

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 29 NOVEMBER 2011**

Membership

* G Butland	* G L Mitchinson
* W J C Dick	* J W Pike
* N Edey	* C Pond
* A M Hedley	* Mrs I Pummell
* M C M Lager (Vice-Chairman)	* J Roberts
* S Mayzes	* T C Smith-Hughes (Chairman)
* M J Page	* A Turrell
* Mrs V Metcalfe	* J A Young (Vice-Chairman)

(* present)

Councillor Mackrory was also present.

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Vivien Door, Committee Officer
Robert Fox, Governance Officer

83. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Apologies	Substitutions
Cllr R G Walters	

84. Declarations of Interest

The following Declarations of Interest were reported:

Cllr Lager	Personal Interest as a Member Panel of Improvement East
Cllr Young	Personal Interest as a Member Panel of Improvement East
Cllr Mitchinson	Personal Interest as a Member of Equality and Diversity Board
Cllr Pike	Personal Interest as a Member of Equality and Diversity Board

85. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman with the following amendments.

Minute 79, Budget Preparation 2012/13: the last bullet point should read "... Essex Libraries were allowed to keep their funding ..."

An extra bullet point was added as follows:

- Discussion took place around reviewing the budget process.

86. 2012/13 Budget Preparation

The Committee considered an oral presentation from Councillor David Finch, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme following his presentation at the 1 November 2011 meeting. Peter Lewis, Interim Assistant Director Financial Strategy was also in attendance.

The budget this year was being shared at an earlier time with the Executive Scrutiny Committee and with Trade Unions, the Federation of Small Business and District and Borough Councils. The report would be presented to Cabinet on 6 December 2011. Any figures given at this meeting could be subject to minor adjustments.

Councillor Finch informed the Committee that the 2012/13 budget had been set under difficult circumstances, both nationally and locally, and highlighted below:

- Reduction in grant funding of 12.4 per cent which would give a Total Revenue Funding in 2011/12 of £933,694 million and in 2012/13 of £930,333 million;
- A final decision on whether to accept the Council Tax Freeze had not yet been made. It would last for 2012/13;
- 79 schools would like to become Academy schools, which would mean less funding for the Local Authority if they were successful;
- There was an overall decline in financial resources as funding levels were reduced;
- £1.2 million had been included for the increase in the cost of fuel and heating;
- There were pressures on the budget regarding increased number of people requiring residential care, Mental Health and Schools Children and Families services;
- Capital grants have not been ring fenced;
- Equality Impact Assessments have been applied to the budget;

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That it was not possible to provide budget detail at this time;
- That the County's Transformation Programme was three years ahead of other Local Authorities. The Transformation Programme savings have been raised to £330 million rather than the current figure of £300 million;
- There was a balance between budget reductions and safeguarding services;
- Other Local Authorities were either closing libraries or to have no Mobile Libraries;
- The Government was suggesting that 60 to 70 per cent of funding for Local Authorities should be provided by local taxation;
- It was difficult for the Committee to monitor the Transformation savings as it was linked into the normal daily business.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Finch for sharing this information with the Committee.

87. Essex County Council Corporate Vision and Values

The Committee received report, ES/055/11, presented by Richard Puleston, Assistant Chief Executive Strategic Services on the final Essex County Council Corporate Vision and Values Strategy following consultation.

Consultation had taken place with 1,000 residents, briefing sessions for Members and another 400 people were consulted on the text. The final document would be taken to Cabinet on 6 December 2011 for approval.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That the Vision links into the Corporate Plan and Service Plans and to the budget providing evidence that the Vision had been actioned;
- Members were concerned that only 1000 people had been consulted as it was a small cohort, but the Committee was informed that the Tracker and Mori Survey used this cross section of residents, it was therefore a robust sample of residents;
- A Member suggested that the County should rebrand and the remove *EssexWorks* logo, but was informed that this was not justifiable due to the cost;
- A Member proposed a recommendation that the Vision Statement should be delayed in being presented to Cabinet, but the Committee voted against this proposal;
- The word citizens be replaced with residents throughout the document;
- A Member suggested that page numbers should be added to all reports and if appropriate paragraph numbers;
- The detail in the Localism Bill would be included in the Corporate Plan and Service Plans which would then link into the Vision Statement;
- The Corporate Plan should be approved in February 2012.

The Committee **Recommended** that:

Cabinet should ensure that there were explicit linkages between the content of the EssexWorks Commitment 2012 - 2017 document, the forthcoming Budget and Corporate Plan. This would ensure that both the Budget and the Corporate Plan make clear how the Vision would be delivered and therefore enable monitoring through Performance Indicators, targets and specific commitments to determine whether the Vision had been successfully implemented.

The Chairman thanked Richard Puleston for his presentation.

88. Equality Impact Assessments

The Committee received report, ES/056/11, on the Equality Impact Assessments from Yvonne Howard, Head of Diversity and Equality and the agreed scoping document, ES/041/11.

More Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) were being produced as part of policy changes but was not consistent across the County.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That the equality framework works well where services meet frequently to check the governance of policies/projects;
- Some services have recently used a light touch approach on EIAs but development was taking place to ensure that the EIAs in the Business Plans added value;
- Not all service areas ensure that by using the EIAs that the customer experience would be enhanced;
- A Member was concerned that EIAs were not consistent across the County and more work was required to change the culture so that EIAs were implicit in all work. An example was given regarding the new County Hall E Block Reception desk in that the business case was completed without an EIA, as it is not suitable for all customers;
- Both Councillors Finch and Pike were Equality Impact Assessment Champions for the Council;
- More detail about EIAs should be included in Cabinet Member decision documents.

Members **Agreed** that:

- i) There should be consistency with the EIAs across the County;
- ii) That service areas should provide reasons why an EIA was not completed in a timely way before the policy/project took place;
- iii) The report was approved.

The Chairman thanked Yvonne Howard for her presentation and report.

89. Member Support and Development

The Committee received the strategy, ES/057/11, and report, ES/060/11, presented by Councillor John Aldridge and Joanna Boaler, Member Support Manager on the current arrangements for Members Development and Information and the development programme for Members of Essex County Council and the agreed scoping document, ES/045/11.

The Council would like to achieve the East of England Member Development Charter and therefore the cross party Member Development Steering Group, now included a Cabinet Member. Member Development would now include topical issues and individual personal Member Development. Members would be asked to provide information on their own skills, ambitions and interests within the County.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That currently briefings were pitched at a particular point and technical information could be pitched too high for some Members, for example, the recent Cloud Computing and E-Payroll briefings were pitched at a higher level than suited some Members. Officers providing these briefings should ascertain the level of understanding. The Member questionnaire should enable that Member briefings could be tailored at different levels of understanding on subjects. The briefings could then be provided at basic, and advanced levels;

- The date and timings of these briefings would be aimed at ensuring maximum Member attendance, for example, following Full Council meetings and on Political Group meeting days;
- Members suggested that they required early notice of Member briefing dates as diaries were full;
- That E-Learning would take place at a time that suited individual Members and could be completed at home;
- Members suggested that County and District/Boroughs could work together on Members training as very often similar training was being offered, and that if a County Member who was also a District Member took part in training it could be added to both County and District websites rather than having to take part in two separate training sessions;
- Member Development Officers from County, Districts/Boroughs and Unitary Councils were working across Essex to produce an Action Plan;
- Members Training attendance was published on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) site.

The Committee **Agreed:**

- i) To endorse the Member Development Strategy and its endeavour to achieve the East of England Member Development Charter;
- ii) To provide individual Member Development Programmes before the elections in 2013.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Aldridge and Joanna Boaler for their useful information.

90. Essex People Strategy 2012 and 'Your Voice' Staff Survey Results

The Committee were invited to consider report, ES/058/11, presented by Keir Lynch, Executive Director for Transformation, on the Essex People Strategy 2012 and the "Your Voice" staff survey results. Adam Bowles, Head of HR was also in attendance.

The Annual Staff Survey achieved a reduced number of responses from Essex staff (60 per cent) but compared to other Local Authorities (40 per cent) there was still higher engagement in Essex. Staff were concerned that since the County had a horizontal structure that staff felt that they had little chance for development. Staff stated that they would prefer to know bad news earlier than having uncertainty for longer.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Comparisons were made with peer Local Authorities;
- The Survey took place in June 2012;
- It could not be identified whether the bullying identified in the survey came from customers or managers and other colleagues, so that Adam Bowles would be working to identify the detail;
- HR service empowers managers to manage and there were no plans to outsource the HR service;

- Members were disappointed with staff survey results, but noted that there would be tougher decisions to be made in the future with reduced budgets;
- The County was the largest employer locally.

The Chairman thanked Keir Lynch and Adam Bowles for their presentation and report.

91. Forward Look

The Committee **agreed** report ES/059/11 by the Governance Officer.

92. Dates of the Next Ordinary Meetings

The Committee noted that the next ordinary meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, Tuesday, 31 January 2012, at 10.00 am in Committee Room 2.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 12.30 pm.

Chairman
31 January 2012