

Minutes of a meeting of Essex County Council held at County Hall, Chelmsford on 16 October 2012

Present

Chairman: Councillor K Twitchen

Vice-Chairman: Councillor N Hume

Councillors:

J F Aldridge	M Garnett	Mrs V Metcalfe
B Aspinell	R G Gooding	Mrs M A Miller
Mrs S Barker	C Griffiths	D Morris
L Barton	I Grundy	A Naylor
R L Bass	Mrs E M Hart	J W Pike
J Baugh	Mrs T M A Higgins	C C Pond
K Bentley	Mrs S Hillier	Mrs I Pummell
R G Boyce	R C Howard	Mrs J M Reeves
A Brown	A J Jackson	C G Riley
G Butland	E C Johnson	J Roberts
R Callender	J G Jowers	D C F Robinson
S C Castle	D J Kendall	S Robinson
R P Chambers	J Knapman	Mrs T L Sargent
P Channer	M C M Lager	J M Schofield
Mrs T M Chapman	D Louis	M Skeels
J A Deakin	J R Lucas	Mrs A Turrell
W J C Dick	G W McEwen	S M Walsh
J Dornan	M Mackrory	Mrs E A Webster
T Durcan	R A Madden	Mrs M J Webster
N D C Edey	P J Martin	Mrs J H Whitehouse
D Finch	S Mayzes	B Wood
M D Fisher	L Mead	J A Young

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S Candy, A M Hedley, G Mitchinson, M J Page, R A Pearson and R G Walters.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor S M Walsh declared an interest in respect of item 8 – Motions, as his wife is employed by the European Union and Councillor G Butland declared an interest in respect of item 8 – Motions, as a Braintree District Councillor and in respect of item 10 – Council Issues, as the District Council's representative on the Essex Police and Crime Panel.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2012**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Minutes of the special meeting held on 4 September 2012**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the special meeting held on 4 September 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. House fire in Harlow

The Chairman on behalf of the Council expressed condolences for the family and friends of Dr Abdul Shakoor who's wife Dr Sabah Usmani and children had died in a house fire in Harlow. She also congratulated the Fire and Rescue Services for their prompt action in attending the fire. Members stood in silence as a mark of respect for the deceased.

6. Duke of Edinburgh Operating Licence

The Chairman received on behalf of the Council a presentation of the new Duke of Edinburgh Operating Licence from the Director for South East England, Mr Christian Scott. Members were advised that centres in Essex in the last three years had offered between 4,500 and 5,000 opportunities for young people to engage in activities arranged through the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme..

7. Local Democracy Week

Members of the Council were urged by the Chairman to support the activities taking place during Local Democracy Week.

8. Anglia in Bloom Awards

The Chairman congratulated Halstead on being the Town Category Gold Winner 2012 in the Anglia in Bloom Awards. Next year Halstead would compete for the Royal Horticultural Society award of 'Champion of Champions'.

9. The Corporate Communications Team

The Chairman on behalf of the Council congratulated the Corporate Communications Team, Strategic Services, who had recently won four gold awards and one silver award at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride Awards. One of the four gold awards was to Michael Page who was named 'Young Communicator of the Year'.

10. Joanna Killian, Chief Executive nominated as Chairman of SOLACE

The Chairman congratulated Joanna Killian, Chief Executive, on being nominated by her peers as Chairman of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). Her absence from this meeting of Council was due to her being present at SOLACE to accept the nomination.

11. Presentation of Olympic Torch

The Chairman was pleased to receive on behalf of the Council, from Councillor Castle, Cabinet Member for Education, Lifelong Learning and the 2012 Games, a presentation of an Olympic Torch that had been borne around the Olympic Mountain Biking Course at Hadleigh Castle prior to the 2012 Olympic Games. He asked Members to note that it was estimated that approximately half of the population of Essex had attended the events around the County prior to the Games and to honour the Essex Olympians and Para-Olympians and he congratulated the Essex Legacy Team who had been named as 'Team of the Year' in the 'You Make the Difference in Essex Awards'.

12. Presentation of petitions

The Chairman formally received petitions relating to;

- Traffic calming measures in Hawthorn Road, Gt. Clacton, Essex presented by Councillor Skeels and

- Complete reconstruction of the carriageway in Burney Drive, Loughton, presented by Councillor Pond.

13. Executive Statements

The Leader of the Council delivered a statement regarding the proposal being put forward by Essex as one of the four pilot areas nationally for the Whole Essex Community Budget Programme.

In accordance with the agreed procedure, Councillor Mackrory responded as Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Council replied to the matters raised by Councillor Mackrory and then, subsequently, to questions put by other members of the Council.

The statement was received.

14. Motion 1: Reducing Red Tape and Financial Burdens for our residents and businesses

It was moved by Councillor D Finch and seconded by Councillor D Louis that

‘This Council believes that the red tape, regulations and laws emanating from the EU are a serious barrier to the Council’s Economic Growth Strategy as they add significant costs to Essex families and businesses, and that the EU should take immediate action to reduce these costs.

This Council finds the EU’s demands for an increase in its budget outrageous, particularly at a time when the public, including our residents and businesses, are facing significant austerity measures. This Council believes that hard-pressed taxpayers in Essex already pay far too much to the EU and that it should significantly reduce its budget to reduce the pressure on families and businesses in Essex and elsewhere.

This Council does not support any closer political integration or the transfer of further powers both of which will force even more red tape, regulations and laws on Essex’s residents and businesses.

We therefore call upon the County’s MPs and MEPs to encourage the Government and the EU:

- to reduce significantly the UK’s contributions to the EU and redirect that money back to the people of the UK, including Essex residents and businesses,
- to reduce significantly the overall size of the EU budget,
- to accelerate rapidly the removal of bureaucratic burdens from the EU on businesses and residents,

- to transfer no further powers to the EU without the consent of the British people through a referendum.'

It was moved by Councillor S Robinson and seconded by Councillor M Mackrory that the Motion be amended to read as follows:

'This Council believes that the red tape, regulations and laws emanating from the EU and often added to by Whitehall are a potential barrier to the Council's Economic Growth Strategy and therefore welcomes the action proposed by the European Commissioner for Industry on 1 October 2012 to reduce these costs.

This Council will respond to the Commission's consultation on reducing red tape with proposals that will help businesses in Essex and elsewhere.

This Council welcomes the recent votes against a budget increase, led by Committee Vice-President George Lyon, Liberal Democrat MEP, and the cuts agreed to the Parliament's own budget. This Council notes that any increase will only come about if other Member States support it.

The public, including our residents and businesses, are facing significant austerity measures. This Council believes that hard-pressed taxpayers in Essex will benefit from savings in the EU budget from Agriculture spending cuts but that these could go very much further, and could further save money by abandoning the monthly Parliamentary move to Strasbourg, to reduce the pressure on families and businesses in Essex and elsewhere.

This Council believes that Essex taxpayers would be pleased to note that the UK's net contribution to the EU is only 25p per person per day, a small fraction of what they pay to this Council.

This Council agrees with Prime Minister David Cameron that Britain should be an active member of the European Union but does not support any closer political integration or the transfer of further powers if it would force even more red tape, regulations and laws on Essex's residents and businesses.

We therefore call upon the County's MPs and MEPs to encourage the Government and the EU:

- to reduce significantly wasteful spending including on agriculture and Strasbourg sessions
- to co-operate with Commission plans for the removal of bureaucratic burdens from the EU on businesses and residents
- to transfer no further powers to the EU without the consent of the British people through a referendum.'

Upon being put to the meeting the amendment to the motion was declared to be lost.

Prior to the motion being put, ten Members demanded a division by name by standing in their places.

The motion having been put it was declared to be carried by 55 votes for and 11 against with two abstentions.

Those voting for the Motion were Councillors:

J F Aldridge	C Griffiths	D Morris
Mrs S Barker	I Grundy	A Naylor
R L Bass	Mrs E M Hart	J W Pike
J Baugh	Mrs S Hillier	C C Pond
K Bentley	R C Howard	Mrs I Pummell
R G Boyce	N Hume	Mrs J M Reeves
A Brown	A J Jackson	C G Riley
G Butland	E C Johnson	J Roberts
R Callender	J G Jowers	D C F Robinson
S C Castle	J Knapman	Mrs T L Sargent
R P Chambers	M C M Lager	J M Schofield
P Channer	D Louis	M Skeels
Mrs T M Chapman	J R Lucas	K Twitchen
W J C Dick	G W McEwen	S M Walsh
J Dornan	R A Madden	Mrs E A Webster
N D C Edey	P J Martin	Mrs M J Webster
D Finch	S Mayzes	B Wood
M Garnett	L Mead	
R G Gooding	Mrs V Metcalfe	

Those voting against the Motion were Councillors:

B Aspinell	Mrs T M A Higgins	S Robinson
L Barton	D J Kendall	Mrs A Turrell
J A Deakin	M Mackrory	Mrs J H Whitehouse
M D Fisher	Mrs M A Miller	

Councillors T Durcan and J A Young abstained.

Motion 2: To examine the feasibility of extending the concessionary travel scheme

It was moved by Councillor M Mackrory and seconded by Councillor D Kendall:

‘Council recognises that young unemployed people are particularly disadvantaged by the current economic situation and that they deserve extra support to move onto the first steps to permanent employment.

Council notes and supports the £1 billion Youth Contract Scheme – launched by the Coalition Government - that opens up various opportunities for young people.

Council further acknowledges that the cost of transport to Job Centres, Job Interviews, Work Experience and Apprenticeships can be a real barrier to young people.

Council, therefore, requests the Cabinet Member responsible to examine the feasibility of extending the concessionary travel scheme to include 18-24 year olds in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or undertaking apprenticeships, and to report back to Council within 3 months. Would he further consider reintroducing the ‘BITE’ card for 14-18 year olds?’

It was moved by Councillor D Finch, Deputy Leader of the Council and seconded by Councillor S C Castle, Cabinet Member for Education, Lifelong Learning and the 2012 Games that the Motion be amended to read as follows:

‘Council recognises that young unemployed people are particularly disadvantaged by the current economic situation and that they deserve support to move onto the first steps to permanent employment.

Council acknowledges that the cost of transport to Job Centres, Job Interviews, Work Experience and Apprenticeships can be a real barrier to young people and applauds the considerable amount of work that ECC is already doing to support young people in this area.

Council, therefore, requests the Cabinet Member responsible to ask the Economic Development, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee to examine the feasibility of extending the concessionary travel scheme to include 18-24 year olds in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or undertaking apprenticeships; noting that the ‘BITE’ card for 14-18 year olds is already in place and that any changes to concessionary fares must be contained within the existing budget for passenger transport.

The amendment was accepted by Councillors Mackrory and Kendall and, therefore, the amendment became the substantive Motion.

Upon being put to the meeting the substantive Motion was declared to be carried.

15. Amended Standards Regime

Councillor J W Pike as Chairman of the Joint Standards Committee presented a report on the amended Standards Regime.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Joint Standards Committee with the Essex Fire Authority and a Standards (Hearings) Sub-Committee be retained, with the membership, quorum and terms of reference set out in Paragraph 5.4 of the report.
- (2) That a new member Code of Conduct as set out in the Annex to the report and the sanctions described in Paragraph 7.6 of the report.
- (3) That the revised arrangements and delegations set out in Paragraph 7.8 of the report for the management and determination of complaints against members be adopted.
- (4) That Mr. Norman Hodson and Mr. Jonathan Swan be appointed as independent persons under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011.

The report was received and adopted.

16. Report of Council Issues

Councillors P Channer and J G Jowers declared interests in item 3 as members of the Essex Police and Crime Panel. Councillor S Walsh declared an interest in item 3 as a member of the Essex Policy Authority.

The report of Council Issues was received and upon being put to the meeting recommendations relating to:

Item 1: Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012,
Item 2: Membership of the Essex Pension Fund Board,
Item 3: Police and Crime Panel and
Item 5: Dates of Future Meetings

were agreed and accordingly it was

Resolved:**Item 1:**

That an addition be made to Council Standing Orders to formalise the arrangement whereby the Chairman responds to any request for the recording or filming of meetings by third parties and this also be added to Standing Order 16.20 (Standing Orders to apply to committees).

Item 2:

That the membership of the Essex Pension Fund Board as set out in paragraph 8.1.7 of the Council's Constitution be amended to read as follows:
"14 members consisting of six Members of the Council (in the ratio of five Conservative and one Liberal Democrat), two members representing District and Borough Councils in Essex, one member representing Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, one member representing Thurrock Council, **one member representing Essex Police and Crime Commissioner**, one member representing Essex Fire Authority, one member representing Scheme Members nominated by UNISON and one member representing Smaller Employing Bodies nominated by the Employer Forum."

Item 3:

That the Panel Arrangements for the Essex Police and Crime Panel as set out in the Annex to the report be approved.

Item 5:

That meetings of the Council be held on Tuesdays at 10am on 9 July, 15 October and 10 December 2013 and 4 February (Budget) and 13 May 2014 (Annual).

The report was adopted.

17. Report of Cabinet Issues

Councillor S Barker declared an interest in item 1 as a member of Uttlesford District Council.

The report of Cabinet Issues was received and adopted and upon being put to the meeting the recommendation relating to item 1: Essex Countywide Traveller Unit

was agreed and accordingly it was

Resolved:

That the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Joint Committee be included under Paragraph 13.3 (Executive Functions) of the Constitution as a joint body exercising Executive Functions in accordance with the agreement currently in operation.

The report was adopted.

18. Overview and Scrutiny Issues

The Overview and Scrutiny Issues Report was received and adopted.

19. Questions to the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen

Members responded to questions as follows:

- (i) On whether the numbers of highways repairs were a direct result of Liberal Democrat campaigns (Councillor I Grundy of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation)

The Cabinet Member replied that to date there had been 31,204 pothole and highway repairs and that, contrary to recent reports, he did not consider that Liberal Democrat campaigns had contributed significantly to this number. He paid tribute to the work of the Maintenance Teams.

- (ii) The sound system and hearing loop system in the Council Chamber today (Councillor Higgins of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme)

The Cabinet Member agreed that there appeared to be problems with the system and he would ensure that it was investigated and appropriate action taken.

- (iii) Concerns expressed regarding those accessing services through personal budgets and protecting them against unsuitable workers. (Councillor Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care)

The Cabinet Member agreed to look into the matter and respond to her direct.

- (iv) The processes in place to deal with requests for the transfer of community assets (Councillor Aspinell of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme)

The Cabinet Member outlined the processes involved.

- (v) Concerning the scheme for improvements to Loughton High Road (Councillor Pond of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation)

The Cabinet Member stated that the improvements would be progressed as far as possible.

- (vi) Concerning the reported 3,000 two-year old children eligible for nursery entitlements – and the Liberal Democrats involvement (Councillor Chapman of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services)
The Cabinet Member responded that this was a Labour idea progressed by the Coalition Government.
- (vii) Concerning a request that an officer from Highways attend the Halstead in Bloom Board (Councillor Pike of the Leader)

The Leader agreed to discuss with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transformation, and the relevant service, the possibility of an officer being authorised to attend.
- (viii) Following the Local Highways Panel in July seeking clarity concerning a proposed pedestrian crossing in Linnit Drive, Chelmsford (Councillor Madden of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation)

The Cabinet Member clarified the position.
- (ix) Concerning recent press reports referring to the Council's level of financial reserves (Councillor Lager of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation Programme)

The Cabinet Member confirmed the adequacy of the Council's reserves.
- (x) Concerning the economic prospects for Essex (Councillor Walsh of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Waste and Recycling)

The Cabinet Member replied that Essex economy was 'holding its own'
- (xi) Would thanks be conveyed to staff of the Record Office for helping the Essex Police Museum Trust prepare a Business Case for accessing additional funding? (Councillor Schofield of the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Environment and Culture)

The Cabinet Member was pleased to pass on the Member's kind remarks.

20. Written Questions (Standing Order 16.11.3)

1. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Environment and Culture.

'How much has Essex County Council received as a 'subsidy' from when they first started using 0845 telephone numbers up to now?'

Reply

Essex County Council does not earn any rebates or credits for 0845

inbound calls received. This also applies to other ECC inbound numbers. Essex County Council is not charged by its suppliers for any inbound 0845 calls. The caller to the 0845 number would usually pay between 3 to 5 pence per minute. However, some residential and mobile packages offer free calls to these numbers.

2. By Councillor B Aspinell of the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Environment and Culture.

‘Following the Government’s requirement to list heritage assets, and recent reports in the press regarding Essex County Council’s ownership of valuable artwork and maps, estimated some years ago at approximately £14.3 million, would the Cabinet Member please advise:

- When the artwork was last valued?
- Is it now prudent to have another valuation?
- Should a cross party committee be convened to discuss the possible exhibiting, storage and, where appropriate, disposal of some works of art?’

Reply

The heritage assets on the register compiled by Finance for the Statement of Accounts comprise the following areas:

- 1) The archive collection at the Essex Record Office which forms the largest part of the £14.3m at £9.3m. This valuation is purely for insurance purposes and has regard to conservation and repair in case of a disaster, as the documents themselves are irreplaceable if lost.
- 2) Paintings in the Barrett-Lennard collection, which are part of the ERO collection but only physically came to us in 2009 although donated by the family in 1974. The valuation for these is as provided by the family to us in 2009.
- 3) Historic paintings in the core collection at County Hall, Shire Hall and Maynetrees. These were last valued in 2010.
- 4) Historic buildings such as mills and Jaywick Martello Tower. As with the archive collection, valuations are for insurance purposes and relate to potential repair costs in the event of damage by storm, fire etc. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that the sale values of these premises could be much lower.

Officers are currently drafting a policy to provide a framework to

manage the collection effectively, which includes a periodic review by a cross-party working group. This builds on a piece of work undertaken by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman last year.

3. By Councillor M Fisher of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'Would it be better use of resources if there were fewer inspections to prioritise highways work and more crews going round area by area and actually fixing the potholes properly? It is ludicrous to have two-thirds of the potholes in one street mended and leaving the remainder because they do not (at that point) meet the criterion for being filled.

Would the portfolio holder please tell me how many members of staff are manning Enquiries and how many pothole inspectors there are?'

Reply

Highways inspectors perform a vital function in enabling Essex County Council to fulfill its statutory duty as the Highways Authority. I would be happy for Cllr Fisher to spend a day with them and if she has any subsequent constructive suggestions on how they could more efficiently and effectively deliver their service I would be happy to review them.

With regards to her other questions:

If Councillor Fisher could provide me with examples of where and when potholes have been left when others in the same street have been repaired I will be able to provide her with a response.

If Councillor Fisher could clarify what she means by "Enquiries" I will also be able to give her a response to her question.

4. By Councillor D Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'Brentwood's Local Highways Panel budget for potential schemes in 2012 is £449,876, which is the third lowest allocation in Essex. This low figure means it is impossible for us to fund the two major junction improvements that are needed in Brentwood at the Devil's Head crossroads in Warley and at Sandpit Lane / Ongar Road in Pilgrims Hatch, as their projected cost of £1,500,000 is well over our allocation. Brentwood residents have been told that the County has no money available to pay for these road safety schemes, but at the same time they have seen £11 million miraculously appear from

nowhere for the emergency pothole repair programme. Would the Cabinet Member tell me:

- (1) How many personal injury accidents have to take place at these dangerous junctions before the County Council allocates the funding to improve them?
- (2) Which budget was used to pay for the £11 million pothole repair programme?
- (3) Did the £11 million found for pothole repairs mean that the budget allocated to local Highway Panels across Essex for locally determined schemes was reduced?

Reply

1. The prioritisation of local schemes by Members is an important function of Local Highways Panels (LHPs) and where a scheme is too large to deliver in a single year, LHPs have the option of spreading the cost of these over more than one year.
2. The £11m for highways repairs was allocated following unprecedented weather extremes and as a result of ECC listening and responding to residents' genuine concerns. The £11 million was made up of the following:
 - £2m revenue from the highways maintenance reserve
 - £1m from the general reserve
 - £8m capital from unsupported borrowing.
3. No.

5. By Councillor T Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'Whilst fully supporting initiatives for safer driving, would the Cabinet Member agree with me that the positioning of 'No Excuse for Poor Driving' (and similar) signs, should not distract or obstruct drivers' vision?

There seems to me to be a plethora of street clutter – shouldn't signs be consolidated where possible?

Would the Cabinet Member let me know the cost of putting up such a sign?

Reply

Positioning and numbers of signs in a particular location is governed

by the Council's policies and/or DFT guidelines. If Councillor Higgins can provide me with some examples of her concerns I will investigate them and get back to her with a response.

The cost of installing a no excuse sign on two supporting poles is approximately £480.

6. By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

'How many times in the past two and a half years (April 2010-April 2011 and April 2011-September 2012) have contractors had to return to redo a highways job because it was not done satisfactorily or correctly the first time? What was the shortest, longest and median time for this second repair to be done? How many of these unsatisfactory repairs were reported? '

Reply

If Councillor Whitehouse could clarify what she means by a "Highways Job" then I will be happy to respond to her question.

7. By Councillor M Fisher of the Cabinet Member for Education, Lifelong Learning & the 2012 Games.

'It has come to my attention that a survey on attitudes to the Olympic Legacy was conducted on behalf of the Council after the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games were finished.

The survey was a random one, with no socio-economic questions, i.e. age of resident, any children, working, etc. The questions that were asked were unnecessarily repetitive.

I would like to ask who commissioned this survey and was he/she aware of the sampling method, i.e. random? A better method is to take every 10th name on the electoral register to interview and although this is more expensive than random surveys, the results would have been better. I wonder what effect the cost of this survey will have on the portfolio holder's budget.

Would that money not have been better spent giving grants to sports clubs, many of which are having to close, or for the hire of sports halls and playing fields?'

Reply

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games were promoted as the greatest and biggest show on earth and the County of Essex was privileged to be named Host County to the Olympic Mountain Bike venue and have 17 communities throughout the County welcome the Olympic Torch Relay.

As we now move into the legacy phase of the Games, we are looking to use the excitement of the games to inspire the next generation of athletes in the County, as well as encourage sports participation across all ages. The survey referred to was essential in assisting us in evaluating the impact the Games and associated activity had on the residents of Essex. The results will allow us to learn from our past efforts and ensure our future activity is based on tried and tested methods.

Firstly to correct inaccuracies in the detail of the question, the survey had 26 questions of which, nine were socio-economic questions including: resident's age, number of dependents, working status and ethnic background. The method suggested by Cllr Fisher would have been both more expensive and less valuable for the purposes required. It would have been possible to use other methods to complete the survey, including a random sampling approach based on the electoral register. However, as phone numbers are not available from the electoral register, this would have required a postal survey. A postal survey would have been a more expensive option and is likely to have under-represented certain demographic groups, particularly younger residents, males and those from BME backgrounds.

The survey was commissioned by Essex County Council's communication team with my approval. A telephone survey was identified as the most appropriate methodology to deliver a representative sample of residents from across the County within the available budget. It meant that we could interview residents from a wide geographical area and the profile of participating respondents could be controlled via the use of quotas set on recruitment for key demographics. Crucially, the use of a quota sample allows all waves of the research to have a similar demographic profile, something which is essential when comparing findings year-on-year. To ensure that respondents were selected at random, Random Digit Dialling was used to provide the sample of contact numbers to call.

The 2012 team are responsible for a wealth of work inspiring people to make sport happen at the local level, embedding the Olympic and Paralympic values in grassroots sport. Some examples include:

- Sport Makers - recruiting, training and deploying the next generation of sports volunteers to organise and lead grassroots sporting activities, building on the legacy of the Essex Ambassadors programme.
- Club Leaders programme - provides free business skills,

training and support to individuals running community sport across the County.

- Sportivate - Initiative which provides opportunities for teenagers and young adults to receive six weeks of coaching in the sport of their choice, guiding them into regular participation in clubs and community groups across the County.

The survey was not at the expense of this work but rather to strengthen and direct future efforts.

8. By Councillor J Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Planning.

'As highlighted by some of my recent casework, I was astonished to find that the public are unable to access Essex County Council Planning Applications on the Council's own website in order to view plans in detail, read attached reports, and see comments submitted.

It appears that the majority of other County Councils in England already have this facility. When will this public service be available to the residents of Essex?'

Reply

Thank you for your question.

At present summaries of planning applications are available online; however, we have been working hard to enable full public access to planning applications on-line and we hope to be able to provide this service within the next few months.

9. By Councillor T Higgins of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

'In view of the fact that from 2013 nursery places are to be available for 2 year olds who meet the "free school meal" criteria, would the Portfolio Holder tell me how Essex is planning to cater for these children? Is further accommodation to be built at current nurseries, many of which already have waiting lists, or are they to be looked after in different / new accommodation?'

The fact that there is an underspend in this budget heading does not, I think, indicate that there is no demand for nursery places, but merely that parents would prefer places in Nursery departments of Infant Schools, not the provision in the private sector, hence the waiting list.

Would the Portfolio Holder please tell me the number of children currently on the waiting lists of the Council's nursery classes?'

Reply

Work is already underway within the Council to meet this target by working with current early years provision or in some cases extending or creating new places. The Department for Education has commissioned two organisations to support Local Authorities nationally to work on this Achieving Two Year Old Initiative. The Council has been allocated, along with other east region Local Authorities, an advisor working for Mott McDonald to provide support and advice. A bespoke package of support is currently being agreed for the Council. An internal project team has been created who have developed and will lead a structured plan for the implementation of this initiative.

This plan will include:

- working with childminders who have not previously been approved to accept free entitlement funding. There will be a thorough quality assurance process undertaken on the environment and ability of childminders to provide this based on a good or outstanding Ofsted and 'green' Council rating.
- reviewing the current funding rate to ensure it is financially viable for the most outstanding early years provision to provide high quality places for 2 year olds which in turn leads onto quality 3 and 4 year old free entitlement places and therefore contributing to an improved educational outcome at the end of the early years foundation stage
- working with maintained nurseries to look at if there is space that can be developed into an appropriate environment for 2 year olds and that Ofsted requirements can be met
- using the capital that has been identified (final Council allocation to be confirmed but £100m nationally) to remodel spaces such as additional toilets and small internal works to create separate spaces. The capital allocation will not give scope to allow for new builds.

To clarify the Council's County Childcare Sufficiency Collection gathers data on occupancy levels. Overall the returns for June 2012 do not show maintained nurseries across Essex with having waiting lists for three and four year olds, although a few are shown at 100% occupancy. There will not currently be waiting lists for two year olds as places are approved as referrals are received and only 2 school sites are offering two year old funding. The September 2012 Childcare Sufficiency Collection is currently being finalised.

10. By Councillor M Mackrory of The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Transformation Programme.

'In answer to my question at the October 2011 Council, I was told by

the (then) Cabinet Member that proposals were being drawn up for the future use of the Shire Hall.

One year on, will the Cabinet Member update me on what progress has been made, and will he ensure that serious consideration be given for the display of public art?’

Reply

The reply is from The Leader at his request;

The public consultation and expressions of interest will be launched shortly; this consultation will allow proposals to be submitted to us for review.

I wish to make it clear though that all bids will be judged against the following criteria:

- i. Continued ownership of Shire Hall by the Council, who will maintain a role in both setting the strategy for proposed future use, and retaining an interest in the operation of the building;
- ii. Achieving demonstrable value for money and financial sustainability;
- iii. A continuation of public access to the building with a sense of community ownership.

Following my discussions with Councillor Roy Whitehead of Chelmsford City Council, a Reference Group was established to identify future uses for Shire Hall. It has representatives from a number of societal, heritage and community groups, and is chaired by Dick Madden. So far it has met four times.

Later this year we are planning an open day for Shire Hall, and I would encourage all to visit this historic building and see the site for themselves.

Councillor Mackrory’s suggestion of Shire Hall becoming an art gallery is of course one proposal for the building but it must however be financially sustainable.

11. By M Mackrory of The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Transformation Programme.

‘Further to the Freedom of Information request, reference ECC 0124611– 12 dated 27 September 2012, would the Cabinet Member state what action has been taken to recover the 90 reported lost or stolen mobile phones during the period March 2011- August 2012?’

Reply

The County Council takes all matters of lost or stolen phones seriously, and we have robust policies in place to manage these situations.

In the event that a device is stolen, the phone holder must inform the police, keep a note of the incident or Crime reference number and notify Information Services via the Essex Service Desk.

Once a phone or device is reported as lost, the telephone numbers are cancelled immediately and no further calls can be made from the device. Where possible the devices are remotely wiped of all information.

Depending on the reason for the loss of the phone, the line manager of the person concerned, Information Services or Risk Management Consultancy Services will investigate and disciplinary action will be taken if there is good reason for it.

The Essex Service Desk, which deals with these incidents, is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

The Council does not claim on the insurance for these devices as the excess is £500 per request.

12. By Councillor J Whitehouse of the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care.

'The changeover of providers of Meals on Wheels to Sodexo was poor and caused anxiety to many residents, particularly those with diabetic conditions, and their families. It also brought adverse publicity to the County Council.

What sanctions are being applied to Sodexo, and what compensation or refund is being offered to those whose meals were late?

Are you satisfied with the Meals on Wheels service delivery now? Are all the meals being delivered in the specified time band?'

Reply

Over the course of the last two weeks Essex County Council staff have worked closely with the new Meals on Wheels provider Sodexo to improve delivery times. There has been a significant improvement; 99% of the meals are now being delivered on time and all meals are being delivered by 2.15pm. Sodexo are committed to ensuring this performance improves to 100%.

As part of the Essex County Council meals on wheels contract Sodexo

are required to adhere to the terms and conditions of the contract. Due to the late deliveries these requirements have not been met; Essex County Council staff will therefore be working with Sodexo as part of the formal performance monitoring process to ensure that the contractual requirements are met.

Sodexo will be applying a full refund and a further gratuity to the affected service users whose meals were delivered late as an apology for the disruption to their service.

Cllr Aldridge will be visiting the meal delivery sites in due course and will be joining a driver on their round; meal tastings will also be set up to ensure the quality of the meals is being maintained.

21. Questions to the Essex Police Authority Representative

The report of the Authority's meeting held on 3 September 2012 was received.

There were no questions.

Councillor Jackson, Chairman of Essex Police Authority thanked all those who had served on the Essex Police Authority and noted that the newly-elected Police Commissioner would take office on 23 November.

The Chairman thanked Mr Jackson for his term as Chairman of the Essex Police Authority in what had proved to be challenging times.

22. Questions to the Essex Fire Authority Representative

The report of the Authority's meeting held on 5 September 2012 was received.

There were no questions.

The meeting closed at 13:22

Chairman
11 December 2012