

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SOUTH ESSEX AREA FORUM HELD AT 2.00 PM
ON TUESDAY 15 MARCH 2011 AT BENFLEET METHODIST CHURCH**

Membership

County Councillors:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| * R C Howard (Chairman) | |
| D Abrahall | R A Pearson |
| S C Castle | Mrs I Pummell |
| Mrs T Chapman | Mrs J M Reeves |
| W J C Dick | * C G Riley |
| J Dornan | Mrs T Sargent |
| * Mrs E M Hart | J M Schofield |
| * A M Hedley | * K Twitchen |
| S Hillier | Mrs M J Webster |
| D W Morris | B Wood |
| * present | |

Also Present

Cllr J Jowers – Essex County Council

(in order of signing the attendance book – and as there described).

John Anderson – Canvey Island TC, D Anderson – Canvey Island TC, George Whatley – PAM, Una Kipps – Hadleigh resident, Alan Kipps – Hadleigh resident, Helen Philpott – Billericay TC, Janice Rigby – Rochford PC, Stuart Mennell – Hawkwell PC, John Dickson – Hawkwell PC, Martin Wakelin – Great Burstead PC, T Cutmore – Rochford DC, M White – CAVS.

Officers Attending in Support

Sallyanne Thallon	Area Co-ordinator South Essex
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer
Samantha Ball	Committee Assistant

11. Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the meeting.

12. Apologies and Substitution Notices

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of apologies from County Councillors David Abrahall, Stephen Castle, Tracey Chapman, Bill Dick, Sandra Hillier, Roy Pearson, Iris Pummell, John Schofield, Terri Sargent and Brian Wood; Councillors Alan Bennett, Basildon BC, Pam Challis, Castle Point BC and Malcolm Maddocks, Rochford DC; Jackie Brown, RRAVS, Humphrey Squire, South Essex Chamber of Commerce, Paul Warren, Rochford DC and Steve Sawkins.

13. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the Forum meetings of 15 November 2010 and 18 January 2011 were agreed by the meeting.

15. Public Questions

Mrs Una Kipps voiced her concerns over the current proposal concerning Hadleigh town centre regeneration, particularly referring to the removal of a gyratory one-way system and the replacement of a two-way stretch in the town centre. She suggested that the consultation process had been inadequate and asked if Council officers might revisit this. Councillor Riley acknowledged these concerns and confirmed that he, as chairman of Dawes Heath Neighbourhood Forum, had contacted the Highways Department and had initiated a reverting to the consultants on their proposals. He was also intending to hold a public meeting.

Mr John Sheath expressed his concern over the increased traffic on Sutton road, Rochford, which had increased significantly recently, as all of Southend and Rochford's recycling was now sent there for compacting. He believed that several years ago, money to develop the bridge on that road had been ring-fenced and a Section 106 Agreement made, but he was most concerned, as no contact had been made with the landowner for 5 years. Councillor Terry Cutmore, as leader of Rochford District Council, echoed these concerns and agreed that questions needed to be asked of the Highways Department, particularly about the whereabouts of the money.

Mr Roy Hatfield informed the meeting that Oikos had recently demolished and rebuilt a number of tanks, to hold product for BP.

Oikos has applied to Castle Point Borough Council for a hazardous substance licence. Mr Hatfield informed the meeting that he had handed the Chairman a

petition with over 100 local residents asking for this application to be turned down.

He was also concerned about the lack of access there would be to and from the island, in case of emergency. In response, it was pointed out that this should go before the Fire and Emergency Planning Team.

The Chairman informed the meeting that Essex Flood Forum would be holding a public meeting at Cupids Country Club, Great Wakering, on Thursday 24 March and both he and Councillor Tracey Chapman had been invited to attend.

George Whatley expressed his thanks to the Forum for helping him to act as a witness for the COMAD Scrutiny, as recently conducted by the Safer & Stronger Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee. At this meeting, Mr Whatley was able to put across the views of those residents living in the vicinity of COMAD sites.

16. The Localism Agenda

The Chairman welcomed Councillor John Jowers, Cabinet Member for Communities and Planning, and asked him to address the meeting.

Councillor Jowers reminded the meeting that the Localism Bill was scheduled to receive Royal Assent in November. The intention of the Bill was to bring the level of government closer to local communities (the UK currently has one of the most centralised governments in Europe).

Financially, several opportunities were opening up for local authorities:

- The Community Infrastructure Levy was introduced in 2010. It gives power to local authorities to impose a levy on developers of new homes. A levy can be imposed on every new home, but only in respect of developments of 25 or more houses. The actual sum likely to be levied per house is thought to be in the region of £20,000, so this is likely to generate substantial amounts of revenue. This money will be shared out in the community, with a fair amount being distributed locally.
- The New Homes Bonus, effective in April 2011, will match fund the council tax on a new property or one brought back into use, the money coming out of a central government fund and going to the relevant local authority.
- It is likely that Business Rates will return to local authorities.
- Another potential source of extra funding will be Tax Increment Funding (TIF), where funding can be raised by borrowing against the anticipated upturn in rates.
- Local taxes are another potential source of income.

Underpinning these is the General Power of Competence, which virtually gives local authorities the power to act in any way they see fit, provided the action falls within the law.

Another area to be reformed is the planning process, where several requirements and processes have been abolished. The Infrastructure Planning Commission will be replaced by the Major Infrastructure Planning Unit. Under the new legislation will be a Right of Community challenge, which will allow local communities to make proposals and challenge decisions made that will affect them.

Local enterprise partnerships represent an important development, which the Government hopes, will offer local areas the opportunity to take control of their future economic development. Essex is part of a very large one, including Kent and East Sussex as well. This will be business led, but should bring the best in business and local government together.

Essex has the highest number of small to medium sized businesses in the country (55,000) and the Council has created a Retail Enterprise Fund, which will match a business's own funding up to £5,000 (or higher, in exceptional circumstances), to assist small rural businesses providing a service to their local community.

Members raised issues:

Councillor Twitchen expressed concern over how engagement with people could be achieved. She gave the example of Neighbourhood Action Panels set up by the Police. These typically committed two PCSOs for a two-hour long meeting, with an average attendance of only 3 or 4 members of the public in urban areas (although rural figures might be slightly higher); and the issues covered tended to be very specific to those individuals. This was neither an efficient use of Police time nor a very satisfactory outcome.

In response, Councillor Jowers acknowledged that such an outcome was not very productive, but he cited the recent experience of Mersea, where the local Police Officer has a regular session in the local public library; this has proved very successful in raising public awareness, improving relations and providing intelligence for the Police.

Councillor Hedley added that, following on the pilot scheme at Tiptree, there was an intent generally to combine Police and Fire Stations (ie normally by closing the Police Stations down); this also might have an impact on the local perception of the local constabulary/fire service.

In response to a question from the floor on Neighbourhood Planning, Councillor Jowers explained this was another element of the Localism Bill. The intention was for local people to come together to decide on what would be good for their

locality. Such plans would have to tie in with any Council Local Development Framework, and of course any developments, for instance, would have to be subject to normal planning requirements, but at least local people had the right to express their views.

An example of the need for control at a local level is with a certain number of village halls and other properties that are owned by the County Council; these should be controlled by and belong to the communities in which they lie.

Concerns were expressed about whether control would come down below borough level, and even if it did, how this would filter right down to grass roots. Councillor Jowers pointed out that the preceding Government had offered to parish the entire country - one of the advantages of parish level control being the lack of politics: people tended to focus on issues as they affected local people. There had been very little take-up at the time; however, if parishes are given more say and more resources, this could become a much more attractive proposition. He added that there were issues about how to define localities and local groups, and the danger of small but active minority groups holding sway in certain circumstances. However, it was the responsibility of the County Council to effect the changes expected to arise from the concept of the "Big Society". He personally was enthusiastic about the possibilities and hoped that it would succeed in giving control back to people and would raise their concern for their own communities.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Jowers for his helpful contribution to the meeting.

17. Scrutiny of the NHS South East Essex Strategic Plan

Councillor Hart, as Chairman of the Task and Finish Group looking at the NHS South East Essex Strategic Plan, introduced the final draft of the Group's Report by reminding the meeting that the Panel had concentrated on four particular aspects of the Strategic Plan, namely, the productivity drive, mental health issues and spend, public health, and provision of community facilities. She pointed out that the Panel was made up of County Councillors and representatives from Southend, Castle Point and Rochford. She acknowledged the contribution made to this Report by all concerned, particularly as recent developments had made this a less than straightforward piece of scrutiny. She asked the meeting to note that the Report would now go before the Essex Health Overview and Scrutiny Board, to be signed off, and she added that the Panel would revisit its findings in July 2011.

Mr Ray Parker, Assistant Director of Strategy and Partnerships, NHS South East Essex, pointed out that this was a time of significant change within the NHS, with the creation of GP consortia. July would be a suitable time for review, as the Shadow Consortium would go online in April and so would have been operating for some time.

Councillor Terry Cutmore, Leader, Rochford District Council, welcomed the report. He specifically referred to the first item in the Report, regarding the establishment of an Urgent Care Centre. He confirmed that the intention was to see this established; unfortunately the planning process was holding it up, so they needed to engage in dialogue with Southend BC.

Councillor Riley, as a member of the Panel, gave a vote of thanks to Councillor Hart and to Sallyanne Thallon, for their work on this project.

18. Community Initiatives Fund

The Chairman invited the meeting to note the outcomes from the 2010/11 CIF. Two points were raised:

- It was requested that the accuracy of the figures as circulated be checked. The Area Coordinator agreed to confirm these after the meeting
- An example of apparent retrospective allocation of funding was queried. In response, the Area Coordinator confirmed this to be an error on the sheet, as funding had been withdrawn when it was made clear that the money had already been spent on the project. As an aside to this, Councillor Jowers, although acknowledging this to be a condition of the scheme, pointed out that he did not think that retrospective allocation *per se* was a bad thing.

The meeting noted the allocation and that the CIF would in future form part of the Big Society Fund, details of which would be announced in due course.

19. Area Forums

The Chairman informed the Forum with regret that the present meeting would be the last in its present format.

Councillor Jowers pointed out that the Council was exploring other potential ways of providing a platform for debate on local issues, eg local liaison groups.

Councillor Twitchen, on behalf of the meeting, thanked Councillor Howard for his hard work and leadership of the Forum.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 3.50 pm.

Chairman