

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at 7.30 pm at the COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 6 October 2004

Present: - Councillor S Flack – Chairman.
Councillors H D Baker, C A Bayley, S Jones, M Lemon,
J P Murphy and M Savage.

Officers in attendance: - V Borges, W Cockerell, P Hunt, I Orton and [G Smith](#).

Also in attendance: - B Cook and P Gregory from Essex County Council.

SC2.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M A Hibbs and D J Morson.

Councillor Flack declared an interest as a member of the County Council.

SC2.16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2004 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SC2.17 FLOODING CONTROL

The Engineering and Safety Officer Phil Hunt outlined the existing Flooding Control Policy. He confirmed that all flood defence work, whether by a Local Authority or the Environment Agency are carried out under permissive powers and there is no statutory duty. He added that the Councils official title in the land drainage and flood defence context was Operating Authority for Ordinary Watercourses. The authority only oversees the watercourses (anything other than main rivers) within the district and has powers to enforce maintenance, but not new works as the riparian owner is ultimately responsible.

He covered flood warning, flood prevention measures and development control which are the three main topics of the policy. He then gave an insight into the history of flooding locations within the district that had been identified after 2001/2002. He outlined seven schemes that had been launched in 2003, five have been completed, and Hempstead and Takeley are the two areas remaining. He also identified extra areas within the district that needed work.

The Quality of Life Plan created an ongoing annual budget of £50k to be matched by Town/Parish Councils and/or residents for provision of flood defence works. This capital had carried forward into the current service plan.

He suggested that the UDC implement one of the Essex County Councils unsuccessful schemes and that the Takeley scheme be carried out this year,

as it was a longstanding problem, no other solution had been found and the residents could be vulnerable.

RESOLVED that a report on the up-to-date flood prevention schemes be submitted to Highways Committee.

SC2.18 HIGHWAYS GRITTING POLICY – ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

Officers from ECC outlined the changes to the Highways Gritting Policy and the implications for UDC. The officers explained that the policy covered prevention through salting and snow clearing. They informed the committee that it was the County Councils statutory duty to ensure safe passage.

Last year they treated over 40%, which is very high in comparison with neighbouring districts and had received good feedback from the district regarding the bad weather treatment. They explained that the information was collected through a questionnaire, which covered a comprehensive group of road users. The results proved that the district was satisfied with the precautionary salting and snow clearance that was carried out last year.

The officers then explained that precautionary salting does not extend to school bus services. They then explained that snow clearing was a priority on pathways and cycle ways. However they currently do not salt them and there is a desire to include the precautionary salting of pathways to the policy and these have been framed into a proposal. Councillor Murphy questioned the precautionary salting measures for school bus routes, in reply the officers informed the committee that the budget is limited and to cover the additional routes it would add an additional £1m to the budget. Councillor Murphy then questioned further the costs for liability if an accident was to happen. The officers informed him that risk analysis had taken place. Councillor Flack suggested to the committee in cases of severe snow schools should be closed and Councillor Murphy added that further costing covering the economic matters of potential accidents should be examined.

Councillor Lemon asked the committee if they had rights to refer precautionary salting of paths and roads of the elderly to Essex County Highways if UDC pays the costs.

The extension of salt bins was successful last year and the extension had been proposed again for this year. Precautionary salting of bus depots had also been added to the policy, however the budget cannot extend to cover the precautionary salting of rural routes. Councillor Lemon was concerned as there was a problem in rural areas where farmers refused to go out. The officers informed the committee that risk audits had been carried out and this had been addressed in the new policy. Councillor Murphy questioned if the farmers receive a retainer fee. It was noted that the farmers did not receive payment. However there was an agreement between the farmers and the County Council.

Councillor Bayley expressed concerns regarding insurance when people use the salt bins and questioned where liability falls. The officers informed the committee that advice had been given and this can be re-issued if required.

RESOLVED that

- 1 that Highway Committee considers investing into precautionary salting on pavements within the district.
- 2 information on the location of public salt bins is to be re-issued.

SC2.19 **RISK MANAGEMENT - UPDATE**

The Performance Manager delivered comments on the implementation of the Action Plan. He explained the integral part that Risk Management plays in Corporate Management arrangements as the process was recognised as the fundamental feature of corporate governance. The Council had recognised this and had established a high-level officer and Risk Management Steering Group (RMSG). The RMSG adapted the Zurich Municipal Risk Management Policy and Strategy in January 2004, which outlined the basics of Risk Management.

During the review of Risk Management between January and June 2004 the District Auditor noted the positive use of Risk Management in a number of its services. However the review also identified some concerns with regards to the delivery of Risk Management within the Authority. These concerns had been addressed in the Action Plan. He pointed out that the bulk of the Action Plan falls onto the RMSG and he questioned whether the group had the capacity to finish off the work of the Zurich Municipal. The Performance Manager informed the group that the RMSG had decided on a figure of £10k to engage external assistance to deliver training and other issues identified by the District Auditor. This proposal would go to the EMT on 11 October.

RESOLVED that:

- 1 The committee noted the comments made from the District Auditor; and
- 2 The following issue is referred to the RMSG for consideration: -
 1. Page 21 R22 is changed to reporting half yearly instead of quarterly.

SC2.20 **REPORTS FROM INTERNAL AUDIT TO BE CONSIDERED DURING 2004 - 2005**

The Committee considered the reports on Street Cleansing and Business Rates. The report contained details of all other Internal Audit reports that would be produced during 2004-05. The committee discussed areas that the Internal Audit would examine during 2004-05.

Councillor Flack said that Council Tax was a major collection area and this would need looking into to ensure correct collection.

RESOLVED that the Committee examine the Internal Audit report of Council Tax.

SC2.21 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTING FOR APRIL TO JUNE 2004**

The Performance Manager reported the details of the Performance Management results for April to June 2004 and the new Traffic Light colour targets from 1 April 2004. The report outlined the details of the change in the layout of the reporting mechanism and identified the five new agreed themes as the framework to improve and demonstrate performance right across UDC. The Performance Manager reported improvements in planning for the first quarter although re-structuring had impacted that was now complete and performance is now beginning to be absorbed into UDC.

The Chief Executive said the figure 56% of staff receiving appraisals was dreadful. He explained in some instances the appraisals had been completed but not recorded. He had asked personnel to provide details on appraisals and to review the current appraisal system including management training. The Chairman suggested that the results collected should be given to Scrutiny for further discussion.

The Performance Manager suggested that the sickness target was too high and that it should be increased to nine as the current figure has unrealistic and hard to achieve. Councillor Murphy believed this as an area for further discussion and that the Executive Manager of Human Resources Carole Hughes produce a report on the reasons behind absences.

RESOLVED that:

- 1 The performance figures for April to June 2004 be noted,
- 2 Members noted the reasons for the 14 Red Indicators,
- 3 The committee noted the potential for changing target for monitoring sickness data.
- 4 The authority should work towards a target of 20% Reds in 2004/05.

SC2.22 **BEST VALUE REVIEWS 2004/05- ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND ACCESS TO SERVICES**

The Performance Manager reported that on the 7 July 2004 this committee agreed the scope documents for the Best Value Reviews of Environmental Health and Access to Services.

The Principal Environmental Health Officers reported the progress of the best value review of environmental health and outlined the details of the Service Improvement Plan.

Councillor Bayley questioned the need for the purchase of an additional noise monitor. The Performance Manager informed the committee that this data would also measure traffic noise and currently this data is not available and with the development of the A120 it is essential we have the equipment to

support any issues. The committee decided that the information would be shared with the other authorities and it was agreed the Chairman would propose this to Essex County Council, asking if they would want to join this venture for a share in the results.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Members noted the progress with delivering the Best Value Reviews in Environmental Services and Access to Services.
- 2 The Performance Manager and Principal Environmental Health Officers refer the comments made on the Environmental Services Improvement Plan to the Executive Management Team and to the Environment and Health and Housing Committees.

SC2.23 **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE 2004/05 UPDATE**

The Performance Manager reported that Resources Committee had agreed that this Committee would monitor the progress of the Code of Corporate Governance on a regular basis. This would help instil confidence that the Council has a framework in place to develop and control activities.

All functions from the updated Code were in the process of being implemented with a manager accountable for the strands that make the Code. It was reported that all authorities had to adopt a Code of Corporate Governance and that all progress is reported regularly to members. It was recommended that progress of the Code would be reported twice a year to Scrutiny 2 Committee normally in April and October each year.

RESOLVED that Scrutiny 2 Committee receive progress updates on the Code of Corporate Governance twice a year.

SC2.24 **MATTERS ARISING FROM TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE – 8 SEPTEMBER 2004**

The committee noted the decision list from the Transport and Highways Committee held on 8 September 2004.

The Chairman expressed concerns that the Travel Plan had been deferred twice previously and the issue should not be deferred any longer.

SC2.25 **MATTERS ARISING FROM ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – 14 SEPTEMBER 2004**

The Committee noted the decision list from the Environment Committee held on 14 September 2004.

- (i) The Chairman expressed concern at the projected budgetary information.

- (ii) The Chairman expressed concern that recycling was not included into the Christmas 2004/05 refuse collection service.

SC2.26 **MATTERS ARISING FROM RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 23 SEPTEMBER 2004**

The Committee noted the decision list from the Resources Committee held on 23 September 2004.

Councillor Murphy expressed concern at the decision of the committee regarding the Museum Resource Centre. He believed that the recommendation made by the group was not in the best interest of the Museum and would not achieve better value for money.

The meeting ended at 10.15pm.