

Report to Council

Date of meeting: 29 September 2015

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny report to Council – September 2015

Contact for further information: Cllr R Morgan

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246



Recommendation:

That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report from April 2015 to the present be noted.

Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 27 April 2015

1. At our last meeting of the 2014/15 year, held on 27 April 2015 we received a presentation from the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), namely from Mr R Walker, Parking Partnership Group Manager, Mr M Adamson, Area Manager Western District and Mr M Young, Head of Operational Service.

2. The officers outlined the background to their organisation, how Essex County Council decriminalised parking functions between 2002-2004 and how a growing deficit reaching £900,000 across the county led, in 2009, to the County Council ordering district and boroughs to cancel all agencies. These agencies were replaced by North and South Essex Parking Partnership. The North was responsible for Epping Forest, Harlow, Uttlesford, Braintree, Colchester and Tendering, the South were responsible for Brentwood, Basildon, Chelmsford, Maldon, Rochford and Castle Point.

3. We noted that the strategic priorities for the NEPP were:

- (i) Improving safety;
- (ii) Improving business opportunities through better parking policies;
- (iii) Increasing enforcement to improve availability for Blue Badge holders; and
- (iv) Greater environmental efficiency.

4. The NEPP Business Plan was to improve on efficiency and be financially sustainable. The NEPP had inherited a deficit of £574,301; currently they had a small surplus of £80,000.

5. The Committee and other members present went on to question the NEPP officers on such things as the role of wardens and the powers they had or had not got; the database that they kept of the roads under their charge; the problems of parking around schools; and how they could be contacted.

6. The Committee then received an interim report from the Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Panel and were advised that officers were arranging a presentation from Barts Health NHS Trust after their recent damning CQC report.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting - 09 June 2015

7. At our meeting on Tuesday 9th June we received a presentation from the Barts Health Trust. We welcomed Lyn Hill-Tout, the interim Managing Director of Whipps Cross hospital. She gave us an update on the problems faced by the Trust and especially Whipps Cross. We noted that she had only been in post for eight weeks but was experienced with working with hospital authorities in distress.

8. We were told that because of problems highlighted by the CQC report, the staff at Whipps Cross were confused and in need of leadership and confidence in their managers. The Trust was now in special measures and implementing an improvement programme, with management holding open sessions to enable staff to give their views on what improvements were needed and to help develop a future strategy.

9. Due to the reported culture of bullying, a 'Guardian Service' had been introduced to offer a confidential service for staff to use. They were agreed that there was a need for more permanent staff and much less use of agency staff. Wards were also undergoing risk assessments and they were considering the need for extra staff.

10. As part of the improvements highlighted, a High Dependency Unit was being built at Whipps Cross, to be opened next spring.

11. The meeting was then opened up to questions from all members present; Ms Hill-Tout was questioned about the Trust's financial deficit, the shortcomings of management, dealing with the culture of bullying, the level of staffing, their new IT system and its effectiveness and other pertinent questions.

12. At the end of the meeting we agreed that members of the Trust be invited back to a future meeting to update us on the progress made.

13. We then went on to agree the last minutes of the now defunct Scrutiny Panels and then examined the Cabinet's Forward Plan and then reviewed the outturn of the Corporate Plan Key Objectives for 2014/15; with which we were satisfied.

14. We appointed the members, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen to the new Select Committees and the two Task and Finish Panels; also agreeing the Terms of Reference for the Youth Engagement Task and Finish Panel.

15. We then agreed the final draft of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2014/15 and referred it on to this Council meeting.

16. We then went on to review the Committee's new work programme and agreed to receive a presentation from the Essex County Fire and Rescue Services at our January 2016 meeting. They would be talking to a consultation exercise on a review of their service provision across the county.

17. Finally, we also agreed to add an item, possibly to the Neighbourhood and Community Services Select Committee's work programme, to look at waste collection and the recent problems had by Biffa.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting - 21 July 2015

18. At our meeting on Tuesday 21st July we received a short talk from Marc Balkham, from VAEF on volunteering through time banking. The scheme was about the exchange of the time and skills of its members; building up time credits in exchange for doing some work such as DIY or gardening and getting some help back when needed. Volunteers were listed on a database with a note of any special skills they had.

19. The meeting was then opened up to questions from all members present. Mr Balkham was asked about the safeguards they had in place to ensure that only appropriate people were used and that any vulnerable people were protected. He assured us that they had put in appropriate review processes, with volunteers having to provide two references.

20. The Committee then went on to review the Corporate Plan - Key Action Plan for 2016/17; with which we were satisfied.

21. Mr Ian White, the Project Officer - Planning Policy, then took us through the Essex County Council Replacement Waste Local Plan consultation document. We noted that this had a very tight timescale, far too tight to enable officers and members to give it any significant consideration. Six weeks was the normal time given for a consultation period this gave us only one. The consultation report had only identified two sites in our district; one by the Hastingwood roundabout and the other one at the Langston Road / Oakwood Hill industrial estate. Both were considered inappropriate by officers and our reply reflected this. The Committee also asked the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to write to the County expressing our concern at their failure in their duty to co-operate and the short time scale given for our response.

22. We then went on to agree the draft Terms of Reference for the four Select Committees and noted their work programmes. We then considered the PICK form submitted by Councillor Breare-Hall asking that the recent problems with the new waste contract be scrutinised. We allocated this to the Neighbourhood and Community Services Select Committee who will incorporate it into their work programme.

23. The second PICK form submitted by Councillor Angold-Stephens asked that we look at the new 6th Form consortium being established in our district. We decided that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider this once the consortium has had some time to bed down and agreed it should come to one of our meetings in the new calendar year.

24. Finally, we reviewed the Cabinet's Forward Plan but had no specific items that we wanted to consider but queried if it should include mention of the retendering of the leisure contract as an upcoming key decision.