

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 8 DECEMBER 2009**

Present: Councillor A Dean – Chairman.
Councillors D M Jones, H S Rolfe, G Sell, A M Wattebot
and L A Wells.

Officers in attendance: P Evans (Business Improvement and
Performance Manager), S Martin (Head of Customer
Support and Revenue Services), L Milns (Project Officer),
R Procter (Democratic Services Officer) and B Tice (Project
Officer).

SC15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Anjum,
S V Schneider and A C Yarwood.

SC16 MINUTES

An amendment was made to Minute SC12, third paragraph, to delete the words 'Councillor Sell thought the running track at the Mountfitchet School could do much for the District if the Council promoted it, though he was concerned not to duplicate what the Town Council was doing', and to substitute the words: 'Councillor Sell said the district could aspire to gain a running track at the Mountfitchet Mathematics and Computing College as a result of the Olympics. Such an achievement would subsequently be of long-lasting benefit to the district'.

Members queried the reference at Minute SC12, seventh paragraph, to 'Mr White referred to a document as relevant', but in the absence of any recollection as to what this document was, the Committee could make no amendment.

Subject to the amendment above, the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2009 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SC17 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute SC12 – 2012 Olympics

The Chairman said various suggestions had been made relating to the implications for this district of the 2012 Olympics. He asked the Lead Officer to start an action list to be included in the Agenda for the next meeting.

Councillor Sell said informal talks between Stansted Parish Council and the County Council had taken place, but the involvement of other parish

councils was now needed, in order to create a more Uttlesford-wide tourism forum, perhaps via the UALC.

Councillors Jones and Rolfe arrived at this point.

SC18

SCRUTINY LANDSCAPE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Customer Support and Revenue Services on the expanding remit of scrutiny committees. The report set out the scrutiny functions of the Committee under the Council's constitution, and went on to describe additional statutory responsibilities. It gave an outline of specific powers under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the Police and Justice Act 2006 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Provisions for the 'Councillor Call for Action' were also described. The report suggested that, in taking forward such powers, the Committee should seek to avoid duplicating scrutiny work by other public bodies, by exploring joint working arrangements.

Councillor Wattebot arrived at this point.

Officers confirmed that discussions between the other districts and the County Council over the past year had made no further progress. The Chairman was due to attend a network meeting next week, at which he would raise the potential for joint working. The Chairman said that at the Uttlesford Futures meeting, the County Council's representative, Yvonne Wetton, had raised the question of the County working with Uttlesford on health, and on crime and disorder.

Councillor Sell said these issues were major areas. It was important that the Committee did not bite off more than it could chew, and in his view it was preferable to focus on one issue within these areas. Members with relevant expertise could be approached to assist the Committee in this task.

Councillor Rolfe said the question was whether the exercise was worth doing and effective, as the police and the NHS were under intense public scrutiny anyway. However, he considered it was valuable to have a dialogue with the PCT, and he would make a distinction between dialogue and scrutiny. Unless the Committee had real powers, it was not obvious what scrutiny could achieve.

The Chairman said the Committee was empowered by legislation to review and scrutinise local NHS trusts. He would question whether Local Area Agreement partnerships were really delivering. There was a role for this Committee in conducting scrutiny to the extent conferred by the legislation, if it were to be resourced and minded to do so.

Councillor Sell said there could be a piece of work around the funding and effectiveness of Police Community Support Officers around the district.

Councillor Rolfe said that since a main priority for residents was health, a possible area of work would be to interrogate health concern, and to provide feedback to the PCT and other bodies through partnership working.

The Chairman said all such suggestions would be considered when developing next year's scrutiny programme.

The Head of Customer Support and Revenue Services said good practice guidance described scrutiny Members as the public's voice. It was important to ensure the programme set out targeted pieces of work with measurable outcomes.

The Chairman said the 'Councillor Call for Action' should be publicised to all Members. Councillor Jones said this mechanism was intended to be used only when all other means had been exhausted. In practice most issues would be resolved before there was a need for this measure, or would go to the Ombudsman. He asked whether there was any definitive information on how the Councillor Call for Action operated. The Head of Customer Support and Revenue Services said materials would be circulated to Members.

The Chairman brought discussion of this item to a close, and invited all to agree that the legislative powers and responsibilities set out in the report should be incorporated within the remit of the committee. Members agreed.

SC19

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

The Community Safety Officer gave a report on the role, coverage and contribution to community safety of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme. He said this district was fortunate in having the lowest crime levels in Essex. Neighbourhood Watch had a role to play, in that it was an effective crime prevention initiative. However, the scheme was not just about reducing crime, but also about building community spirit. The Chairman asked whether such schemes helped reduce fear of crime. The Community Safety Officer said this aspect was less certain.

There were 80 schemes across Uttlesford, run by about 500 volunteers, giving fairly high coverage of 67%. This figure had increased during 2009 from 51% coverage. During this period there had been a reduction in the number of most types of crime in Uttlesford. Neighbourhood Watch received limited funding from the Government, and local support from Essex Police, and bids to the CDRP. Essex Police provided £5,000 in the year 2008/09, which had mainly been used to buy Neighbourhood Watch notices for distribution across the district.

The Community Safety Officer confirmed efforts were being made to extend the scheme to all areas; and that police support was good. Members asked whether Neighbourhood Watch could be extended to hard to reach communities; the impact the scheme might have on the fear of local reprisals on those wishing to report crime; and how Police Community Support Officers played a role in supporting scheme co-ordinators. The Chairman suggested officers obtain information on hard to reach and deprived communities to encourage their participation in the scheme.

The Chairman thanked the Community Support Officer for his report, and asked that at a future date he give feedback on how the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme intended to expand its coverage of the district, and to report any obstacles to achieving that aim.

Councillor Rolfe questioned the scrutiny function, in terms of measuring progress against a strategy for extending Neighbourhood Watch. Councillor Sell said that the scheme fell within the area of residents' concerns about crime and disorder.

The Chairman suggested that the head co-ordinator of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme, Alan Johnson, be invited to a future meeting.

SC20

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DAY CENTRES

The Committee considered the report of the Business Improvement and Performance Manager which gave an update on the review of day centres by a Member Working Group. The review was now benefitting from additional part-time support of two Project Officers. Member visits had been arranged to all but one of the day centres before Christmas. Meetings would take place with the housing management and finance teams to consider maintenance and financial data relating to the day centres. The management agreements for the centres were being compared, and benchmarking studies would be conducted. All findings would be the subject of a report at the conclusion of the review.

The Chairman commended officers for what was a rigorous and important report, and invited Members of the Working Group to comment.

Councillor Rolfe said the Group, which had met immediately prior to this meeting, was making good progress. There were likely to be various issues arising from the review which would need careful consideration.

The Business Improvement and Performance Manager said once all data had been gathered, the Group would consider its recommendations and would report in the New Year. In reply to a question from the Chairman, she said the phrase in the report 'perceived use' referred to

efforts to contrast the way in which day centres could be used, as against actual use. There were potentially many opportunities for using these facilities, although this very much depended on what other facilities were in the local area. There was great variation in what the five day centres each provided, for example in care provision.

Councillor Sell said some problems were common to all the district's day centres. In relation to Stansted, he was aware the day centre had certain restrictions on bookings. It would be interesting to know the proportion of time when day centres were lying idle, rather than in use.

The Business Improvement and Performance Manager said it was clear that the review was likely to open up issues which would be 'cans of worms'. The review would therefore be a useful catalyst for a debate on informed policy for the long-term future.

SC21

DECISION LISTS

The Committee considered the decision lists of the policy committee meetings which had taken place since the last Scrutiny Committee meeting. In relation to the Environment Committee resolution of 24 November on the Uttlesford Core Strategy consultation, the Chairman said he would attend the forthcoming meeting of the Local Development Framework Task Group on behalf of this Committee.

Regarding the resolution of the Finance and Administration Committee on 26 November on the transfer of Bridge End Garden to Saffron Walden Town Council, the Chairman noted an annual report was to be made to the Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Jones disagreed that such a report should come to Scrutiny Committee, as in his view the correct forum was the Environment Committee. The Chairman said the principle of separation of responsibilities was a valid reason for such a report to come to this Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.