

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SOUTH ESSEX AREA FORUM HELD AT 2.00 PM  
ON TUESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2010 AT BENFLEET METHODIST CHURCH**

**Membership**

County Councillors:

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

**Also Present**

Cllr R Chambers and Cllr J Jowers – Essex County Council

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

Adrian Roper – representing Rebecca Harris MP, Rod Bishop – Canvey Island TC, Janice Payne – Borough Council, Brian Dallas and Tony Brockwell – Brockwell & Sons, George Whatley – PAM, John Buchanan – EALC, Brian Efde – Essex Flood Forum, Glenn Caton – Essex Police, Keith Garnish, Paul Howell – Essex Police, Adam Acott, Steve Rogers – Castle Point BC, Bill Dudbridge and Rob Ashford – Thames Ambulances, Geoffrey Sharp – CPSC, W Archibald, Harry Tucker – Neighbourhood Watch, Helen Philpott – Billericay Town Council, Adam Gaudry – Echo Newspapers, Martin Wakelin – Great Burstead and South Green Village Council, Jackie Brown – NHS South-East Essex.

**Officers Attending in Support**

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

**45. Welcome and Introductions**

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

**46. Apologies and Substitution Notices**

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of apologies from Councillors Stephen Castle, Elizabeth Hart, Roy Pearson, Iris Pummell, Terri Sargent and Kay Twitchen; Jackie Govier and Pam Challis, Castle Point BC and Jackie Brown, RRAVS.

#### **47. Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

#### **48. Minutes**

The minutes of the Forum meeting of 1 September were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

#### **49. Public Questions**

Councillor Roy Pearson asked about how the public could address any concerns they might have in respect of flooding. Councillor Tracey Chapman pointed out that there are Regional Flood Defence Committees, on which Councillors sit, and suggested any concerns be addressed through these.

Councillor Terri Sargent questioned the suitability of the present venue and whether it was likely to attract local people. The Chairman responded that he had been asked to keep costs to a minimum, and having surveyed a number of suitable options within the South area, had concluded that this venue represented the best value. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman should reconsider some further venues.

#### **50. Emergency Services**

##### **i) Fire authority**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Anthony Hedley, Chairman of the Fire Authority, and David Johnson, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, Essex Fire and Rescue Service, to the meeting.

Mr Johnson gave a brief PowerPoint presentation on the fire service in Essex. Certain points were brought out:

- Essex has the fifth largest service in the country, employing 2000 people, with 51 fire stations, responding to over 35,000 emergencies in 2009, and a budget of £76m
- Recent legislation, the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, had made definite changes to the way in which the force operates. For example, national standards, set according to such factors as density of buildings, were superseded by integrated risk management planning, based on local interpretation of risk

- The service also faced changes in situations it was called upon to deal with. Changes to the environment gave rise to larger more frequent fires, airborne particulates and more frequent flooding (although the fire service is not statutorily bound to respond to flood situations). Terrorism was another area that presented new situations, and the Essex force had an urban search and rescue unit that was a flagship within the service nationally
- Recent financial developments have led to the need to review every aspect of the service, with a serious reduction in funding inevitable over the next few years. There is certainly some overprovision in the force, which will need to be addressed, but other options may be explored, for instance sharing sites with the Police.

Questions and comments were invited from the floor.

- Councillor Wood expressed concern over the Fire Service's decision not to respond to automatic fire alarms without confirmation. Mr Johnson acknowledged this concern, but he pointed out that 98% of calls from commercial automated alarms were false alarms. This represented a substantial drain on resources and potentially might draw manpower and equipment away from real life-threatening situations. He reminded the meeting that all alarms from schools and those occurring in the night would still be responded to. There was also an ongoing process of educating businesses in good practice, as far as these were concerned
- Steve Rogers (Castle Point BC) noted that the Fire and Rescue Service had no statutory requirement to deal with flood risks; but he pointed out that when he had contacted the Environmental Agency about flood risk on Canvey, they had suggested contacting the Emergency Services. In response to this, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Environment Agency should be first point of contact. Councillor Chapman agreed to take up this issue with the EA, as part of the Flood Partnership.
- Councillor Martin Wakelin (Great Burstead & South Green VC) asked if thought had been given to having volunteer firemen, as he believed was the practice in some European countries. Mr Johnson confirmed that this was not a new issue – the same question had been raised periodically for many years. He did not believe it likely. Given the physical demands and levels of training required, the Service had trouble filling existing vacancies with the right people, who get paid
- In response to a query on whether insurance companies might be asked to contribute to fire services by way of a levy on policies, Councillor Hedley suggested this may not be the fairest way, as 20% companies are not insured, many of the bigger companies self-insure, and many private individuals go without cover.

**ii) Police authority**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Robert Chambers, Chairman of Essex Police Authority, and Jim Barker-McCardle, Chief Constable, Essex Police, to the meeting.

Mr Barker-McCardle addressed the meeting.

He explained that the funding for Essex Police came partly from a Government grant and partly from local council tax. Of the £237m available to him, 83% was spent on people – so approximately £40m was spent on non-pay costs; and this was the equivalent expected cut he expected over the next four years. Therefore, substantial changes would be required, to meet the new budget figures.

At present, the force employed 3,600 police officers, 2,200 civilian staff, 450 police community support officers (PCSOs) and also had 650 special constables (who were unpaid) on its books. It was inevitable that the savings required would mean a reduction in terms of people, but a complete review of every post, role and operational practice was being undertaken, in order to achieve maximum efficiency, with least possible detriment to actual policing.

Various avenues were being explored, for example:

- working with neighbouring forces (eg with Kent in serious crime)
- providing a service to other forces (eg IT services)
- exploring the possibilities for sharing buildings with the County Council
- generally more efficient use of property
- better use of officers' time (eg through changing shift patterns, etc)
- best practice in the back office
- examining transport costs

The Home Office has also commissioned a comprehensive independent review of police pay and conditions; and Lord Hutton is also conducting a review of public sector pensions, the findings of which will have some impact on Police personnel.

Questions and comments were invited from the floor.

- John Buchanan suggested that community engagement was fairly poor at present. Councillor Chambers confirmed that the Authority was aware of this. Police Community Consultative Groups had been set up, but these had not proved as successful as the Authority had hoped. Neighbourhood Action Panels were also under review. The most important element with these was matching them to communities' local needs. Councillors Hillier and Cutmore both confirmed they enjoyed good engagement with the Police
- Another issue was how the Olympics would affect budgets. Councillor Chambers pointed out that £2.5m had been set aside for the Olympics

and the Authority had received assurances from the Government that they would get the money back in respect of the mountain biking

- Mr George Whatley expressed some concerns over the expressed intention of County Council to switch off street lights in certain areas at certain times, particular with regard to the potential rise in crime rates. In response, Councillor Chambers confirmed that this concern had been noted but pointed out that statistics suggested lower crime rates in areas where this scheme had been piloted. The Council's approach would be to continue to consult the Police
- Councillor Sargent expressed concern over the lack of Neighbourhood Police Officers – she agreed that it was good to have PCSOs on the beat, but added that they needed NPOs to manage them. She also expressed concern over the amount of paperwork that officers were required to deal with. In response, Mr Barker-McCardle pointed out that the impending cuts would mean fewer officers in total, so ways would need to be found to maximise their impact. He added that a recently-introduced scheme, "neighbourhood resolution", which targeted low-level crime, had proved very popular with victims and showed low reoffending rates. It was based on swift resolution and a minimum amount of administration, allowing officers to spend more time on the beat.

### iii) **Ambulance service**

The Chairman welcomed Brad Lane, East of England Ambulance Service in Essex, to the meeting.

Mr Lane gave a presentation on the work of the Ambulance Service in Essex and he began by reminding the meeting that the Service did more than just respond to 999 calls, with its work in providing care. It employs about 4,000 staff and uses a further 2,000 volunteers. Last year it received over 250,000 999 calls, of which 61,000 were "Category A" (ie life threatening), and Essex achieved a 78% success rate of an 8 minutes arrival time within this category (NHS target is 75%). Its customer satisfaction rates 97%, which is one of the highest in the country.

Yet challenges remain – increases in 999 demand, financial cutbacks, the drive to further improve quality, and the need to treat patients closer to home and to reduce hospital admissions.

Various ways of improving the service may be required, for example: more assessment of callers, and a focus on clinical assessment and treatment; the option of a paramedic response only, if appropriate; looking into other ways of providing help; the creation of a new, alternative number to 999, for non-urgent cases.

The intend to become an NHS Foundation Trust. This should maintain closer relationships with the local community, and better reflect the needs of local communities, giving local people greater freedom to operate and control.

Some points were raised by the meeting:

- Asked about specialist equipment and skills, Mr Lane specifically referred to decontamination equipment and the Hazardous Area Response Team (HART); and he added that staff were given training to deal with all sorts of emergencies
- In response to a question about whether they had dealings with other ambulance services, Mr Lane confirmed that they had adopted a policy of mutual aid, so were always prepared to move to wherever the need arose. They did use other services, such as Kent, as well as St John's Ambulance; and they contracted directly with Thames Ambulance Service, by tender
- Asked about Community First Responders, Mr Lane explained that these were volunteers, usually in rural communities, who are trained by the Ambulance service and given equipment. They did not attend all calls – only to cases of chest pains and difficulty in breathing. There were some 400 in Essex.

.The Chairman thanked all three services for their enlightening presentations and for their candour in responding to the varied questions from the meeting.

#### **51. Area Forum budget**

Members received a report AFS/07/10, setting out the recommendations for funding. It was noted that, of the 40 bids submitted, 33 were being recommended. Of the remaining seven, six were more suited to the Community Initiatives Fund, and the other had been requested from a Southend based organisation.

In response to a request that the Council must ensure that applicants deliver, even though they are underfunded, Ms Thallon pointed out that projects are monitored carefully, and that monies are not paid out until goods are actually purchased.

The meeting approved the recommendations as circulated.

#### **52. Scrutiny of the NHS South East Essex Strategic Plan**

Sallyanne Thallon, Area Co-ordinator South Essex, gave a brief update. The salient points were:

- The Panel had held its third meeting on 29 October, attended by Andrew Pike, Chief Executive of NHS South East Essex, and two of his senior

managers, Jackie Brown, Director of Strategy, Productivity and Performance, and Ray Parker, Assistant Director, Strategy and Partnerships

- Jackie Brown presented an overview of the Strategy and the financial pressures arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review, showing that the overall increase in NHS spending will be 0.4% in real terms which will not cover inflationary increases in costs; and a reduction in the administration budget locally of 48% (compared with 33% nationally) must also be found.
- NHS South East Essex does not have the significant deficit in the current year budget that has recently emerged in relation to South West Essex. Although Andrew Pike is the Chief Executive of both South East and South West there is no question that South East funding will be used to bail out the problem. They remain separate entities.
- Inevitably, the Comprehensive Spending Review has had an impact on the Strategic Plan requiring some initiatives to be scaled back though there will continue to be growth in priority areas.
- The minutes of the meeting will be circulated as soon as they are available and will provide more detailed information to Forum Members.
- The next meeting of the Panel is on Tuesday 23 November when organizations have been invited to come and give evidence to the Task and Finish Group [*meeting subsequently cancelled*].

**53. Date of next meeting**

Members noted that the next meeting would be held on **Tuesday 18 January 2011 at 2.00 pm**. Venue: South Benfleet Methodist Church.  
One future meeting date was noted:

Tuesday 15 March 2011.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 4.20 pm.

Chairman