

Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held digitally on Thursday, 21 January 2021

Present from the Committee:

Councillor I Grundy (Chairman)	Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor A Wood	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Moore	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor I Henderson	Councillor C Weston
Councillor P Honeywood	Councillor B Massey
Councillor W Schmitt	

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

There were no changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting.

No formal apologies were received.

Cllr Honeywood declared a code interest as a district authority cabinet member with responsibility for housing.

Cllr Wood declared a code interest due to his employment working in rail replacement passenger transport.

2. Minutes

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020.

3. Questions from the Public

There were no requests to speak from members of the public.

4. Essex Housing Strategy

Members noted report PSEG/01/21 and received a presentation from Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Lee Heley, Head of Housing Growth and Daniel Baker, Housing Growth Lead.

Key points raised included:

Context

- The draft ECC Housing Strategy was presented to the Committee on 23rd January 2020
- A revised consultation document setting out the proposed focus, goals and high-level actions of the strategy was subject to a 12 week public consultation from 3rd March 2020. The document set out three Strategic Goals:
 - o Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county;
 - o Enabling people to live independently throughout their life;
 - o Supporting people to have a stable home
- We have and continue to engage directly with key partners from Essex Borough, City and District councils, Housing Associations and Developers
- Following a short pause during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic the strategy has been updated in line with the outcomes of the consultation.

Housing through the pandemic

- Local Housing Authorities in Essex moved around 200 rough sleepers into accommodation working in close collaboration with partners, including ECC, Police, Health and voluntary sectors to provide necessary support
- Temporary ban on evictions and mortgage holidays
- 2019-20 saw highest number of affordable housing completions in Essex since 1995. New build crashed in lockdown then sprang back in summer 2020.
- Housebuilding will play an important part of post-COVID economic recovery work in Essex with research suggesting each new home built supports over 3 jobs
- The housing market has defied economic gloom during the pandemic so far, but many uncertainties in 2021:
 - o Economic outlook;
 - o When will COVID restrictions end?;
 - o Working practice and lifestyle changes;
 - o Changes to Help to Buy and end of Stamp duty holiday;
 - o Planning reforms; and
 - o Investments in improved energy performance, accessibility, and fire safety

Feedback from committee in January 2020

- The draft strategy has undergone a number of changes based on feedback from the committee in January 2020:
- Partnership working on housing issues essential - 12 week public consultation, further round of engagement with partners planned ahead of publication. Aiming to co-develop strategy action plans for each Essex district to reflect specific ECC activity in that area
- Provision of necessary infrastructure - Increasing infrastructure investment included as specific outcome in the strategy

- Influence of ECC over housing needs - Using evidence and influence to increase the proportion of accessible new homes built included as a specific outcome in the strategy
- Empty homes and keyworkers - Work to assess options of how ECC can support Local Housing Authorities to bring empty homes back into use to be included as an action in the strategy. Keyworker homes to be considered alongside plans to support increase affordable housing delivery

Feedback from the public consultation

- 12 week public consultation starting in March 2020.
- 36 responses received.
- Feedback from partners highlighted the need for a closer partnership to realise mutual goals.

Next steps

- Updating document based on comments from the Committee
- Refinement of strategy and action plan with officers across ECC responsible for delivery (Jan/Feb 21)
- Draft strategy shared with partners for final engagement & feedback (Feb 21)
- Final strategy drafted and presented for sign-off (Feb-Mar 21) **Once strategy agreed*
- Monitoring of action plan implementation and co-production of district specific action plans (Apr 21-Mar 22)
- Refresh action plan for financial year 2021-22 (Nov 21 – Feb 22)

The Chairman and members of the committee thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for taking the feedback of the committee on board and incorporating suggestions into the draft strategy.

Following the presentation, members were invited to questions and provide feedback. Key points raised included:

- Provision of necessary infrastructure – members raised concerns around current legislation around permitted development and the lack of s106 money to provide necessary infrastructure. Members were assured that the Cabinet Member and officers were aware of the problem and would continue to lobby central govt to make the policy more sustainable in future.
- Population figures and housing targets – members enquired as to how the statistics were arrived at and whether ECC was consulted.
- The ability for elderly and disabled Essex residents to purchase appropriate single-story housing – Members were assured that the cabinet member and officers continue to influence the market where they can to ensure appropriate housing is available. Members were also updated on the independent living strategy to support older adults in care.
- Five year land supply – members noted that, due to Covid, developers aren't producing and selling as quickly as they had planned for so the five

- year land supply is falling behind. Officers noted that there is little ECC can do around this as policy is set nationally.
- Essex Design Guide – Members asked for an update on the guide, particularly focusing on green infrastructure and electric charging infrastructure. Members requested an additional session later in the year to receive a formal update.

ACTION: Formal update on Essex Design Guide scheduled for later in 2021.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their attendance.

Following this, the panel for this item left the meeting.

5. Passenger Transport Update

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Helen Morris, Head of the Integrated Passenger Transport Unit to the meeting. Members received report PSEG/02/21 and were invited to ask questions and provide scrutiny.

The Chairman and the committee thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their work maintaining the service during a difficult period.

- Impact of the pandemic – Members were informed that the passenger transport industry had been hit hard by the pandemic. The support has been good, but more is needed to ensure that the industry can survive the crisis.
- Covid safety on buses – Guidance on transport safety upheld to highest degree. Masks are worn at all times, ventilation maintained, there's advanced cleaning procedures.
- Temperature checks – members enquired as to whether temperature checks should be implemented as standard on all passenger transport services. Officers noted that temperature checks had proven ineffective in the past and potentially increase risk due to the proximity required to carry out checks.
- Community transport funding – Members asked whether current funding levels are going to be upheld. The Cabinet Member assured members that a new passenger transport strategy was in development and that members would be updated on future funding levels once a clearer picture had emerged following the pandemic.
- Protection of bus providers and workers – there are currently no plans to move bus drivers up the vaccine distribution list.
- Future marketing strategy – members asked what plans were in place to market passenger transport services once it was safer to travel. Members were assured that an update would be provided later in the year.
- Connections to vaccinations – Members were assured that the arrow dart service currently in operation was capably carrying out a service to connect residents to vaccination services.
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6. Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the next full committee day was scheduled for Thursday 25th February. Here, members will be looking at the Essex Skills Strategy, and receive an update on Essex Libraries.

7. Urgent Business

None received

8. Urgent exempt Business

None received

Close of meeting

The formal meeting was closed at 11.52