

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at 7.30pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 4 OCTOBER 2006

Present:- Councillor S Flack (Chairman).

Councillors E Gower, M A Hibbs, J P Murphy, S V Schneider and A C Yarwood.

Officers in attendance: - R Chamberlain, J Dear, V Harvey, J Roos and T Turner.

SC10

PUBLIC SPEAKERS

Members of the public spoke in relation to Saffron Walden Town Library. Hilary Shibata, Mayor of Saffron Walden, Malcolm White, Saffron Walden Town Clerk, Martin Everitt, Lizzy Sanders and Gordon Ridgewell historic reporters for Saffron Walden made the following points:

Essex County Council had made plans to re-model the library, without consulting local residents or the Town Library Society. The only consultation received from Essex County Council to the Town Council was a paper entitled "Future of Library Services in Essex". The proposed layout would not be suitable for meetings and the space for 60 people on the first floor was inadequate. As the Library had once housed an Arts Centre it was felt that there should be provisions within the plans for it to be restored. In 2001 the Arts Centre had been withdrawn. The only place for 200 people to congregate would be the Town Hall, which was fully booked long in advance, or the Saffron Walden County High School. They felt the proposal was not ideal for all users: teens wanted the same access as adults and children and did not want this section to be hidden behind a screen. Having the children zone situated by the door could potentially be dangerous.

There were a lot of historical books to be moved to the library and these would be ideal for school children to look at for archives. The town library started in 1832 and was moved to 2 King Street in 1850 and currently housed over 20,000 books. It was regularly used by historians, students and local residents.

The Town Library Society had received many complaints over the proposed 10 month closure for refurbishment.

The group recognised that the renovations were a chance to update the library, but wished for it to be completed so as to benefit for all users. No consultation with the public had been made and they asked if a meeting with the Architects, Surveyors, Project Managers, District and County Councils could be arranged, so that the group could put forward their alternative proposal.

Councillor Flack reported that the Leader of Essex County Council had said the plans were only in outline and that the County Council had undertaken

some consultation. She then went on to say that she would ask the Chief Executive of Uttlesford District Council to facilitate a meeting with the requested bodies.

SC11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R P Chambers, D W Gregory, V Pedder, F E Silver and A M Wattebot.

Councillor S Flack declared a personal interest as a Councillor for Essex County Council.

SC12 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JUNE 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2006 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SC13 MATTERS ARISING

(i) SC3 – Road Safety

No procedure was in place for providing regular road safety updates as yet, but this would be arranged shortly.

SC14 SCRUTINY CLIMATE CHANGE

A report had been prepared by the Energy Efficiency Surveyor on behalf of the Scrutiny Climate Change Investigation Group. Councillor Hibbs, a member of this group explained that they had discovered many examples of good practice already occurring within the Council. However, there were areas with good potential, but uncertainty remained on what direction they would take. He thanked Officers for the good work undertaken on the report, and was pleased to find a good level of co-operation, enthusiasm and commitment from those areas assessed. The group were likely to recommend a range of measures and initiatives to be implemented over the short, medium and long term ; these were likely to include: Strategy, Council Buildings, Council Housing, Transport, Planning and Public/Community. The group had recently met with officers from Environmental and Cultural Services, the Chief Executive, Strategy and Performance and Quality of Life. A final set of recommendations could now start to be compiled.

The Scrutiny Climate Change Investigation Group had found evidence for man-made climate change and recognised the urgent need to reduce emissions, and the important role authorities could play in dealing with climate change.

It was hoped that the impact assessment within reports would include sustainability, and the Executive Manager (Strategy & Performance) said a set of guidelines were being prepared to help officers when preparing reports.

Councillor Flack was very pleased with the reduction in land fill waste produced by Uttlesford. The national average was a 5.7% reduction and Uttlesford had achieved 12%.

Members were pleased with the work undertaken to date and it was

RESOLVED that

1. the committee recommend the Corporate Group Sustainability be given the task of developing a climate change strategy for the Council, involving public consultation. Consultation must seek the views of a wide range of residents or else there would be limited public 'buy-in' to the climate change strategy.
2. the Scrutiny Climate Change Investigation Group be given further time to compile its final report.

SC15

LEBANON EVACUATION

A report had been prepared by the Emergency Planning Officer and Executive Manager (Housing Services) setting out the background and Council's response to the Lebanon Evacuation in July 2006. It set out the situation with day to day details of events, the role of Uttlesford District Council and the respondents involved. Paragraphs 21 to 30 set out the recovery from a housing perspective. This had now peaked, but work by housing officers was still ongoing. Many learning objectives were identified, as well as a set of internal and general recommendations.

Overall the respondent agencies provided the Council with excellent support, however some did not provide much flexibility in providing after care.

The Executive Manager (Housing Services) thanked Members for help during the weeks after Operation Highbrow.

Councillor Flack stated that she had some concerns over the areas in which the Lebanon evacuees were being housed, as the location was often unsuitable to their needs and Social Services should have been assessing the families from day one.

Councillor Hibbs said a comprehensive report had been made to the Community Committee, and he felt there was scope to develop the service provided after the emergency.

Councillor Murphy was pleased to report that the evacuees that had been placed in Dunmow had been welcomed by the community and many residents were very helpful in providing clothes, food and electrical items.

Councillor Yarwood said there was not enough housing in the District, and asked what would have happened if the evacuees were unable to be temporarily housed at the University of Essex Halls of Residence. He also asked if any counselling had been provided. The Executive Manager (Housing Services) said that staff did not have counselling skills, but did offer to listen to the evacuees; proper Counselling agencies were being looked into.

The Emergency Planning Officer said that he had been working on multi-agency plans and had already started working with Social Services and the Citizens Advice Bureau so that in any future crisis all agencies could dovetail their work to a more effective level.

Members asked that the scoping document include additional points. The title "This review will examine" should incorporate the following points:

- Post emergency planning issues
 - Involvement of Members
 - Involvement of town and parish councils
- The title "What do we hope to achieve?" to have an additional point of:
- Ensure better coordination of other agencies

Councillor Yarwood was nominated as the lead member of the review, with Cllr Flack supporting. Other review members were to be invited from amongst councillors in general.

RESOLVED that the Committee

1. agree the scrutiny scoping document and initiate a scrutiny review of the Council's response to the Lebanon Evacuation and funding issues.
2. appoint Councillor Yarwood to lead the review, and seek further review members from the Committee's and Council's membership.

SC16

SCRUTINY UPDATE

A report by the Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) had been prepared updating the Committee on progress in relation to fees and charges, process scrutiny and health scrutiny.

Further to minute SC5 the fees and charges review group had compared the Council's fees and charges structure against other authorities and these were being passed onto the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) who

would collate these into a booklet which would then be presented to the January cycle of policy committees.

Further to minute SC7 on process scrutiny the customer care training was to be rolled out with the customer service centre implementation and the corporate complaints system was to be reviewed with the roll out of the customer relationship management software. A review of processes around value for money was being undertaken with the intention to bring a value for money review process to the Committee's November meeting.

The West Essex PCT would be operational from 1 October 2006, and it was intended that the Scrutiny Committee would continue to scrutinise health issues with the new Chief Executive Aidan Thomas, and the new Chairman Alan Tobias to be invited to address a future meeting.

Members wished the following areas to be addressed by the PCT at a future meeting:

- PCT structure and finances
- The position of the Princess Alexandra Hospital
- Whether old UPCT initiatives, such as diabetes in the home, were to be continued
- Mental health provision
- Counselling – specialist services
- Specialist eye treatments
- Breast screening
- Dentistry

Councillor Murphy brought to the table the current topic of street lighting within the district, and presented the committee with a paper by Ken Pease, from Loughborough University and suggested Mr Pease be invited to the next committee along with County Councillor Rodney Bass. Councillor Hibbs added that the Energy Efficiency Surveyor had said that the savings made by switching off the street lights would be minimal, and the overall best solution to this would be switching every other light off.

It was also agreed that the Essex Fire Authority should be invited to the next meeting to explain the arrangements for Stansted, present statistics from Bishop's Stortford, and methods of consultation.

RESOLVED that

1. the Committee note the progress.
2. the Committee invite representatives of the West Essex PCT to a future meeting of the Committee.
3. street lighting initiative to be scrutinised at a future meeting

4. Essex Fire Authority be invited to a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.45pm.