
Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 18 January 2018

Present:

Councillor E Johnson (Chairman)	Councillor C Pond
Councillor T Ball	Councillor M Platt
Councillor S Hillier	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor P Honeywood	Councillor W Schmitt
Councillor D Kendall	Councillor A Sheldon
Councillor B Massey	Councillor J Young

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox - Scrutiny Officer
Lisa Siggins - Committee Officer

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report of the Membership, Apologies and Declarations was received and it was noted that

1. the membership of the committee was unchanged since the last meeting;
2. Councillor S Canning and Councillor R Gadsby had sent their apologies; and Councillor M Durham had sent his apologies and was substituted by Councillor M Platt;
3. Councillor W Schmitt declared an interest as a Board Member of Great Notley Country Park; and Councillor Chris Pond as an Honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals.

The Chairman reported Councillor Stephen Canning has stepped down from his role as Vice-Chairman; to that end the Chairman proposed Councillor Stephen Hillier as Vice-Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Tony Ball. The Committee agreed the election of Councillor Hillier as a Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 23 November 2017 were agreed as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

3 Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

4 Mobile Libraries Consultation Outcomes

Councillor Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and

Customer was in attendance for this item.

Councillor Barker explained the current fleet of mobile libraries is getting past its operational functionality with seven of the nine vehicles needing replacement from April 2018. There is a cost of £60,000 per annum per vehicle to lease new ones.

The consultation was undertaken between September and November 2017 and was sent to 4,700 residents. There were in excess of 1,400 responses. The responses were, in the main, what was expected with residents understanding the need for rationalisation given there had been a 47% fall in the use of the mobile library service over the last 10 years. The consultation outcomes indicated service-users would be happy to move from a fortnightly visit from the service to a three- or four-weekly visit – with a preference for three-weekly. As a result of the consultation a change has been made to the final decision that a mobile library service be available anywhere where there is a one-and-a-half mile destination to a static library. Two stops in villages will be merged into a single stop at a convenient location. Cabinet will confirm the decisions at its meeting on Tuesday, 23 January 2018.

Essex does have some anomalies in relation to library provision, for example Thaxted has over 3,000 properties but is not served by a static library, yet smaller villages do have such provision. Examples like this have resulted in interest in establishing community libraries.

There are individual conversations going on with care homes in the county to restock them every three months with books and audio-books. Between now and April care homes who are not within one mile-and-a-half radius of a static library will be approached to also find suitable points within villages for mobile library visits, taking into account access logistics.

In response to Committee Member questions Councillor Barker stated:

- She hoped the mobile libraries consultation will have raised awareness and enthusiasm in the library service; and there had been reports of people involving themselves in the consultation who were not mobile libraries users in specific villages
- Young children do use the mobile library service to a significant degree
- She wants books to still be free at the point of use by users in communities and wants to encourage communities to establish their own library facilities. There will be funds available to set these up
- She would undertake to look into Greenstead Library charging the 'knit and natter' group being charged to use the facility
- There is no reason why Post Offices could not be established within libraries – this was previously the case at Writtle Library. However, there is a need to raise the awareness of the public in terms of the utilisation of library space. Concern was raised with regard to library staff being expected to take on additional tasks as a potential result of other facilities utilising space
- Thoughts will be given to the establishment of libraries in the new garden

- town developments
- She would undertake to speak with local churches and church halls as part of the engagement
- She will be considering library opening times between Christmas and the New Year
- District leaders, voluntary groups, parish councils will all be invited to the engagement meetings – they will not be public meetings. This will enable focus. Libraries are very personal to a location so the local picture will be key as an outcome of each meeting. They will also be a way of understanding whether there is appetite for a community library within the locality
- There should be no reason why the public cannot use the library when parish meeting are taking place. Councillor Barker requested Councillor Pond send specific detail related to Loughton Library in this respect
- The engagement meetings will take place on Monday and Wednesday evenings throughout March. Councillor Barker will circulate confirmed dates to Members

The Chairman invited the Committee to support the Cabinet paper and this was agreed. The Chairman thanked Councillor Barker for her contribution.

5 Essex Libraries: Static Libraries Public Engagement

Councillor Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer was in attendance for this item.

Councillor Barker explained the rationale behind the public engagement, which is starting in March 2018, is to ascertain whether the current static libraries are fit-for-purpose? There will be conversations within every district to gain informed ideas about libraries to ensure they are fit for the 21st Century; and to maintain and grow the service. At present many of the county libraries have space lying idle and these spaces could be let out to individuals, community groups, businesses etc. as leaving these spaces empty is not viable moving forward.

In response to Committee Member questions Councillor Barker stated:

- Equipment being transferred into community libraries will depend on how long it is intended for the provision to open. It should be technically possible to put the equipment in, however
- In visiting 65 libraries throughout the county it is clear that the main usage is anything but borrowing books. Therefore, as part of the public engagement it is clear that we do not always need the full space currently occupied by books. The plan is to provide what each community wants within their libraries
- She would undertake to look into Greenstead Library charging the 'knit and natter' group being charged to use the facility
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- Thoughts will be given to the establishment of libraries in the new garden town developments
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The Chairman thanked Councillor Barker for her contributions to the Committee.

6 Country Parks Car Park Charging Task and Finish Group: Portfolio Holder response to Recommendations and Actions

Councillor Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste was in attendance for this meeting.

The Chairman explained a discrete Task and Finish Group met on a single occasion in December which was provided with detail of the intended car park charge increases and the rationale behind them. Recommendations and actions followed the meeting which were forwarded to the Cabinet Member for consideration and response at this meeting.

Councillor Walsh presented his response and explained to Members that an additional consultation with the Joint Venture Board for Great Notley Country Park will take place as the Park is jointly funded by Braintree District Council. The consultation period itself would be six weeks from 5 February until 18 March, with feedback available by 23 March with the intention to sign-off a Key Decision by 6 April. Implementation of the new charges would begin on 23 April.

Posters will be displayed by car parking machines and notice boards; plus there will be communication in newsletters, the internet and social media.

Councillor Walsh thanked the Task and Finish Group for their work and recommendations and confirmed all were accepted.

In response to Committee Member questions Councillor Walsh stated:

- He would feedback any changes that are made as a result of the public consultation
- He would provide the financial investment going into each Country Park in the County

- He is aware of verge parking, particularly in Brentwood's Country Parks and is considering ways this can be better controlled
- He would shortly provide a written response to the question relating to Hainault Forest and the Woodland Trust asked by Councillor Pond in November

The Chairman thanked Councillor Walsh for his contribution to the meeting.

7 Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017/18

The Work Programme presented was noted. The next meeting of the Committee would receive a report on Air Quality in advance of undertaking the review referred by Full Council.

8 Future Meeting Dates

The dates presented to the Committee for the remainder of 2018/19 were noted. There was one change agreed with the Committee to now meet on Wednesday, 12 December 2018.

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There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 11.48 a.m.

Chairman