

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES
POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON
17 SEPTEMBER 2010**

Membership:

Councillors:

- | | |
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| * S Walsh (Chairman) | * E Johnson |
| * J Deakin | J Knapman |
| * M Fisher | * C Pond (Vice Chairman) |
| * M Garnett | * M Skeels |
| * E Hart | M Webster |
| * R Howard | * J Schofield (substitute for K Bentley) |

(* present)

Also present Councillors J Lucas, Cabinet Member for Heritage, Culture & the Arts, and J Jowers, Cabinet Member for Communities & Planning.

Christine Sharland, Governance Officer, and Matthew Waldie, Committee Officer, were in attendance throughout the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am

43. Apologies and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported apologies from Councillor K Bentley and one notice of substitution as set out in the above membership.

44. Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were recorded:

	Personal Interest:
Councillor S. Walsh	Resident in a Grade 2 listed building Member Essex Police Authority
Councillor M. Fisher	Member Essex Police Authority
Councillor C. Pond	Chairman of Local Historical Society, Member of Loughton Town Council/Loughton Residents Association
Councillor J. Schofield	Member Essex Police Authority

45. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2010 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to an amendment to the list of membership to show Councillor E Johnson as being present at that meeting.

46. Matters Arising: Essex Heritage (Minute 40/July 2010)

With reference to Minute 40/July the Chairman together with Councillors Pond and Deakin (as a Borough Councillor) confirmed that they had attended the *National Heritage in Local Authorities* conference in July. John Penrose MP, the

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, had addressed delegates at the Conference and confirmed his unequivocal adherence to PPS15 (as per the previous Government, albeit with caveats on funding). Members' overall impression of the event was that it was interesting although a little diffuse and light in material.

47. Scrutiny Review on Essex Heritage (Minute 40/July 2010)

The Committee considered report SSC/13/10 enclosing a draft Scrutiny Report that had been prepared for Members on the basis of the evidence collated as part of the review on Essex Heritage.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor J Lucas, Cabinet Member for Heritage, Culture & the Arts, to the meeting and invited him to respond to the Committee on the proposals contained in the draft report.

Councillor Lucas confirmed his endorsement of the overall thrust of the report, albeit he indicated that there were some minor factual details that would need to be adjusted for the final report. He proceeded to address each recommendation in turn, and some of the main points are summarised below:

NATIONAL ISSUES

(1) That the Cabinet should invite the Government to clarify its current stance on planning issues in respect of historic buildings and the historic environment.

Councillor Lucas endorsed this recommendation and confirmed that the Council had already invited the new Minister for Culture and Tourism, John Penrose MP, to visit Essex and was awaiting a reply.

STAFFING ISSUES

(2) That, as part of the Transformation Programme, the Cabinet should invite the Transformation Team to consider (i) whether the current split of heritage related activities across Directorates is the most appropriate and cost effective method of organising staff; and (ii) whether an approach should be made to the 12 district councils in Essex to seek to combine staffing provision in order to better deal with heritage/planning conservation matters.

This very issue is under review. The Council is looking at ways of pooling conservation talent, as many of the smaller authorities have genuine difficulties making up their conservation requirements. To pool resources would not only make economic sense but should raise consistency levels.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

(3) That the Cabinet be invited to consider how the County Council and the 12 district councils can work together to achieve a consistent and robust planning policy across Essex.

(4) That the Cabinet be invited to remind County Council Directorates of the importance of keeping their property portfolio in good order.

The Council has tried to be flexible in its approach, and is keen to see more recent developments (ie those built within the last 50-100 years) as having heritage value. One approach, as adopted with some libraries, which are often housed in interested buildings, is to encourage greater activity in them. Councillor Lucas considered Essex's record as reasonable to date. However, he reminded the Committee of the likely financial restraints over the next few years, which would make their task more challenging.

ARCHIVAL SERVICES

(5) That the Cabinet be invited to consider these findings [see below].

Councillor Lucas endorsed the findings as set out in the report, pointing out that he has just submitted a business case for acquiring the software needed to enable the public to download digitised material, at a cost. He also endorsed the idea of consistency across local authorities being required by law.

Regarding publications, he has been trying to revitalise this area, using the internet and electronic publishing.

BROWN AND WHITE TOURISM SIGNS

(6) That the Cabinet be invited to ask officers to undertake a review of the current Essex policy and guidance notes, and incorporate any necessary updating.

Councillor Lucas made two points: Firstly, aside from the County Council, as Highways Authority, the Highways Agency has responsibility for road signs on trunk roads like the A12 and therefore has a say about the acceptability of tourism signs. Secondly, the funding of these signs is an issue for those people wishing to erect them. In response to the suggestion that the Council might consider funding tourism signs on the main routes into the county (especially in the light of the Olympics), Councillor Lucas confirmed that the Board of Visit Essex has been considering this.

HERITAGE SIGNAGE & WAR MEMORIALS

(7) That the Cabinet be invited to ask the Government to review the existing legislation, giving clear powers to parish councils (where they exist), and clarifying the arrangements in unparished areas.

(8) That the Cabinet be invited to ask the 12 district councils in Essex to compile a list of war memorials in their area, with details of ownership and maintenance arrangements, and that the full list then be retained by the County Council and made available for public access.

Regarding Blue Plaques, it was suggested that local authorities should be given some guidance on this matter, to encourage a discerning and consistent

approach. Councillor Lucas added that slate grey plaques could also be used, albeit they did not carry the kudos of national significance. Councillor Pond referred to a plaque scheme that is operated by Loughton Town Council, and undertook to obtain a copy of that scheme for inclusion in the final scrutiny report.

Regarding war memorials, it was agreed that there should be clarity about where the responsibility for these lies (eg, parish council or alternative). In view of the potential budget problems for their maintenance, various bodies were cited as possible sources of financial and/or practical assistance: Royal British Legion, Communities Initiative Fund, and the County Council's own Historic Buildings personnel.

Councillor Lucas pointed out that the Imperial War Museum is currently compiling a national register of these. When this is complete, the County Council may then carry out a check against its own records.

As an aside, he informed the meeting that the County Council have seats on the boards of several external bodies (eg Museum of Essex Committee) and some of these are vacant at present. It was agreed that the information on these vacancies would be passed to the Committee Officer for circulation to Members.

In conclusion the Committee **agreed** that the report should be redrafted in the light of comments made for further consideration by Members prior to being forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Heritage, Culture and the Arts.

48. Scrutiny Review on Government Consultation “Policing in the 21st century: Reconnecting police and the people.”

The Committee considered report SSC/14/10 concerning this Government Consultation setting out proposals for policing reform, including a number of substantial changes to existing governance arrangements such as the abolition of Police Authorities and their replacement by directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

The Chairman welcomed Robin Paddock, Chief Executive of the Essex Police Authority, and Councillor John Jowers, Cabinet Member for Communities and Planning, to the meeting as witnesses. He invited Mr Paddock to address the meeting on Government consultation *Policing in the 21st century: Reconnecting police and the people*, with particular reference to Chapter 2, on Increasing Democratic Accountability.

Mr Paddock gave a brief presentation on the proposal to abolish local police authorities and create a new, salaried position, that of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The PCC would be responsible for engaging and representing the public, setting priorities, hiring and firing the Chief Constable, holding the Chief Constable to account, and setting the budget and precept. The PCC would be elected by public ballot (for a 4-year term) and would be subject to scrutiny by an independent Police and Crime Panel (PCP). The PCP would, inter alia, be able to provide advice and make concerns public, but it would have no

power of veto over the PCC. It was unclear as yet how the PCP would be constituted, or how the individuals would be appointed to it.

The consultation period would close on 20 September 2010; with the draft Bill scheduled for publication in Autumn 2010; and the first elections in May 2012.

Councillor Jowers confirmed that he was preparing a response on behalf of the County Council and would be submitting it shortly. This was certainly the greatest change in UK policing for 50 years and it was likely to have a significant impact in many ways. The new position, and the manner in which it would be filled, represented the essence of democracy, to some extent, but it would be powerful, and almost certainly politicised. There appeared to be a number of issues still needing to be resolved, and he welcomed input from Committee Members on what issues they considered important, before he finalised his response.

Various comments were forthcoming, which could be summarised as follows:

- Concern about the lack of detail on the way that the proposals for the election and scrutiny of a PCC will be implemented in practice, and democratic accountability in general.
- Given the size and diversity of Essex, its mixture of urban and rural areas, and the two tier and unitary mixture of local government, concerns were expressed over the ability of a single PCC to effectively represent and address the existing variety of needs of the whole area. Members expressed further concern that the fact that the PCC will be elected may encourage candidates to focus upon local issues in order to win support.
- In practice the existing Police Authority operates in a strategic, non-partisan way for the benefit of Essex residents, and it is hoped that the positive lessons that may be learned from its make up and activity will not be lost in the way that any new scrutiny bodies may be implemented. Members suggested that a parochial approach to the make up of Police and Crime Panels should be avoided.

Councillor Jowers noted Members' comments. He agreed to circulate the proposed Cabinet response to Members and asked that any further comments be sent to him as soon as possible, as the submission deadline was imminent.

The Chairman thanked Mr Paddock and Councillor Jowers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

49. Forward Look

The Committee noted report SSC/15/10 setting out its Forward Look, and agreed scoping documents for the following new scrutiny reviews:

- Review of COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazards) Sites
- A Boards on Publicly Maintainable Highway

50. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted that its next meeting was scheduled for 15 October 2010.

The meeting closed at 12.35 pm.

Chairman