank the college for the work they had done on this.

Ms Morgan said it was just one example of how the college wants to change and broaden what it offers. We want to work with local industry and the local task force groups and with the Lea Valley growers to develop career opportunities for the young people.

Councillor Mitchell wanted to know what the college's induction courses were for new pupils. Ms Morgan replied that they have an officer who went out to talk to schools and arrange try out days on Saturdays for pupils to try out the college facilities.

Councillor Breare-Hall noted that the quality of the college was paramount to the governing body. They also wished to see the college developing at the heart of the local community and were very aware of local feelings particularly about Luctons fields and we will consult about this.

The Chairman thanked Ms Morgan for her excellent presentation and for answering all the questions put to her.

6. REVIEW OF CABINET FORWARD PLAN

In the absence of the Leader, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Stavrou introduced the Cabinet's Forward Plan and Key Objectives for the coming year.

She noted that the Cabinet took an interest in the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and appreciated the important role scrutiny played in providing checks and balances to the Executive. Last year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed that the Leader would attend to provide details of the Cabinet's work programme and Key Objectives for 2014/15 to advise the Committee of their future work and identify mutual areas of interest where the O&S Committee could assist the Cabinet in undertaking bespoke pieces of review.

It was noted that attached to the agenda was the Cabinet's Key Objectives for 2014/15. They are presented under a number of broad themes and these constitute the priorities of the Cabinet over the next municipal year. Progress against last year's key objectives was reported elsewhere in the agenda. It was noted that a number of items are an extension of last year's programme. Also attached is the Cabinet's work programme listing all the Key Decisions that they would be making over the next four months in order to deliver their Key Objectives.

She noted that the local plan was probably the most significant document that the Council would produce for many years. It would determine the future character of our District and help us deliver benefits to our residents in terms of homes and employment. All key decisions in relation to the Local Plan will be taken by the Cabinet, but they wish to be as consultative in their approach as possible. She noted that the Scrutiny Panel on Planning was responsible for scrutinising the Local Plan and this was an area where she hoped the Cabinet and Scrutiny could work together.

Councillor Stavrou highlighted that the Council was keen to embark on a Council House-building Programme and the Housing Portfolio Holder had established a Cabinet Committee to advise him. With tenders being received for the first phase this was an exciting initiative for the Council.

The Council had also embarked on the development of a new Leisure and Cultural Strategy, which would not only clarify the role that the Council would play in future provision, but also determine the best way to procure the new Leisure Management Contract. A draft report would be going to this Committee in September and she would welcome the Committee's input into its conclusions.

The performance of the KPI's was now being considered by the individual Scrutiny Panels and she would welcome any feedback about how this worked in practice.

Finally she noted that the Cabinet would like the assistance of Overview and Scrutiny. The Council operated a Grant Aid Scheme to support the valuable work of the voluntary sector. To date they had managed to protect the level of funding; however as financial pressure built, it was important that the most was gained from the council's resources. Councillor Kane the new Leisure and Communities Portfolio

Holder would like scrutiny to undertake a review of the Grant Aid policies and procedures and asked that Overview and Scrutiny undertake this work on the Cabinet's behalf, by possibly establishing a Task and Finish Panel.

She would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

Councillor Watts commented that the table for Key objectives for 2014/15 shown on page 23 of the agenda had a column entitled "Targets/How Measured". A lot of these were not targets or were measurable, but were deliverables. Such as the 'Community Engagements' section which indicated that the programme of community focussed consultation would be delivered by 31 March 2015. But this was not a target. It should focus on what outcomes we were trying to achieve and what outcomes we could measure. This also applied to the Local Plan section and the outcome of local plans. Successful outcomes would be something not challenged by the inspector.

The Director of Neighbourhoods noted his concerns that he would like to make the targets smarter; we could ask management board to look at this. The Chief Executive was happy to do this and work with any suggestions for improvements, although we did need to know we were successful in delivering our objectives.

Councillor Murray thanked Councillor Stavrou for her presentation and was happy to endorse the way the Council House-building programme was to be progressed. Also if a review of Community Grant Aid was to be had I would endorse a one off Task and Finish Panel to do this. He was also glad to see the item on the refurbishment of the 'Charlie Moules Footbridge' in the Roding Valley Recreational Area, as this was important to local residents.

Councillor Murray noted that listed under 'Community Engagement' was the stated aim of safeguarding frontline services. What was under threat? Safeguarding front line services should be a given.

Also one of the objectives was to have the lowest Council Tax in Essex; I'm sure we were all in favour of this but, I'm not sure you can agree to just having the lowest Council Tax, especially if this threatens our front line services. Can you comment on this and also on your stated aims of providing a more commercial approach service delivery?

Councillor Stavrou replied that the front line services were important to us and so we kept it in the forefront of our policies, which is why we keep mentioning it. A low Council Tax was not a bad aspiration; there was nothing wrong with wanting this. We need targets to aim for. As for a more commercial approach to service delivery I'll ask an officer to comment.

The Chief Executive, Glen Chipp, noted that they were safeguarding the front line services and reorganising officers. By doing this they had saved about £1million last year and had saved the front line services. As for a commercial approach, a lot of councils were in the same position. Central Government grants will continue to reduced and so we would need to find alternatives for this by other means and to look at generating revenue streams from our services.

Councillor Waller noted that the 'Charlie Moules Footbridge' fell within the remit of Country Care. Complications held up repairs for over a year. Loughton Town Council had been involved in this and has also held up repairs. Councillor Breare-Hall will be bringing a report on this to Cabinet in October.

Councillor Angold-Stephens commented that it was a bland statement to have the lowest Council Tax in Essex and was fairly meaningless. It was better to say the lowest Council Tax in Essex while maintaining a high level of services, or were we just after low Council Taxes. Councillor Philip said this is a measure of what we should achieve; it was an admirable aim, to do as much as we can with what we have.

Councillor Chambers welcomed the Cabinet's Forward Plan and in particular the suggestion that we look at Grant Aid procedures.

Councillor Wixley asked where we were on the league table for Council Tax in Essex. Councillor Stavrou said we were the second lowest.

Councillor Surtees noted that the issue of low Council Tax was important as it affected all residents. It was important that we have an understanding that it affects everybody. We should recognise that in parts of our district we have significant areas of poverty. I would like to see a low Council Tax, but high enough to look after our residents.

Councillor Sartin proposed that a Task and Finish Panel be set up to look at Grant Aid policies and procedures. This was agreed by the Committee. A PICK form was to be submitted.

RESOLVED:

That at their next meeting a Task and Finish Panel be set up to review the Council's Grant Aid policies and procedures.

7. CORPORATE PLAN KEY OBJECTIVES 2013/14 - OUTTURN

Councillor Stavrou introduced the report setting out the year end outturn of the Corporate Plan Key Objectives for 2013/14. A range of key objectives for 2013/14 was adopted by the Cabinet in March 2013; progress in relation to individual actions and deliverables are reviewed on a quarterly basis. Performance for the first nine months of the year was considered by this Committee at its meeting on 25 February 2014.

At the end of the year, 23 (42.6%) of the individual deliverables or actions supporting the key objectives had either been completed or achieved. Some 20 (37.0%) deliverables or actions were not completed by year-end. A further 11 (20.3%) deliverables or actions were on-hold at year end, as a result of external circumstances.

It was noted that this report was considered by the Cabinet on 23 June 2014. The committee then considered the outturn of each objective as set out.

Councillor Murray noted that the new Tenant Scrutiny Panel had just completed its first service review.

Councillor Watts noted that the Development of Council's Economic Development Strategy status was said to be 'behind schedule'. Did this imply they would not complete this task? Councillor Grigg replied that the target date was now September 2014. They had employed consultants to look at this. Councillor Watts asked if it was therefore under control. Councillor Philip noted that this was an historical document and at that time it was behind schedule, but now it was under control.

RESOLVED:

That the end of year position in relation to the achievement of the Council's Key Objectives for 2013/14 be noted.

8. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERSHIP TO SCRUTINY PANELS

The Committee were asked to make appointments to Scrutiny Panels in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny rules. The Committee were reminded that the Council had agreed pro rata applied to Standing Panels and that membership should be kept to a minimum to allow each Group to have representation. It was noted that on this basis it had been agreed by group leaders that Panels would consist of 11 Members, including any independent member that wished to be a member of a Panel.

It was reported that nominations to Chairman and Vice Chairman to Standing Panels were excluded from the pro rata calculation rules required for such positions contained in the Council's constitution.

RESOLVED:

That the appointments to Standing Panels annexed to these minutes be adopted.

9. APPOINTMENT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH PANEL

The Committee considered the membership of an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel to review the future structure of the Scrutiny Panels. They agreed that it should mirror the previous Overview and Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Panel in terms of membership.

RESOLVED:

That the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel reviewing the future structure of the Scrutiny Panels be:

K Angold-Stephens (Chairman) LRA;
R Gadsby (Con);
A Grigg (Con);
M Sartin (Con);
D Stallan (Con); and
J H Whitehouse (Lib Dem).

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

The Committee received the amended annual Overview and Scrutiny Report for 2013/14 incorporating comments made at their meeting of 1 April 2014.

Councillor Murray thought it was a very good report and wanted to give his thanks to the Scrutiny Housing Panel members and officers, and his special thanks to his vice-Chairman. He thought that the case study was a particularly good example of scrutiny work carried out by the Housing Standing Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report for 2013/14 be agreed and submitted to the Full Council at its meeting on 29 July 2014.

11. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING

a) Work Programme

The Committee considered their work programme for the coming year. They noted that in order to submit a request for new work, members would need to submit a PICK form. Publicity was also being put in place to enable members of the public to submit a simplified form on our website. Officers will also be going to a Local Councils Liaison Meeting to ask them if they had any suggestions for scrutiny to consider.

They noted that the Standing Panels would be agreeing their work programmes at their first meetings.

b) Reserve Programme

It was noted that a PICK form may be submitted asking O&S to look at the operation of the Planning Committee and its sub-committees.

CHAIRMAN

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Scrutiny Panel Nominations for 2014/15

Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel

Chairman: M Sartin

Vice Chairman: A Watts

Conservative Group (7): M Sartin / A Watts / J Philip / D Stallan / G Waller / M McEwen / J Lea

Liberal Democrats Group (1): J H Whitehouse

LRA Group (2): Caroline Pond / S Weston

Other Nominations (1):

Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel

Chairman: T Church

Vice Chairman: A Mitchell

Conservative Group (7): T Church / A Mitchell / E Webster / J Knapman / G Mohindra / S Watson / H Ulkun

Liberal Democrats Group (1): J M Whitehouse

LRA Group (2): K Angold-Stephens / H Mann

Other Nominations (1): D Dorrell

Housing Scrutiny Panel

Chairman: S Murray

Vice Chairman: G Shiell

Conservative Group (7): G Shiell / S Jones / J Lea / H Ulkun / B Rolfe / R Gadsby / K Chana

Liberal Democrats Group (1): J H Whitehouse

LRA Group (2): T Thomas / C Roberts

Other Nominations (1): S Murray

Safer Cleaner Greener Scrutiny Panel

Chairman: J Lea

Vice Chairman: H Brady

Conservative Group (7): J Lea / H Brady / Y Knight / E Webster / M Sartin / R Gadsby / K Chana

Liberal Democrats Group (1): B Surtees

LRA Group (2): R Jennings / L Mead

Other Nominations (1): S Neville

Planning Services Scrutiny Panel

Chairman: G Chambers

Vice Chairman: Y Knight

Conservative Group (7): G Chambers / Y Knight / M McEwen / B Sandler / A Watts / G Shiell / S Watson

Liberal Democrats Group (1): B Surtees

LRA Group (2): H Kaufman / D Wixley

Other Nominations (1): D Dorrell
