

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLACE SERVICES & ECONOMIC GROWTH
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 27
NOVEMBER 2014**

Present:

Councillor S Walsh (Chairman)	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor G Butland	Councillor V Metcalfe
Councillor T Cutmore	Councillor C Pond
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor S Robinson
Councillor D Harris	Councillor K Twitchen
Councillor T Hedley	Councillor A Wood
Councillor I Henderson	

Members also in attendance: Councillors K Bentley and K Bobbin

1. Apologies and Substitution Notices

Apologies were received from Councillor Guglielmi.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 23 October 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

With reference to Minute 5, Councillor Walsh declared a personal interest in that that his wife is a retired EU official and is in receipt of an EU pension; and Councillor Butland declared a personal interest as he is Chairman of the Europe & International Panel of the East of England European Partnership.

With reference to Minute 9, Councillor Kendall declared a personal interest in the Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy in that he is Secretary of the Brentwood Bus and Rail Users Association, and a Trustee of Brentwood Community Transport in his capacity as a Brentwood Borough Councillor.

4. Questions from the Public

There were no questions raised by members of the public.

5. EU Funding & Brussels

The Committee considered report PSEG/31/14 setting out the Essex County Council (ECC) relationship with the Brussels Office, and the Council's strategic engagement on EU affairs.

The Committee received information from the following individuals and organisations:

- Councillor Kevin Bentley, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure and Waste and Recycling
- Jennifer Dearing, Interim Director of Commissioning for Economic Growth & Communities, ECC
- Karen Williams, Head of Funding and Investment , ECC
- Adrian Harris, EU Funding, Funding and Investment Team
- Jonathan Millins, Senior European Policy Officer, East of England European Partnership Brussels Office (hosted by ECC on behalf of partnership)

Councillor Bentley introduced the aforementioned representatives and gave a brief outline of the role of East of England Local European Partnership Brussels Office. The Brussels Office serves the needs of 52 East of England Local Authorities and other partners. The ECC External Funding Team works with the Office to increase the level of EU funding obtained for the County. Line management and hosting of the Partnership continues to be provided by ECC in close collaboration with the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA). Councillor Bentley explained that ECC had secured £30 million approximately for use into various projects and training schemes. He highlighted the significance of the work and service provided by the Brussels Office, and referred to his personal experience using their services on a regular basis and successful funding bids such as the Superfast Broadband Project.

Councillor Bentley indicated that he would like to generate more interest from businesses across the County in seeking EU funding, and confirmed that public information is produced in various formats by the Brussels Office and others. Nevertheless he indicated that he would review what information was available in response to questions raised by Members. Also he highlighted other measures taken to promote awareness of the subject including a Business event to be held in February 2015 at Anglia Ruskin University. He further undertook to provide to Committee members, a list of projects across Essex where EU funding had been acquired.

The following is a summary of information considered by the Committee:

- What is the Partnership and what does it do?
 - The Partnership is funded by EELGA and a number of other partners to represent the views of the East of England European Partnership vis-à-vis the EU institutions.
 - The Office's principle role is to assist partner organisations improve their access to EU funding. It provides intelligence and advance warning of EU policy and funding developments.
 - Raising the profile of individual partners in particular and the East of England in general with key policy makers and organisations across the EU.
 - Actively distributing information regarding seminars, business events, Twitter feed, Facebook, E-bulletins and Knowledge hub.
- What is European Funding?

- The term European Funding is used to describe a group of pan-Europe 7 year funding programmes issued by the European Commission that allow ECC and its partners to access grants that can help provide financial support to projects that meet the specific objectives/ outcomes of the programmes
- It is imperative that ECC and Essex based organisations take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new EU Funding programme which runs from 2014 – 2021.
- It remains apparent that organisations across Essex both public and private, are not fully aware of the opportunities that the EU Funding Programme offers.
- Features of the Brussels Office
 - Expertise in lobbying EU policy makers.
 - It has developed effective communication networks, which are enhanced by its close geographical proximity, regular contact and familiarity with EU bodies.
 - While the Office can provide information and tailor it to the needs of councils, it does depend upon the institutional capacity of a local authority to use that advice to its full potential. It was acknowledged that ECC does have a dedicated team of officers and councillors who are actively engaged in pursuing EU funding and influencing its policies with Brussels Office support.
 - The East of England European Partnership is the only area of the UK that has an Office specifically geared towards fostering a positive relationship and benefits from the EU.
 - It acts as a conduit for bringing Councils and relevant EU Commission officials together.
- Business & Industry
 - The priority of the Brussels Office is to deliver a service to its subscribers ie mainly local authorities.
 - In practice it is a small office and could not manage individual relationships with thousands of private companies. However, it has worked on particular projects with councils in response to issues raised by businesses.
- Funding across the County
 - ECC has mechanisms in place to seek EU funding for various projects across the whole of the County.
 - The ECC Funding and Investment Team is proactive. It regularly shares up to date information with Essex Borough, City and District Councils, as well as offering individual advice and support.
 - Partners are encouraged to be proactive and develop projects that might attract EU funding so if opportunities arise then timely bids can be submitted. However, there is a reticence to allocate resources to developing proposals given the costs of doing so.
 - It was acknowledged that there are potential risks associated with currency fluctuations as funding is awarded in Euro. Such risks would be taken into account where the programme or large project warranted action be taken. The Public Sector is subject to greater regulation than the Private Sector as well as through budget allocation, in the measures it may take to alleviate financial risk.

- SELEP (South East Local Enterprise Partnership)
- The EU has more experience of working with regions rather than the Government's UK structural funding framework.
- Following a transitional period the EU has become more familiar with working with the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Given the large size and composition of the SELEP it does mean that processes tend to be slower than for other LEPs that may represent a single county administrative area such as Hertfordshire.

In conclusion the Chairman on behalf of the Committee thanked everyone who contributed to the discussion, and confirmed the session had been extremely useful. It had provided an opportunity for Members to develop greater understanding of the role and services provided by the Brussels Office. Although the Office is small it has proven very effective in supporting local authorities in the pursuit of economic growth and other projects in the East of England.

6. Highways Maintenance and the Repair of Potholes

The Committee considered report PSEG/32/14 enclosing a Scrutiny Report on this issue.

During a brief discussion the Committee touched upon:

- The criteria for pothole repairs
- The timescale for repairs
- County Council's classification of roads and the implications for highway maintenance
- The management of utility company works
- The longevity of pothole repairs viewed by the Committee in September

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed some of these matters are referred to in the Scrutiny report that is to be published. For instance there are links to the ECC website including the Highway Strategy Maintenance Strategy. Nevertheless, the Chairman undertook to seek an update on those issues that were raised where there may have been some recent changes.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman expressed his thanks to those Officers involved in the organisation of a highly informative visit on 25 September.

In conclusion, the Committee **agreed** to the publication of the Highways Maintenance and the Repair of Potholes Scrutiny report.

7. Jobs, Welfare and Skills

The Committee considered report PSEG/33/14 setting out the progress of the Task and Finish Group conducting this review, and seeking its endorsement of a scoping document designed as a framework for this review.

At the meeting attention was drawn to Carers Strategy Task and Finish Group (of the Peoples and Families Scrutiny Committee) and the potential links between the two reviews due to implications of the National work Programme for full time carers.

In conclusion, the Committee **endorsed** the scoping document attached to report PSEG/33/14.

8. Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Management

The Committee considered the progress report of the Task and Finish Group Report PSEG/34/14 conducting this review, and seeking its endorsement of a scoping document designed as a framework for this review.

In conclusion, the Committee **endorsed** the scoping document attached to report PSEG/34/14.

9. Work Programme

The Committee received report PSEG/35/14 by the Scrutiny Officer updating Members on the work programme.

The Committee noted there will be a formal meeting on 18th December, when proposed changes to County Park Car Parking Charges will be considered.

The Chairman advised the Committee that he had received a request from Councillor Abbott to call in a decision of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP). It had not been treated as a valid call in under the County Council's rules around the calling in of decisions as set out in its Constitution as it had not been submitted by a Committee Member. Nevertheless as Chairman of the Committee Councillor Walsh would be seeking clarification from the NEPP on why the imposition of any waiting restrictions in Forest Road, Witham had been deferred. In addition he confirmed that the matter had raised some concerns about the clarity of the notice produced by the NEPP, which were being addressed.

At the meeting Members did raise some concerns about the two Essex Parking Partnerships. Consequently it was proposed that an item be brought to a future meeting of the Committee on the Partnerships.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that its next formal meeting was scheduled for 18 December 2014.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 11.55am

Chairman