
Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 22 February 2018

Present:

Councillor E Johnson (Chairman)

Councillor M Durham

Councillor C Guglielmi

Councillor S Hillier

Councillor P Honeywood

Councillor D Kendall

Councillor B Massey

Councillor J Moran

Councillor C Pond

Councillor R Pratt

Councillor W Schmitt

The following officer was present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox - Senior Democratic Services 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. Councillors R Gadsby and J Young had sent their apologies; additionally Councillors T Ball and A Sheldon had sent their apologies and were substituted by Councillors C Guglielmi and J Moran respectively.
3. Councillor C Guglielmi declared an interest in relation to item 4 as a Director of the North Essex Garden Community.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 18 January 2018 were agreed as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

A further request should be made of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste with regard to the Woodland Trust and Hainault Forest.

3 Questions from the Public

There were no public questions.

4 Air Quality

Councillor Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste was in attendance for this item, alongside Mark Ash, Director for Waste and Environment and John Meehan, Head of Environment and Flood Management.

Councillor Walsh introduced a presentation which focussed on what

constitutes pollution and what it means for Essex County Council, and the seven issues listed by the motion, which was approved by Full Council in December 2017, requested a review by this committee ought to focus upon.

Mark Ash highlighted that nine out of 10 of the world's population live in proximity to an area which does not comply with World Health Organisation air quality standards; with the most in need the ones that are most exposed to poor air quality. Improving the air quality of Essex will meet the strategic aims and priorities of helping to create great places to live and work; helping to secure sustainable development; and protecting the environment whilst also improving the health of the people in the county. The most striking pollutants are nitrogen dioxide and particulates and many of the county's strategies and air quality management issues are focussed on these. Major road networks and urban stop-start congested areas are a risk to public health in Essex.

Councillor C Pond raised the issue of environmental issues being underplayed in the ECC responses to local plans. Mark Ash responded there will be a change in focus as the overlap between economic and environmental development are recognised, thus raising the profile of green infrastructure. Therefore, there shall be a consolidation of responses to local plans.

Councillor J Moran stated he was concerned that Saffron Walden has been highlighted as a particular pollution concern due to narrow congested streets; and, therefore asked whether the extension of traffic control systems would be better replaced by increased traffic flow? Mark Ash responded that there have been studies, notably in King's Heath, Birmingham, which showed there are small gains that can happen reasonably quickly. Councillor Walsh highlighted an Environment Agency graph showing reduced air quality in areas of stop-start traffic in London. Councillor Walsh stated he would circulate the graph to the Committee. He also stated there should be some engagement with the Greater London Authority on air quality as there is cross-boundary impact for Essex.

In Essex, 20 areas exceed air quality standards. Where this is the case the Local Authority must prepare an Air Quality Action Plan setting out the measures it intends to put in place in pursuit of the air quality objectives. The main pollutant in each case is nitrogen dioxide, but there will be an increased focus on particulates. Mark Ash issued a word of caution as there is not a consistency of approach across the Essex local authorities in terms of capturing pollutant data and it will be key in order to be informed by better data moving forward.

Councillor C Pond noted Basildon and Harlow have a prevalence of roundabouts to assist traffic flow and that neither has an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). Whereas the rest of Essex mainly has signalised junctions. Councillor J Moran added the latest issue of *Science* magazine provides evidence that traffic is not the largest air pollutant. He

also raised, as did Councillor W Schmitt, whether any studies were available on the switching off of engines at signalised junctions?

John Meehan presented on the seven elements of the Full Council motion. With regard to the adoption of an overarching Council Air Quality Improvement Policy he stated a fuller picture of what is happening throughout the county is needed to enable improved monitoring of pollutants. There is a school education programme to raise awareness of the long-term issues potentially caused by pollutants.

Councillor C Pond suggested the addition of railway authorities in relation to air quality policy engagement due to the non-electrified freight trains that travel through Essex. An energy strategy is being developed and will be published shortly.

The Council has no specific air quality standards, as yet, but developing policy may define any standards. However, pragmatic and practical quality standards are adhered to in procurement activity, John Meehan informed the Committee.

There is also a developing strategy on cycling, walking and sustainable transport. The County does have a *Making Sustainable Travel Decisions* document to assist staff and Members in transport decisions. It is still an open question with regard to which vehicles are the most polluting.

Councillor D Kendall requested some clarity on what ECC can and cannot realistically influence in terms of air quality? Mark Ash agreed to return with the definitions at the next meeting of the full committee.

John Meehan confirmed that in relation to dialogue with HM Government and Local Planning Authorities conversations with spatial planning colleagues are ongoing. Additionally, progress on the Garden Communities projects is likely to have impact on improving air quality as ECC has a high aspiration of 60% sustainability from the developments.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the presentation and suggested a return to the Committee on 19 April with further information.

Councillor J Moran stated he would wish pollutants from farm vehicles to be considered in any review and suggested information could be forthcoming from the National Farmers' Union.

Councillor D Kendall questioned whether ECC monitors air quality in and around its own buildings? What are the air quality standards in each borough/city/district in the county? What are the definitions of a polluting car and what does data reveal to be the most polluting? What funding is available for the district and county cycling strategies? Mark Ash agreed to include answers to these questions at the next meeting of the full committee.

Councillor C Pond, with regard to transport, stated ECC should not be contracting bus services where the buses being used by operators are old and subsequently heavy polluters. He suggested the officers contact passenger transport to raise awareness of this happening.

Councillor R Pratt suggested any Task and Finish Group review should include conversations with district environmental health colleagues looking at domestic, commercial and restaurant pollutants.

Councillor S Hillier stated the task would potentially be enormous and that the review be broken into 'bite-size chunks'. Councillor D Kendall, therefore, referred to the seven elements of the Full Council motion and stated it would be expected these areas were looked at first prior to any diversion. Councillor M Durham agreed and stated the committee would need to thoroughly define the objectives and suggested the review is conducted by a full committee Task and Finish Group.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste thanked the committee for its input into the issue and would welcome the Committee doing a full review of Air Quality.

The Chairman of the Committee questioned whether the Committee take the review in full committee or Task and Finish Group, following the next session in April. It was agreed to re-evaluate following that session, but Councillor Durham's suggestion of a full committee Task and Finish Group be given serious consideration.

5 Localism And Subsidiarity Task And Finish Group: Interim Report To The Committee

Councillor C Pond as the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group updated the Committee on the ongoing review. Councillor Pond highlighted a response from the Cabinet Member for Highways was still outstanding with regard to areas of responsibility the County Council might be willing to delegate to local councils.

Following an enlightening contribution from Maldon District Council at the last meeting of the Task and Finish Group a letter was sent to all Borough/City/District Councils requesting a response which would enable the Group to isolate the most requested areas for devolved activity. To date there have been five responses, plus Epping Forest District Council will attend the next meeting of the Task and Finish Group. Further responses will be chased, and once received will enable the Group to submit a cogent report to the Committee with recommendations to the relevant Cabinet Member(s). The final report will need to demonstrate those areas that could potentially be delivered more effectively and cost-efficiently by districts and/or parishes in order to achieve political buy-in at the County Council.

As a member of the Task and Finish Group Councillor S Hillier acknowledged the topic is much larger than that first envisioned and sought

the support of the Committee to continue with the review. Councillor D Kendall, also a member of the Group, agreed and stated that along with the list of highways related areas that might be devolved this be extended to other functions of the County Council. He warned, however, that funding streams in terms of who will pay for delivery may be a sticking point; but that parishes might have a degree more flexibility due to their precepts.

Councillor M Durham reported on a visit he undertook, as leader of Maldon District Council, to Eastleigh Borough Council in Hampshire which has devolved everything possible to its parishes.

Councillor W Schmitt stated Braintree District Council is ready and willing to undertake devolved services in order to provide better service for the taxpayer, with an example being the maintenance of grass verges.

The Chairman of the Committee highlighted the difficulties of unparished areas to deliver services; and Councillor S Hillier highlighted part-parished areas, such as Basildon where it is even more complicated to deliver devolved services.

Following the discussions it was agreed that the Task and Finish Group continue with the review. Councillor C Pond stated a final report would be presented to the April 2018 meeting of the Committee.

Councillor C Pond also informed the Committee of a conference he attended on 19 February in Waltham Abbey on the Forests of Essex. The conference was intense but had great value and was attended by 131 delegates with themes relevant to the work of the Committee, such as air pollution and the beneficial role trees play in the environment and the associated absorption factors. Councillor Pond stated he would contact the organisers of the conference to provide the papers to circulate to committee members.

Councillor M Durham referred to the expectation that districts log and maintain where trees have been planted, but this is becoming a financial burden.

Councillor W Schmitt stated that there is a right tree at the right time in the right place and is aware of the costs but trees benefit the future health of residents. She stated Europe tends to be more tree-oriented than the UK.

Councillor C Pond stated the conference heard that woodland management at a number of Essex forests are being degraded by the increasing number of winter visitors and that similar applies at some of the county's Country Parks and at Hatfield Forest. Increased urban development is one of the reasons for this. Councillor Pond also stated forests and woodlands are often overlooked when local authorities develop their Local Plans and he was concerned that comments from the County Council on Local Plans have not included any reference to the health and wellbeing agenda of ECC. He stated he would raise this with the Cabinet

Member for Environment and Waste.

6 Petition With 2,318 Signatures: No To Baddow Bus Gate

The Committee received a petition with 2,318 signatures against the proposal for a bus gate in Baddow Road, Chelmsford.

The Chairman of the Committee explained the procedure as outlined in the ECC Petitions Policy which provides for a petition with 2,000 signatures or more to be received by the relevant Scrutiny Committee and the Chairman would make a decision on how it is progressed. All such signatures are responded to by either the relevant Cabinet Member or and Executive Director in writing to the lead petitioner. The Chairman explained this petition was related to a local issue and was not, in his opinion, an issue the committee could usefully debate at this stage. He considered that at this stage the contents of the petition be noted and this was seconded by Councillor S Hillier who stated if the issue moves forward the committee might be minded to consider at a future meeting.

The petition was, therefore, duly noted. Councillor D Kendall wished to record his opposition to the noting of the petition stating that residents who had signed the petition would expect the committee to examine the proposal and discuss the concerns raised.

7 Call-in of decision: FP/058/01/18 Review of ECC Street Lighting

The Committee noted report PSEG/08/18 regarding the call-in of decision FP/058/01/18 Review of ECC Street Lighting and noted the call-in had been withdrawn and no further action by the Committee was required.

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

The Committee work programme, as presented, was noted.

Councillor W Schmitt requested the work programme be supplemented with a review of grass verges. She stated that some areas that cut verges twice a year do not need to do so and there is a potential saving to the taxpayer if the committee could look closely at what, where and when verges are cut.

Councillor J Moran questioned why the cutting of grass verges is undertaken by the County Council and not devolved to districts and/or parishes? He stated his experience in Saffron Walden is that the County Council does not cut verges very well.

The Chairman of the Committee stated the County Council does devolve grass-cutting where it can but that there is a limited budget available. Some parishes are happy to supplement some of their precept whilst others not so. Similarly some districts are happy to undertake extra grass-cutting – it comes down to money. Harlow District Council appreciates the grass-cutting that ECC does and once flowering and seeding is finished the grass

is cut back for hay.

Councillor D Kendall suggested the Deputy Cabinet Member responsible for looking at grass verges is invited to update the Committee. He also stated any review should include the maintenance and repair of verges and the installation of dropped kerbs that go over them. He stated he would support a review.

Councillor S Hillier stated Basildon Borough Council supplements the cutting done by ECC. In the urban areas of the Borough the edges of the roads are kept short on the verges and bio-diversity is encouraged on the outer verges. He fully supported the merit of undertaking a review.

Councillor C Pond agreed that grass verges would be a welcome addition to the work programme, and suggested any review include what grows in grass verges in terms of the judicious planting of appropriate species.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked Councillor Schmitt for the suggestion and the Committee for its input. It was agreed to add grass verges to the work programme.

Robert Fox brought Members attention to the Libraries public engagement events being held in March at locations throughout the county.

Robert Fox also stated the next activity day would be a Highways briefing undertaken by the Cabinet Member for Highways and would be held in private session. The rationale behind this is to understand issues the Committee might wish to take forward on its work programme. Councillor J Moran stated the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee is looking at the finances behind the Ringway Jacobs highways contract and there might be an opportunity for joint-working on this. He stated he would mention this at the next meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

9

Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next activity day will be on Thursday, 22 March 2018 commencing at 10.30 a.m. Councillor D Kendall indicated his apologies for this activity day and that he would be substituted by Councillor S Robinson.

The next formal meeting of the Committee will be on Thursday, 19 April 2018 at 10.30 a.m., with a pre-meeting for Members only at 10.00 a.m. Councillor B Massey and Councillor W Schmitt indicated their apologies for this meeting and would be substituted by Councillor J Moran and Councillor C Guglielmi respectively.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 12.53 p.m.

Chairman