

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 5 NOVEMBER 2012

Present

G Butland (Vice-Chairman)	M Page
W J C Dick	J W Pike
N Edey	Mrs I Pummell
T Higgins	J Roberts
M Mackrory (Chairman)	J A Young (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs V Metcalfe	
G L Mitchinson	

Councillor M Lager was also in attendance

The following officers were present in support of the meeting:

Robert Fox	Governance Officer
Vivien Door	Principal Committee Officer

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported apologies for absence from Councillors A M Hedley, S Mayzes, A Turrell, R Walters and B Wood. Councillor T Higgins was substituting for Councillor A Turrell.

2. Declarations of Interest

The following Councillors declared a personal interest for Item 5, The Changing Pattern of Finance within Local Government.

W J C Dick	Personal Interest as Member of Castle Point Borough Council and Member of Essex Fire Authority
T Higgins	Personal Interest as Chairman of the Colchester YMCA
M Page	Personal Interest as Member of Tendring District Council
J Roberts	Personal Interest as Member of Essex Fire Authority
J A Young	Personal Interest as Member Colchester Borough Council and Member of Essex Fire Authority

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman with the following amendment:

Minute 6, **Health and Safety**, should say “this report to be brought to the December meeting.”

4. 2012-13 Financial Review as at the Half Year Stage

The Committee considered the 2012-13 Financial Review as at the Half Year Stage, (ES/018/12), presented by Councillor Finch, Deputy Leader of the Council

and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme and Stephanie Mitchener, Assistant Director Financial Management.

The projected underspend for the half year stage for the current revenue was £11.750 million, whilst the Capital Payments underspend was £41.423 million, whilst the services provided have not been reduced. A £5.8 million grant had been received which would enable the Council Tax for 2013/14 to be set at zero percent increase for the third year. That a significant part of the underspend was due to detailed fast tracking in the Children's Service. The Capital Planning underspend of £7.4 million which was due to better control of the Capital Projects. The County now provides more value for money with a lean service. £2.690 underspend was directly from having less Children in Care. The Service was working successfully with children and families earlier, impacting on the numbers of children being brought into Care.

Education and 2012 Games Portfolio had a projected overspend in the first quarter of £3.318 million although the actual overspend was £699,000. This was mainly due to vacant properties awaiting disposal (£477,000), and delay in improving the Child Care records system. Communities and Planning increased underspend of £471,000 due to the Community Budget focus therefore any other Policy Development had been delayed. £167 to £170 million savings were due to changes in contracts.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Members congratulated Schools Children and Families Service for their work in reducing the number of Children in Care;
- Members suggested that Credit Unions could be included to provide help in the Community. Councillor Finch informed the Committee that discussion was taking place with some Credit Unions;
- Work was taking place with the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Mental Health Trust regarding the Section 106 agreement changes;
- The South East Rapid Transport had been abandoned.

The Committee **Agreed** that:

- i) Information on the Capital Programme could be provided by Councillor Finch;
- ii) The following formatting changes to the Appendices should be made:
 - a. Enlarge the print;
 - b. The RAG results should be simplified;
 - c. The Equality Impact Assessment be included.Councillor Finch agreed to make the changes.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Finch for the information.

5. Corporate Plan Progress Report as at the Second Quarter Stage

The Committee considered the progress of the Corporate Plan as at the second quarter 2012/13, (ES/019/12) presented by Councillor Finch, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme

and Mark Golledge, Head of Information and Intelligence. The following officers attended in support of this item: Caroline Murphy, Children's Services I&I Business Partner; Justine Atterbury, Place I&I Business Partner; and Matt Barnett, Senior Analyst Adults Services.

Education Attainment and School Performance

There had been an increase of between seven to twenty schools moving into Special Measures, in particular the primary sector. Work was taking place to work with schools before it declines into Special Measures by providing support to develop and improve.

Use of Essex Libraries

The number of physical and virtual visits to Libraries had decreased by 9 percent and 9.7 percent respectively. Some Libraries provide one stop shops, for example, Witham Library. All Libraries provide internet access. The reduction of Library hours had not impacted on the decreasing number of visits.

Economic Growth

These statistics were reliant on national figures. Essex had lower number of Business Start-ups than in other areas. There was also a reduction of re-enablement Business start-ups.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That there were a significant number of schools that had poor performance;
- That the Cabinet Member for Education, Lifelong Learning and the 2012 Games was working closely with schools, Headteachers and School Governors to improve performance;
- That parental support for the child and the school was paramount to enable the school to improve;
- The Service was investigating to see if it could obtain a pattern for why schools were moving into Special Measures;
- More detailed statistics would provide information on how long schools were in Special Measures and under improvement, and the status of the schools, for example, Academy or Community;
- That more dual usage of Libraries buildings, as long as the buildings were in the right location could be promoted;
- Some Local Authorities no longer have mobile libraries, so post books to customers. Essex still have 12 Mobile Libraries;
- Springfield Library would eventually be operated by volunteers;
- Several Children's Centres were located within Library buildings.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Finch and the officers for the information.

6. Procurement Strategy

The Committee received a presentation from Anthony Doyle, Chief Procurement Officer and the scoping document attached as agreed at the last meeting of the Committee (ES/020/12).

The £150 million stretch target savings over a four year period were sustainable. Currently the Service had delivered £161 million with the expectation that £170 million would be delivered by March 2013. Passenger Transport had used electronic tendering for transport bids producing savings. Adult Services have moved away from block contracts to paying for occupied beds only. The risk

had been transferred from the County to the market where appropriate. Savings could be expected throughout the life of the contract by continuing to drive down the cost. There was little joint provision for the Adult and Children sector; it may take two to three years before this was available. Local business was supported where possible and accounts for 46 percent of the overall spending. Benchmarking takes place against other private sector organisations of a similar size to the County rather than using the County's statistical neighbours to provide a better comparison. Any company or charity tendering for work was asked to inform the County regarding any declarations of interest they may have. Impact assessments and the need for Apprentices and skill set were built into the contract process. It may prove more difficult to achieve savings in 2015/16. The County would like to work with other Local Authorities on a range of initiatives

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- That reducing the cost of Passenger Transport had sometimes meant that larger buses have been used on narrow roads only suitable for smaller buses;
- The Quality and Assessment Team assess the Residential Homes;
- Members suggested that the Home to School Transport Service should work with Health Transport and Community Transport to provide residents with a holistic service;
- Small Businesses could form a consortium to tender for contracts;
- Members were concerned that the Mitie contract had not paid staff for several weeks, which had been difficult for the individuals. This had now been rectified and that contactors were expected to pay their suppliers within the 30 day deadline. This was continuing to be monitored to ensure fairness;
- There was no automatic inflation built into contracts;
- That Children's Centres tendering process was fair and open for small and large charities;
- Businesses tendering to the County were encouraged to support Apprentice opportunities;
- That more services were provided to help the elderly with dementia in a variety of ways;

The Committee **Agreed** that:

- i) In future it should receive presentations with the Agenda to enable it to work effectively;
- ii) The Chairman would raise the Procurement issue with the Scrutiny Board as to which scrutiny Committee should review this contract.

7. Forward Look

The Committee considered the Forward Look (ES/021/12).

The Committee **Agreed** the Forward Look and the scope for the Developing Localism Agenda Item and be received in December 2012.

8. Equality and Diversity E-learning Course

Members from the Equality and Diversity Board suggested that all Members of the Committee should complete the on-line Equality and Diversity E-Learning Course. The County had achieved excellent status even though the Assessors commented that all Members should complete this course and that it would impact on the County maintaining its status.

The Committee **Agreed** that the Chairman would contact Members encouraging them to complete this course if they had not already done so.

9. Dates of Future Meetings 2012

The Committee **Agreed** the following dates:

Date	Time	Venue
Tuesday, 29 January	10 a.m.	Committee Room 2
Tuesday, 26 February	10 a.m.	Committee Room 2
Tuesday, 26 March	10 a.m.	Committee Room 2
Tuesday, 23 April	10 a.m.	Committee Room 2

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 12.15 pm.

Chairman
4 December 2012