

Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on the 25 February 2021.

Present from the Committee:

Councillor I Grundy (Chairman)	Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor B Massey	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Moore	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor C Weston
Councillor I Henderson	Councillor S Hillier
Councillor P Honeywood	

AGENDA

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

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

Apologies were received from Cllr W Schmitt, Cllr D Kendall, and Cllr A Wood.

Cllr A Turrell substituted for Cllr Kendall.

Cllr C Pond declared an interest as an honorary fellow of the chartered institute of librarians.

2. Minutes

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021.

3. Questions from the Public

There were no questions from the public

4. Essex Libraries Update

The panel for this item was:

- Councillor Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities Culture and Corporate
- Juliet Pirez, Head of Libraries
- Elizabeth Sippings, Citizen Services Manager

- Carolyn Peters, Citizen Services Manager.

Members received a presentation outlining how the libraries service had adapted to the pandemic, the implementation of the current future libraries strategy, an update on progress with regards to the new library management system and ECC's national consortium membership. The full presentation can be found [here](#).

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

- Refurbishment of libraries – currently there is only one active refurbishment, in Shenfield, though active plans are in the pipeline for Harlow and other possible sites for redevelopment include Loughton. Members were assured that the committee will be notified as soon as new sites are identified. Refurbishment decisions are taken on a case by case basis, but business cases need to be proposed for each site with an idea of how it will improve prospects for the location.
- Staffing – members received assurances that all staff will be returning to the same positions as before. In many cases they will enable them to carry out new and enhanced roles when they do return. Registration skills for example. It's been great for the service and feedback from staff has been good.
- Impact on current registration staff – new training for library staff in the area of registration will not affect any current staff. It will however, open up new opportunities for current libraries staff should they choose to explore them.
- Existing Adult Community Learning spaces in Harlow – it's unsure what will happen to the existing space at this stage. It is not in a good location for ACL. If it is surplus to requirements, then it will likely be disposed of.
- Budget for new book stock - It is unclear at this stage how much of the budget will be spent on new book stock. Further information will be provided to committee once more is known.
- Harlow library redevelopment – members enquired around the public backlash toward proposals. The Cabinet Member maintained that most local residents were happy. The current space was inappropriate for current needs, so redevelopment will hopefully bring it back into greater use.
- Joining the national libraries consortium – members were promised a briefing paper outlining the key features and benefits of joining the consortium.

ACTION: Members to receive a paper outlining the key benefits and features of ECC joining the national libraries consortium.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their attendance and work in preparation for the meeting.

5. Essex Skills Strategy

The panel for this item will be:

- Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
- Mark Doran, Director Sustainable Growth
- Andy Burgess, Head of Economic Development
- Sarah Read, Localities Lead
- Caroline Betts, Skills Development Manager

Members received a presentation outlining ECC efforts to promote skills and jobs growth as a response to the pandemic. The full presentation can be found [here](#).

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

- Spring budget – members raised questions around what to expect from the spring budget and how this might impact ECC service delivery and implementation of the skills strategy. Members were advised that it would be difficult to speculate, but that officers expected extension of the current furlough scheme and further guidance around the timely reopening of local small/medium sized business to be likely areas of guidance and support.
- 2017 PSEG skills and jobs growth task and finish group – members revisited recommendations from a task and finish group carried out in 2017 by the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee as an example of how little headway had been made in areas of concern for a significant amount of time. Members were advised that more efforts were needed to lobby central govt. to localise more authority around the issues of joblessness and skills growth, handing accountability and autonomy to county authorities. ECC will continue to lobby for more local control and are well dialled in with DWP partners to enable kickstart programme.
- Unemployment amongst 16-24-year olds – members raised concerns around unemployment in young people and barriers to employment. Specific concerns raised included the cost of travelling to and from opportunities and the impact of cuts to careers advice at secondary school level.
- Promotion of STEM subjects in schools – members offered thoughts around how best to promote the uptake of core stem subjects in schools. Members were advised that this is an active area of work for the education and skills portfolio.
- Engagement with further education providers – members stressed the importance of engaging better with FE providers to secure greater and more responsive opportunities in the future. Members were advised that the challenge is articulating both the opportunity and challenge to providers. There is lots of demand for courses at these FE colleges, but often they are not promoting the courses that more directly are likely to lead to gainful employment.
- Jobs in the public sector - Each district and borough have goals and programmes with regards to greening their local areas. Members raised questions around how ECC can audit these opportunities and ensure that they reach the widest number of people. Members were advised that work was being undertaken through the

Essex Housing Officer Group and Essex Planning Officer group, as well as various other groups.

- Brexit – members raised questions around opportunities for more port health authority officers – members were advised that the cabinet member was in close communication with both Harwich and Felixstowe ports and would keep the committee updated as this area of work moved forward.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their attendance and their work in preparation for the committee.

6. Work Programme

Members noted the current work programme.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next committee activity day was scheduled for the 25 March 2021. Members were advised that due to the start of the pre-election period it is unlikely that it will go ahead.

8. Urgent Business

None received

9. Urgent exempt Business

None received

The meeting was formally closed at 12.38.