

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consisted of the following members:

Councillor R Morgan (Chairman)
Councillor K Angold-Stephens (Vice Chairman)
Councillors G Chambers, K Chana, A Church, L Girling, D Jacobs, H Kane, P Keska, A Lion, A Mitchell, S Murray, J Philip, B Rolfe and D Wixley.

The Lead Officer was Derek Macnab, Deputy Chief Executive.

Terms of Reference

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's main functions are to monitor and scrutinise the work of the executive and its forward plan, external bodies linked to the District Council and the Council's financial performance. It is tasked with the consideration of call-ins, policy development, performance monitoring and reviewing corporate strategies.

The Committee's workload over the past year can be broken down as follows:

(a) Scrutinising and monitoring Cabinet work

The Committee has a proactive role in this area through carrying out pre-scrutiny work. This involved receiving and considering the Cabinet agenda a week prior to the Cabinet meeting.

(b) Call-ins

The Committee received just one call-in this year.

At a special meeting on 27 August 2013, the Committee considered the call-in of the Cabinet's decision (report C-018-2013/14) regarding the option to be considered for North Weald Airfield as part of the Local Plan process. The call-in was concerned only with parts 2 and 3 of the decision taken by the Cabinet, that:

“(2) That the following options not be given further consideration as part of the Local Plan process:

- (a) the intensification of aviation based solution; and*
- (b) the non-aviation based solution with a focus on residential development; and*
- (c) the non-aviation based solution with a focus on commercial development.*

And

(3) That, for the mixed aviation/development based option, a further high level master planning exercise focusing on feasibility, deliverability and

incorporating the option in the Local Plan be undertaken as part of the assessment process leading to the Local Plan Preferred Options consultation in May 2014.”

The lead member of the call-in, Councillor Watson was asked to open the discussion.

After a long discussion on the merits of the call-in, at the end of which the Portfolio Holder concluded that she believed that she had answered the questions the call-in posed. Option 3 would be out to consultation in the next year. The public could still comment or add more options then. The costs were greater for options 2a and 2b than they were for option 3. The Cabinet had tried to make option 3 as fair as possible by providing housing and continuing with aviation as well as keeping the heritage of the site. She asked the Committee to reject this call-in and endorse the Cabinet's decision.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on consideration of the merits of the call-in and all the arguments raised, confirmed the original decision of the Cabinet regarding options to be considered for North Weald Airfield as part of the Local Plan Process.

(c) Standing Panels work programme monitoring

The Committee received regular updates from the Chairmen of the various Scrutiny Panels reporting on the progress made on their current work programme. This allowed the Committee to monitor their performance and when necessary adjust their work plans to take into account new proposals and urgent items.

(d) Items considered by the committee this year

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received various presentations and considered a range of diverse topics.

Presentations:

(i) Children Services and Corporate Parenting - The Committee at their meeting in June 2013 received a presentation from Jenny Boyd, the Director of Local Delivery West, Children's Social Care at Essex County Council. She was there to talk about Corporate Parenting and Children Services, what corporate parenting was and just what was a members' responsibility in relation to it.

These responsibilities were primarily laid out in the Children Act 1989 and updated and refined in subsequent legislation.

The Committee noted that in some circumstances we share parental responsibilities for these children in care and care leavers. Some of the duties and responsibilities on local authorities are for planning, safeguarding, promoting health, wellbeing and life chances. Duties to care leavers extend to at least age 21.

Councillors needed to be aware of the corporate parenting role and the shared responsibility for ensuring that the needs of children were met. They also needed to understand the impact of council decisions on children in care and care leavers and to ensure that action was taken to address any shortcomings.

The cost of getting this wrong would result in poor educational performance, contact with the criminal justice system, poor physical and mental health, homelessness and/or unemployment. All at a huge cost financially to the state.

Children in care needed someone who cared for them and believed in them; they needed stability, security and continuity of support. The support services needed to promote resilience and not just fix what was broken but to nurture what was best.

The meeting was opened out to a question and answer session from the Committee and other members present.

(ii) Local Strategic Partnership - At their meeting in July 2013 the meeting welcomed John Houston, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Manager. He was there to update the Committee on the LSPs work over the last year and the current projects that they were engaged in.

He noted that the LSP membership consisted of senior figures from business and the voluntary and public sectors. These and other local groups were brought together to identify common problems and develop joined-up solutions by pooling their expertise. They were also able to commission research, identify gaps in provision and opportunities for new ways of working.

They have two taskforces (their equivalent of task and finish panels) looking at tourism and youth employment.

They were concentrating on tourism last year via their Tourism Taskforce. Research had shown that this sector was worth about £200m annually to the local economy and comprised a significant percentage of local jobs. It was noted that there was no joined up infrastructure in place for the various stakeholders to co-ordinate their work. They have now designed, built and launched a new website www.visiteppingforest.org to represent the major attractions in the district.

It should be noted that this Taskforce had no formal budget allocation; all work undertaken was supported by the individual partners and the 'One Epping Forest' General Fund and contributions from partners.

The partnership had hosted a seminar at Epping Forest College with the ECC to promote the roll out of Superfast Broadband. They also launched the Districts' first business charter for local businesses, with pledges to use local contractors and pay quickly to aid cash flow.

The theme group on health had been rebuilt under the leadership of Dr Kamal Bishai and the support of officers from Epping Forest District Council.

The LSP also worked closely with the Safer Communities Partnership and the Council's Safer Communities Team for the purpose of delivering safer neighbourhoods and organised a range of events that targeted young people in the District.

The LSP was also working with the London Borough of Enfield and Broxbourne Council, jointly considering the future roles of glasshouses and to explore joint opportunities around productive landscapes. This included producing a first draft for an EU bid.

The meeting was then opened up to questions from all those present.

(iii) Health and Social Care Issues - At their meeting in September 2013, the Committee received Dr K Bishai, Vice Chairman of the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Mr D Westcott, Chief Financial Officer, who made a presentation regarding health and care and their plans for the communities health and social care for the next 5 to 10 years. Their presentation was entitled "My Health, My Future, My Say."

Dr K Bishai outlined the area covered by West Essex CCG, stretching from Chigwell to Saffron Walden.

He advised:

- (1) Health and care provision would change over the next 10 years.
- (2) Services would become more person-centred, require fewer organisations and have a single commissioning body.
- (3) Public services were under pressure, with a need to control debts.
- (4) Clinical evidence had shown that early intervention and avoiding hospital stays assisted in reducing costs.
- (5) Technology, such as tele-health, enabled more home care.
- (6) There were significant challenges with an aging population, for example dementia.
- (7) There were wider issues to explore affecting health, for example housing, transport and education.

The meeting was opened out for questions from members. The questions ranged from the dissatisfaction felt by residents on their GP out of hours service; how the new funding system operated and who took responsibility for the care of drink and drugs abusers.

(iv) Citizen Advice Bureau - The Chairman welcomed Stephanie Chambers the Epping Forest Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) District Manager and Janet Woods the Chair of the Epping Forest District CAB to their October 2013 meeting.

The meeting noted that they are a registered charity and had, in 2008, become a joint branch by combining the three existing branches in the district, namely those at Epping, Loughton and Waltham Abbey. They have nine volunteer officers on the governing trustee board along with two non-voting councillors. They currently have a three year Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the District Council from which they receive £113,840 per annum. They have renegotiated the SLA for another three years but that has not as yet (in October) been signed off.

The CAB was operated at the service level by highly trained volunteers who underwent a nationally supported training programme to become advisors and they continued to have on-going training, especially in benefits and aspects of the law. New clients were given a diagnostic interview known as a 'gateway assessment'. If they are from outside this area then they would be referred to their local authority

area or another suitable organisation that could help them; the exception being the need for emergency interventions.

They also have specialist voluntary advisors who have chosen to specialise in a particular area, and pro-bono legal advice from some solicitors who work voluntarily for them. Currently they do not have the facility to offer an email service, but hope to do so in the future. Each branch has a service manager responsible for the standards for that branch.

Last year they saw 3,397 clients and helped with 14,096 issues. They were mostly asking for advice on benefits and tax credits followed closely by debt advice.

(v) Youth Council - The Committee welcomed members of the Youth Council who were there at the request of the Committee to give their annual presentation, updating members on the work carried out over the last year and their developing Youth Council Programme.

Ten members of the Youth Council were in attendance. They noted that Youth Volunteering had been a big theme for them this year. They were passionate about encouraging young people to volunteer and were behind the Council's Youth Volunteer Programme which was being taken up by all secondary schools in the District. Many of the young people who had participated in the Council's volunteer days enjoyed it so much; they have asked to do more in their spare time. They also discovered that it was not so easy for young people to volunteer if they were under 18, there being all sort of issues with insurance, health and safety etc. This led them to produce a Young person's Guide to Volunteering. The guide contained helpful tips and advice for young people interested in voluntary work.

They developed an inter-generational project to tackle the barrier between older residents and the young people. Additionally they were keen to promote the importance of local democracy to pupils. They identified three main concerns which were the negative stereotyping of young people; concerns about alcohol and drug misuse and thirdly, bullying.

By far the most successful project this year had been the planning and delivery of their Celebration of Youth Groups event in October. On the night they had entertainment from some fantastic local young artists and welcomed organisers and teenagers from 18 different youth groups across the district. They set up a market stalls made up of over 24 tables which provided information on funding opportunities for youth groups, training and information about volunteering. The purpose of this whole project was to identify all the youth clubs and activity groups in the Epping Forest district and to help promote them.

Having approached the Leader of the Council they were delighted to be given a pot of money that had enabled them to allocate each of the groups that came along on the night a small sum of money towards the running of their group.

(vi) Probation Services – In January 2014 the meeting welcomed two officers from the Harlow office of the Essex Probation Service, Neeve Bishop and Adrian Saward. They were there to inform the members of the type of work that the probation service carried out. In order to do this they showed a film showing the journey of an offender through the probation system. It showed that probation was not an easy option to a custodial sentence. It showed the way they interacted with

other agencies specialising in the reduction of the use of alcohol or who worked with people with anger issues.

The meeting noted that:

- the average age of an offender referred to the probation service was 36, not the typical teenager that most of the public would imagine;
- any reports on an offender was compiled by the probation officers in conjunction with any other agency that was involved with that person;
- offenders can be given between 40 to 300 hours community service which was now called Community Payback;
- the aims of Community Payback were twofold. As well as being a means to punish offenders it also literally forces an offender to pay the community back;
- offenders had to attend regular appointed interview and/or support sessions, if they missed any one they had to provide reasons as soon as they could; and
- a lot of this was also centred around the aspiration of what was termed ETE, Education, Training and Employment, essential for the rehabilitation of an offender.

(vii) Mental Health Services in the District – In February 2014 the Committee welcomed Melanie Crass, the interim Head of Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Commissioning for North Essex and Dr Kamal Bishai, the Vice Chairman of the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Also in attendance was Andrew Smith a governor of the North Essex Partnership of the NHS Foundation Trust who sat in as an observer. Ms Crass and Dr Bishai were there to talk about local mental health services and the Joint Health and Social Care North Essex Mental Health Strategy 2013-17.

She was there to talk about the joint Mental Health and Social Care Strategy, a four year strategy that had been developed over the last six months. A lot of consultation on this had been undertaken since June 2013. Their vision was that they wanted people to have good mental health and people with mental health problems to recover as well as having a better quality of life. It was noted that they wished to achieve this vision developing and supporting community well-being and encouraging people to maintain healthy lifestyles and keep themselves and their families mentally well. They would improve access and the gateways into services and would ensure a smooth transition between services, including children to adult services, and have a more integrated approach to the mental and physical health services. They would develop a broader primary and community based models of care for people across the spectrum of mental health conditions.

The Committee were shown a diagram showing access to services and where people could get on and off wherever they may be and have a level of integration and a smooth transition into other areas of service. It was noted that the work was very GP driven.

By the end of year one, they hoped to have:

- Explored opportunities of joint commissioning with their public health colleagues to support early intervention and community wellbeing;
- Establish a North Essex Mental Health Clinical Network (likely to be locality forums) and get their input into service and pathway redesign;
- Developed a series of 'Think Tanks' to explore, across all providers any opportunities for improvement;
- Further developed IAPT, primary and community mental health services;

- Developed the roll out of Primary Care (General Practice) Mental Health Education Programme;
- Development of a single point of access (primary care based); and
- Development of Personality Disorder Strategy for North Essex.

The Chairman thanked Ms Crass and Dr Bishai for their informative and interesting presentation and hoped to see them in a year's time for an update.

Other Topics Considered:

(i) In July 2013 the Committee received the Key Objectives Outturn report for 2012/13. The key objectives were intended to provide a clear statement of the Council's overall intentions for each year, containing specific actions and desired outcomes.

The Committee was requested to consider outturn performance against the Key Objectives adopted for 2012/13. This report was also considered by the Cabinet.

(ii) Also in July the Committee considered a consultation document on Crossrail 2. It was noted that this had also been to the last Planning Scrutiny Standing Panel meeting for their comments on the consultation which were reflected in the report.

Members noted that Crossrail 1 was well underway and was to provide improved links and capacity for east west travel across London.

Crossrail 2 (formally known as the Chelsea – Hackney Line) was intended to do the same on a south west north east axis.

The report identified likely issues for EFDC and there was also a supplementary report written by Jonathan Roberts an experienced consultant who looked at some of the issues which had been raised. Particular attention was drawn to his comments about the Central Line.

On consideration, the Committee endorsed the comments made by the Planning Scrutiny Panel adding few comments of their own.

(iii) The Committee received a report from the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Standing Panel on the restructuring of the Employment Procedure rules.

On 14 February 2012 the Council adopted new procedures for top management officer appointments within the Council. As part of this process, Counsel was instructed to give advice on the Council's Redundancy and Redeployment Policy and Procedure and also to carry out a review of the Constitution's Staff Employment Rules and Operational Standing Orders to ensure that all processes were consistent.

(iv) The Committee also considered a report on the conventions on the working relationships between Political Groups and Councillors with Officers.

The Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel had looked in detail at the conventions and accepted the Management Board's view that these need to be revised as they were out of date.

The report with the revised conventions was agreed and referred up to full council for agreement.

(v) In July the Committee received their annual report reviewing the recent elections. These elections were for the seven County Council Divisions in our district and for one casual district by-election.

They noted that the level of turnout was disappointing. The Panel was informed that in the days before the election and throughout polling day, officers received numerous complaints by telephone, social media and face to face at polling stations about the lack of available information about candidates. A common response from electors was that they expected to receive leaflets through their letterboxes and they did not have the time or inclination to search for information.

It was noted that 80 established Polling Stations were provided in 72 different buildings on 2 May 2013. This required the appointment of 72 Presiding Officers and around 120 Poll Clerks.

The total number of postal vote packets issued was 8115. Only 4 packs failed to reach the electors in the post and had to be re-issued. 71% were returned which equates well with previous elections.

(vi) In November 2013 the Committee considered Essex County Council's formal consultation on the future provision of Children's Centres in Essex which would end on 5 December 2013. The consultation was about the need to make £2.5m of savings from the Children Centre Budget from 2014/15.

The Committee welcomed Stav Yiannou the Essex County Council's Lead Strategic Commissioner for Early Years Education and Learning and Stacy Randall, Spurgeon's Regional Manager, accompanied by Gill Wallis, EFDC's Community Development Officer. They outlined the background to the consultation and answered member's questions.

After considerable deliberation the Committee agreed that the draft response to the consultation prepared by officers in consultation with members and the Portfolio Holder be approved.

(vii) A report reviewing the first six months of the new licensing arrangements of having single evening meetings for premises licences also went to the November meeting. It was recognised that the new system brought in a lot more meetings and that the council had taken on the responsibility for licensing scrap metal dealers and the corresponding amount of work that this would entail for the licensing section.

Further, because of the larger amount of work and extra cost involved it was agreed by the Committee that all licensing hearings revert back to being held during the daytime. But, that the Chairman of the Licensing Committee be authorised to determine whether any hearing would be better held in the evening in view of significant public interest.

(viii) The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Panel, Councillor Angold-Stephens, introduced the Panel's final report to the Committee. They were set up to review the O&S arrangements within the Council with particular reference to working relationships with the Cabinet.

He noted that they covered a large range of topics starting with the appointment of the Chairman for Overview and Scrutiny, consulting with the Leader, improvement of the work programme and the scrutiny of external organisations. They also looked at the Scrutiny Panels and had a discussion on call-ins and made some suggestion on their arrangements. They noted that the County was responsible for the scrutiny of the NHS, but the Panel felt that for particular items of local interest, EFDC would like the option to approach County to ask if we could scrutinise our own area.

They Panel noted that they would like the public profile of O&S raised and that any training requirements for O&S should be arranged early in the new municipal year.

After a long debate this report was agreed and referred up to full council for their agreement.

(ix) In January the Chairman of the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel, Councillor Philip introduced the report on Officer delegation. These now required amendment to reflect the new Directorate structure approved by the Council on 17 December 2013. The revised rules were agreed and referred to Council.

(x) The Committee also considered a report on the annual review of Contract Standing Orders. The report dealt with the annual review of CSOs and Financial Regulations which included controls on contract procedures and provided for financial governance. There had been a recent review by Internal Audit and this had resulted in the proposals set out in the report. It was emphasize that the suggested changes to CSOs were points of detail rather than major alterations, being designed to reinforce existing requirements.

(xi) Councillor Philip introduced a report that went to the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel on the review and process of the nomination and appointment of the Vice-Chairman of Council. The review had been ongoing since May 2013, and included considering information regarding how other Local Authorities arrange their appointment process and the operation of the Point System used previously by this Council.

They eventually made four recommendations that in summary were:

- The a nomination needed the support of a quarter of the council;
- That it was important that non-affiliated members had a role in this process as currently they did not;
- That the Full Council had the final decision; and
- That nominations and seconding of nominations were acceptable as an email.

(xii) The Committee considered a report on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel Structure and Future Programme. The report looked at the arrangements of the Scrutiny Standing Panels in the light of the directorate restructuring and the outcome of the OS review.

The report had looked at several options, such as keeping the present 5 Panel structure and appointing new lead officers to each; moving to a commissioning model based upon a work programme; or moving to a 4 panel structure aligned around the new directorates. Because of the complicated nature of the relationship between scrutiny, portfolios and the new directorate structure, the Committee agreed to set up

a Task and Finish Panel in the new municipal year to consider in more detail and make recommendations on the future structure of Scrutiny Panels.

(e) Case Study: ECC Consultation on the Future of Children's Centres

The Committee welcomed Stav Yiannou the Essex County Council's Lead Strategic Commissioner for Early Years Education and Learning and Stacy Randall, Spurgeon's Regional Manager, accompanied by Gill Wallis, EFDC's Community Development Officer.

It was noted that Essex County Council were undertaking a formal consultation on the future provision of Children's Centres in Essex which would end on 5 December 2013. The consultation was about the need to make £2.5m of savings from the Children Centre Budget from 2014/15.

The County Council's Children's Centres offered a wide range of services for families and others caring for children under five. Each Children's Centre was different, offering a variety of services according to the needs of local families. Activities were delivered from either a main site, a delivery site, or through a range of outreach venues. All Children's Centres work closely with health, schools, GPs and other local service providers.

Essex County Council had proposed that the Little Buddies Children's Centre in Buckhurst Hill be closed and merged with the Sunrise Centre in Loughton. The reasons stated for this proposal were that "it is in an area of lesser deprivation compared to neighbouring Epping children's centres; and they were trying to prioritise resources to areas of greater need.

The site suffers from accessibility issues as it is on a busy high street with limited parking. Neighbouring centres in Epping Forest are easier and safer to access. Good transport links between Buckhurst Hill and neighbouring centres in Loughton and Debden would also serve to minimise the effects of this closure."

The ECC officers acknowledged that the district of Epping had eight children centres and that they proposed that four main centres would remain. They would have outreach services, targeted one to one support in the home and on-site pre-school and nursery provision would continue to be delivered. As part of this provision they were proposing to close Little Buddies in Buckhurst Hill and merge it with the neighbouring Sunrise Children's Centre, Alderton, which would continue as a Main Site.

A public speaker, made a short statement about the location and ease of access of the Little Buddies centre in Buckhurst Hill. That it had a large catchment area and that many of these people were not well off, some of them could not afford the train and bus fares to travel to other centres and so would have to walk a long way to get there.

A second Public speaker said that she was a mother of two children. When she received the consultation she found that there was nowhere she could put her views in, just tick boxes. She lived in Buckhurst Hill but they were not affluent and they would struggle to go privately. She praised the centre there which helped her and her family when she had a very sick child and helped her through a very difficult time.

The Committee wanted to know about the overall proposals compared to the other proposals in West Essex. They were concerned about the number of centres proposed for the West of the county and how many children under 5 they would cater for. There appeared to be significantly more children under 5 here than in other areas. Was there any justification for this? How was the burden spread across the whole of Essex, as the three other areas had significantly fewer children under 5 (by percentage), than West Essex. Ms Yiannou replied that there were three areas that they considered, one was the indices of multiple deprivation; they looked at families living in these areas and the number of families suffering from deprivation as classed within the top 30% across the country. They used this data and the accessibility data. This area was more densely populated so there would be more children there. They also considered the number of families accessing services in order to put the proposal forward. The committee noted that it would have been useful to have these items put in the consultation documents, as it would have helped people to understand it better.

Officers had met with the Portfolio Holder and other members to discuss the issues and had prepared a draft council response, which the Committee agreed.