

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP REFERENCE GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.30pm on 16 JANUARY 2007**

Present: Councillors C M Dean and J E Menell.

Officers in attendance: A Bovaird, M Jones, P Snow, A Stewart and T Turner.

SPR1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor C M Dean was elected to act as Chairman of the Reference Group for the remainder of the current year.

SPR2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B M Hughes and D J Morson.

SPR3 DELIVERING PARTNERSHIP WORKING IN UTTLESFORD

The Director for Communities presented a report about the development of partnership working in Uttlesford. The Reference Group (SPRG) had emerged from the Strategic Development Advisory Group (SDAG) and would have to seek ways of working with Uttlesford Futures and other related bodies such as the Essex Partnership.

The SPRG's terms of reference were set out in the report and this also referred to the realisation of the Council's strategic vision which was being consulted on through the Local Development Framework (LDF), Uttlesford Futures and the Community Strategy. The report also considered how this process would link in with the recent White Paper on Strong and Prosperous Communities.

Many of the elements of the White Paper had been included in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill now being considered by Parliament. The Bill provided for the development of a Local Area Agreement (LAA) with agreed targets. The Chief Executive commented that the Government appeared to be making up policy as it went along as, for example, the bill had excluded NHS Foundation Trusts and Health Trusts from the list of public sector partners having a duty to co-operate with the local authority in agreeing LAA targets.

Second, more weight was being placed on partnership working. There had been criticism that the LSP was not sufficiently central to the Council's objectives. There was a need to ensure that the Council took ownership of the LSP agenda.

Councillor Dean thought that the Council should agree the chair of the LSP although that had not previously happened in Uttlesford.

Consideration was given to the position of partnership working in Essex. The Chief Executive said that no-one in Essex was bidding for unitary status. A pathfinder bid could be submitted for improved two tier working but this would need the support of all twelve districts as well as the County Council. However, Tendring District Council had

already rejected this possibility and it seemed that no bid could now be submitted from Essex.

It was clear however that Essex could not be seen to be doing nothing and the Essex chief executives were trying to reach a clear joint view of the priorities for service provision partnerships. The LSP would have a crucial role in developing such an agreement.

He asked Members to consider what an effective LSP would look like. One example might be the Harlow Renaissance and, in this connection, it was noted that John Spence of that organisation would be invited to attend a future meeting.

Councillor Dean thought that the LSP should explore business opportunities within Harlow and at Stansted Airport.

Councillor Menell pointed out that much of the northern end of Uttlesford based on Saffron Walden was more likely to look towards Cambridge and she drew attention to the vision for North Cambridge.

The Chief Executive agreed that for many residents in Uttlesford Cambridge was more relevant than other centres such as Chelmsford, Harlow or Bishop's Stortford. It was important to note that where LSPs were working well there was no doubt about the agenda. The Council should seek to make the LSP more effective and to achieve greater influence within the partnership. The vision should set out the Council's aims and then address the means for achieving it. This would involve testing the strategy set out and trying to command general support.

Councillor Dean noted that Harlow had secured more funding and she wondered whether Uttlesford would be given similar opportunities as part of the objective to achieve greater visibility.

Some funding was already in place and there was the prospect of applying for reward money from central government. It was noted that the current proposal was to include the £15,000 already received from Essex County Council within an LAA reward grant of £45,000.

Members agreed that if money was committed it would contribute to the sense of partnership and ownership and that more use could be made of the voluntary sector.

It was recognised that area panels were seen as a key component in local partnership working. However, concern was expressed that the area panels had not knitted together as well as they might have done. It was noted that the chairmen of area panels did meet together to discuss matters of mutual interest but it was the case that each of the panels had different issues of local concern. Area panels provided a forum to enable other groupings to be brought into the discussion but this was not always being achieved.

For all of these reasons it might be worthwhile to consider holding a Member workshop to explain the importance of partnership working.

The Minutes of Uttlesford Futures meetings could be included in the Council's Minute Book.

Councillor Dean asked about how all of this fitted in with consultation on the Local Development Framework (LDF). The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that a questionnaire would be sent to Uttlesford residents in a future edition of Uttlesford Life on the different spatial elements of the LDF and that views would then be fed back as part of the development of the Core Strategy.

The Chief Executive agreed that the Council had not yet identified the proper forum for discussion of these matters. Part of the problem was that the area panels did not fit with other potential partnership structures such as, for example, the police consultative groups. A way would have to be found of resolving these issues and a useful first step might be to hold a Member workshop on the content and likely outcome of the White Paper.

He suggested that the political groups might find it useful to take these matters back for discussion and that officer briefings would be helpful. A further development could then be to invite particular groups such as the PCT to discuss ways of forming partnerships. In this context it was noted that Aidan Thomas, Chief Executive of the PCT, had spoken positively about the need to build relationships with district councils.

An interim director was now in place jointly for Epping Forest and Uttlesford and the new director would be allocated to Uttlesford. It was a possibility that the new West Essex Local Team could be accommodated within the London Road office.

Reference was made to difficulties caused locally by the assimilation of immigrant communities as there was some evidence of local tension. It was noted that the local Catholic Church had helped with the integration of migrant workers but that the scale of the problem clearly warranted a greater financial contribution from central government. A letter had already been sent to the Home Office and the County Council about the economic and social effects of Stansted Airport.

Summing up the discussion, it was agreed as follows:

- LSP Minutes would be included in future Minute Books;
- Briefings would be offered to each of the political groups;
- Briefings on the LSP would be incorporated into Member training after the May elections;
- The terms of reference were approved; and
- A representative from Harlow Renaissance would be invited to the next meeting.

SPR4

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would be on Monday, 26 February at 2.30pm. (Please note that the time has now changed to 4.00pm.)

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The meeting ended at 3.50pm

