

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CENTRAL SERVICES POLICY AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON  
19 OCTOBER 2009**

**Membership**

**Councillors**

- |                       |                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| * B R Aspinell        | S S Mayzes                  |
| * S Barker (Chairman) | * G W McEwen                |
| J D Dornan            | * L Mead (Vice-Chairman)    |
| * E C Johnson         | D W Morris                  |
| * J Knapman           | * A Turrell (Vice-Chairman) |
| * M C M Lager         |                             |
| * Present             |                             |

**41. Apologies and Substitute Notices**

Apologies were received from Councillor John Dornan

**42. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were recorded.

**43. Minutes**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

**44. The Essex Registration Service**

The Committee noted a tabled report from Alex Hallam, Deputy County Solicitor outlining budgetary information and staffing costs for the Registration Service.

The Committee were advised that the colour codes in the table under section 2 considers the available space in relation to the number of staff and the overall condition of the property and was set by colleagues in Asset Management.

The Committee were advised of the current standardised price for the use of ceremony rooms and that de-commissioning ceremony rooms would enable the registration service to rationalise the pricing structure at certain times of the week and year. The Committee heard that fees for issuing certificates of births, deaths and marriages; currently £43.50 was set by central government and has remained the same for five years. In the case of weddings and civil partnerships this does not include the cost of posting notices of intention, furthermore the Committee were advised that the cost of supplying this service is greater than can be received and that a wedding or civil partnership requires two members of staff for approximately 45 minutes. The Committee were advised that the Registration Service aimed to reduce staffing costs through the flexibility of opting for the single district proposal. Members suggested that this Committee recommend that central government allow Local Authorities the flexibility to set

prices specific to their geographical sites and indeed certain times of the week and year. This issue will be passed to the Cabinet Member.

Members were advised that a formal occupancy survey had not been completed however it is perceived that a single district proposal along with a single diary system would achieve a better use of the Registration's Service and offices. Ceremony rooms are not in constant use and the paper suggested ways in which these rooms could be used by the Coroners Service or for training and meetings. Members were advised that one of the charities previously located at the Brentwood offices had been relocated and that Asset Management are working with the other to secure alternative office space. The Committee were advised that the Registration Service were looking to secure additional off site parking for the Brentwood office.

Alex agreed to provide a breakdown of the costs for citizenship ceremonies

#### **45. The Coroners Service**

The Committee received a verbal presentation from Alex Hallam, Deputy County Solicitor. The Committee were advised that the Coroners Service had recently integrated to the County Council and that staff had transferred across using the TUPE legislation.

Members expressed the need to identify the volume of cases seen by this service as well as costs, income, premises, processes and performance indicators. Alex agreed to produce a report for Members; containing this information. It was agreed that the scrutiny review of this topic take place in the near future.

#### **46. Introduction to EssexWorks Corporate Plan Scorecard Referrals to Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Members noted report CS/17/09 and received a verbal presentation for Mark Golledge, Performance and Improvement Officer.

The Committee were advised that the County Council work with Partners and the Quality of life Team and all use the same report format. Members suggest that the Fire Authority and District Councils also work to this format. Members noted that the document was complex and suggested inserting an executive summary at the start of the Scorecard.

#### **47. Performance Indicators on the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions**

The Committee noted report CS/18/09 and received a short verbal presentation from Duncan Wood, Head of Public Engagement and Corporate Analysis and Suzanne Harris Voluntary Sector Core lead NI4, Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)

The Committee were advised that Performance Indicators (PI) are relative to all public services and not just those provided by the County Council. They can be unpredictable, changing in the short and medium term; and can be influenced by external factors. The Committee were advised that the target of 40 percent was

set by Richard Puleston, Director of Community Planning and Regeneration and that there is not a performance reward grant for meeting targets.

The Committee were advised of the Engage Essex website launched six months ago to stakeholders and Local Authorities and of county wide projects set to engage with Districts.

The Committee noted the difficulty in identifying causes for the PI results which in turn created issues in formulating action plans. Members suggested including reply slips on County publications and looking into using Short Message Service (SMS) texts making it easier for people to respond and ensuring we reply to individuals.

#### **48. Essex Strategy Review**

The Committee received a short verbal presentation from Dan Gascoyne, Assistant Director for Partnership and Delivery.

The Committee were advised of a consultation exercise with partners including District Councils and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and the public, published 15 September 2009 and of further work on changes since the launch of the Essex Strategy review

It was agreed that scrutiny of the Essex Strategy Review refresh would take place at the January 2010 meeting.

#### **49. Management of BT Contract**

The Committee noted the tabled report CS/20/09 and received a short verbal presentation from Mark Briggs, Head of Information Services.

Members agreed to form a Task and Finish Group to carry out a scrutiny review into Information Services.

#### **50. Forward Look**

The Committee noted report CS/19/09.

#### **51. Dates of Future Meetings and Change of time to the November meeting**

The Committee noted the dates and times of future meeting and made note of the change of time to the November meeting which will now be held at 14:00.

There being no urgent business the public meeting closed at 13:20pm