
Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Tuesday, 24 October 2017

Present:

Cllr M Mackrory (Chairman)	Cllr J Moran
Cllr J Beavis	Cllr R Pratt
Cllr M Buckley	Cllr C Sargeant
Cllr I Henderson	Cllr W Schmitt
Cllr V Metcalfe	Cllr A Sheldon

The following officers were also in support:

Joanna Boaler	Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Richard Buttress	Senior Customer Services Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Cllr D Louis and Cllr M Steptoe.

2 Declarations of Interest

Cllr J Moran declared an interest in agenda item 5, confirming that he is a paid employee of a funeral directors as a Funeral Assistant.

3 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

4 Questions from the Public

There were no questions from the public.

5 Coroner's Service

Members received report CSC/17/17, which provided an update on the Essex Coroner Service. The Chairman welcomed Cllr S Barker, Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer, Caroline Beasley-Murray, HM Senior Coroner for Essex and Hannah Brown, Coroner Service Operations Manager to the Committee.

Cllr Barker and Caroline Beasley-Murray introduced the item by making several points:

- Caroline Beasley-Murray said she was pleased to attend the Policy and Scrutiny Committee; her first appearance at a Scrutiny

Committee

- Caroline Beasley-Murray stated that she was very grateful for the support she receives from Essex County Council
- It has now been confirmed that the scheme for Medical Examiners will commence no later than 1 April 2019 with it being the responsibility of the Local Authority
- There was a marked overall increase in the number of inquests held relating to DoLs deaths but, as a result of recent legislative changes, this has now abated.
- Consideration of the involvement of coroners in stillbirths is being discussed nationally.

Members made various contributions and received responses from the witnesses:

- The jurisdiction in Essex is high in cases that require jury inquests because of the prison, heavy industry and psychiatric referrals for those sectioned under the Mental Health Act
- There is no reason why we have a higher post mortem rate, they are requested when a doctor has not given a cause of death
- The UK has a higher rate of postmortems than other countries so the direction nationally is to only undertake when necessary
- The Coroner's Service works closely with mortuaries including funeral directors and temporary mortuary units in the winter
- Liaison does not take place with Addenbrooke's Hospital because it falls outside the jurisdiction of Essex
- The accommodation in Seax House is appropriate for the number of cases and the Coroner confirmed she was pleased to have a dedicated Courtroom. However there is a pressing need for improved jury accommodation
- It was confirmed that inquest jury selection is the same as for a criminal jury
- It was confirmed that the Coroner's Support Service is a highly trained team of volunteers who provide support and an interface with Coroner Officers
- Improvements over the last four years were noted and it was confirmed that specific religious arrangements are made when necessary and further provision is currently being explored
- Soft market testing has concluded for the case management system and a business case will now be prepared. A case management system will bring significant efficiencies to the service
- Digital Autopsy Services provide an enhanced post mortem examination, the technology is cutting edge
- Regulation 28 Reports require a response within 56 days, it was agreed that the Coroner would make some examples of these available to the Committee
- If a flight arrives in Stansted with a body but the destination is outside of Essex, it is not the responsibility of the Essex Coroner
- There has been no impact to date with the merger between Colchester and Ipswich Hospitals

- Because of the size of Essex no exploration of shared services has taken place.

In light of the discussions, the following further recommendations were **agreed**:

1. Further reports will be brought back to the Committee on progress of the case management system, stillbirth reviews, jury accommodation, digital scanning and increased mortuary provision
2. Members were invited to visit Seax House to see the Coroner's Office.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member, the Coroner and officers for their submission to the Committee.

6 Work Programme

Members received report CSC/20/17, which provided the current position as regards to work planning and programming. The Chairman reminded members of the discussion at the last meeting.

It was agreed that Fees and Charges, Reserves and Registration Services would be explored by the Officer for the next meeting in addition to the programmed report on the Budget Out-Turn.

Members had particular interest in the following topics where they asked for clarification:

- Property investment to shape communities
- Administration of Grants, and
- Review process for developing policy.

It was noted that the Place and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee were reviewing the mobile libraries consultation at their November meeting.

In light of the discussions, it was **agreed**:

1. The Officer would consider the options for the November meeting
2. The Officer would investigate the topics members asked for clarification on
3. Briefing and information gathering sessions would be utilised to investigate areas before coming back to the Committee.

7 Commercial Property Fund

Members received report CSC/18/17, which detailed the Property Investment Fund - investment criteria. The Chairman welcomed Cllr L

McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Resources, Robert Manning, Head of Finance and Chris Hornung from Lambert Smith Hamilton (LSH).

Cllr McKinlay introduced the item by making the following points:

- ECC is looking for opportunities to develop sustainable income streams and an agreed way of doing this is by investment in commercial property
- To decrease the risk, a variety of sectors will be used, it was confirmed that alternatives could include student accommodation, car parks, health care and petrol stations for example
- There will be a quarterly report to Cabinet and regular reports to this Committee
- Research has been undertaken to learn lessons from other local authorities
- LSH have been appointed to advise and have already provided some properties for ECC to look at.

Members made various contributions and received a variety of responses:

- The rationale is purely a financial one and economic development benefit is not being considered in this workstream but will be considered in the future
- Reports for each investment opportunity will include key issues on the property but also external factors such as the economics of the local economy, employers in the area, disposal income, expected return, borrowing costs and potential tenants
- LSH have been appointed for the first year as we had existing arrangements in place with them; after 18 months ECC will go out to tender for future years
- Interest rates will not impact in the same way as for individuals because our borrowing would be from the Public Works Loan Board, but considerations around income would be considered
- Half of the profit will be put into a reserve for investment back into property maintenance and other needs
- Legal, financial and tax advice has confirmed that this Fund can progress.

It was **agreed** that the Committee should receive a further report in three to six months depending on the progress made.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their submission to the Committee.

8

Member Enquiries

Members received report CSC/19/17, which provided an update on the implementation and recommendations on the Member Enquiries Service.

Members raised the following points that will be taken up with the Cabinet

Member for Culture, Communities and Customer and Cllr R Mitchell, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways.

1. Arrangements for the briefings and training is encouraging but members requested that this happens quickly
2. Cllr Buckley agreed to discuss the work Cllr Mitchell is undertaking to expedite its progress
3. Members requested that the briefing on Parking Partnerships happens soon as there are levels of misunderstanding amongst the responsibilities
4. More quality control is needed, particularly on non-answer responses.

The Officer agreed to pass back the points raised to the Cabinet Member.

9

Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 28 November was noted as the next activity day.

Chairman