

**AGENDA ITEM 4
CS/03/10**

Committee	Central Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	15 February 2010	

Essex Strategy Refresh Scrutiny Review

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The Committee are invited to consider and approve the attached draft report that contains the findings and recommendations from the scrutiny review that took place at the last meeting.

Central Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Essex Partnership Strategy Review

Introduction

The Essex Partnership Strategy is an 'umbrella' document for the activities of all the key partners in Essex. It has been compiled from the views of Essex people and sets out a vision for sustainable development in Essex into the medium term future.

The Essex Partnership Strategy undertook a formal consultation with partners that opened on 15 September and closed on 27 November 2009.

The Central Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee (the 'Committee') was invited to consider the consultation process with a view to feeding in any recommendations to the Essex Management Board in February 2010.

The scrutiny review was intended to deliver a 'critical friend' challenge to the adopted consultation process, and consequently it was agreed at the October meeting of the Scrutiny Board that the Committee, with an increased membership, would undertake a full review into the topic. Invitations were extended to all Chairmen of Policy and Scrutiny Committees and Area Forums to take part in the 25 January meeting, along with the 11 Members of the Committee.

The following Members were present at the meeting:

- Councillor S Barker, Chairman,
- Councillor L Mead, Vice-Chairman
- Councillor A Turrell, Vice-Chairman
- Councillor E Johnson
- Councillor S Mayzes
- Councillor G McEwen
- Councillor Mrs M Webster
- Councillor K Twitchen
- Councillor W Dick
- Councillor M Page
- Councillor Mrs E Webster

Witnesses

The Committee invited a wide range of witnesses to assist it in scrutinising the consultation process of the Essex Strategy Refresh process:

- Dan Gascoyne, Assistant Director for Partnership Delivery, Essex County Council
- Ian Davidson, Lead on the Comprehensive Area Assessment, Audit Commission
- Representative from the Police Authority
- Kevin Jones, Head of Environmental Strategy, Essex County Council
- Councillor Pam Challis, Chairman of the Partnership Forum
- Sue Sumner, Voluntary Sector
- Paul Fallon, Essex Safeguarding Board
- Representative of the Fire Authority
- Representative from a Primary Care Trust
- Representative from the Business Community

Of the witnesses that were invited, the following were able or willing to attend:

- Dan Gascoyne, Assistant Director for Partnership Delivery, Essex County Council
- Ian Davidson, Lead on the Comprehensive Area Assessment, Audit Commission
- Kevin Jones, Head of Environmental Strategy, Essex County Council
- Paul Bedwell, Essex Safeguarding Adults Board
- Andrea Atherton, Director of Public Health, South East Essex Primary Care Trust
- Councillor Pam Challis, Chairman of the Partnership Forum and District Councillor for Castle Point Borough Council

Background

When the Essex Partnership Forum was set up it was agreed that a review and refresh of the Strategy would be undertaken on an annual basis, with the output being used as part of the Essex Partnership evaluation for the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

The objective of the review and refresh was to examine each of the Essex Strategy outcomes to outline what has been achieved and to identify and address any gaps. Evidence is needed to demonstrate that the partnerships reflect local needs and how these are translated into priorities, along with the governance arrangements, and identify whether any improvements could be made in these areas.

The Essex Strategy Review interim findings were presented at the Essex Conference held on the 9th July 2009 in Colchester. The event was attended by over 300 partners from across the county and provided an opportunity to discuss how the 'wicked' issues could be addressed. The conference objectives included deepening relationships between key individuals within partner organisations, developing commitment to new joint working initiatives; identifying and tackling

existing blockages to improved performance; Providing an opportunity for cross cutting issues to be discussed with delegates from other partners or partnerships and; Embedding a shared understanding of the key challenges facing Essex. The Essex Conference created an operating environment to discuss the issues facing Essex with 35 workshops held including sessions on: -

- Developing a common approach to reducing Health Inequalities in Essex
- Everybody's Business: Safeguarding Children in Essex
- Gypsies and Travellers
- Later Life Strategy
- Reducing Re-offending
- Slim line Essex – tackling obesity across the county
- Reducing CO₂
- Tackling Domestic Violence

The Essex Strategy consultation document requested views on the draft report and specifically against five main consultation questions.

Seven 'wicked' issues facing Essex were identified, with seven theme-based summits taking place in October and November 2009:

- Reducing health inequalities
- Safeguarding the most vulnerable
- Raising educational achievement
- Responding to the recession
- Mitigating climate change
- Improving community safety
- Strengthening communities

The summits were arranged by the Essex Management Board to discuss the priority issues and how changes to the Essex Strategy would enable these 'wicked' issues to be addressed more effectively.

The consultation document requested views on the draft Strategy and set out five specific questions:

1. 'Seven wicked issues facing Essex have been identified, and will be the focus of themed summits held in the Autumn 2009. Comments are welcome regarding changes to descriptions or identification of any significant omissions'.

2. 'The review process has seen the 64 Essex Strategy outcomes reduced to 45. This was not a radical change but rather a simplifying by joining together related outcomes. The Essex Strategy itself will be refreshed following this review and the outcomes included will be formally rationalised. Taking these 45 outcomes as a starting point your comments are welcome regarding description changes, obvious omissions or indeed suggestions to rationalise further'.
3. 'This report discusses each outcome, identifying key achievements and future prospects, since the launch of the Essex Strategy in April 2008. Many of you will already have been involved in developing these stories. Comments suggesting changes to the text are welcome'.
4. 'Many of you have been involved in the review process, and any comments you may have for improving this process are welcome. We also welcome constructive comments regarding future approaches to reviewing the Strategy from those of you not involved in the recent review'.
5. 'Following this review and feedback from external regulation activity undertaken this year the Essex Strategy Document itself will be refreshed (but not rewritten) any comments regarding this refresh are welcome'.

The refreshed Essex Strategy would be submitted to the Essex Management Board on 2 March 2010, and then at the Essex Partnership Forum on 23 March 2010 for subsequent approval.

Witness sessions

The Committee received the following evidence at its meeting on 25 January 2010, and identified a number of issues that could enhance the Strategy:

Dan Gascoyne, Assistant Director for Partnership Delivery, Essex County Council

Dan introduced his role and gave a brief background to the Essex Strategy.

The original Strategy was launched in March 2008, to cover a ten-year period. The partners involved in the production of the Strategy included those in District and Borough Councils, the NHS, Police and Fire Authorities, and the Voluntary Sector. It was agreed that the Strategy would be reviewed after one year to take into consideration changing needs and expectations, the changing regulatory framework (CAA) and economic climate. In response to a question from Members, Dan explained that it had not yet been agreed when the next refresh would take place, and this issue would be considered by the Essex Partnership Forum.

Dan explained that the County Council provided administrative support for the Essex Partnership Forum even though the Strategy is not Council led. Members were concerned that the Essex Works branding could be found on Forum publications even though the Council was not directly responsible for the work of the Forum.

The review began in March 2009 with a desk based exercise taking place to review evidence already collated; with these results feeding into reports for the Thematic Partnerships and District Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The Essex Conference was held in July 2009, and was well attended by over 300 stakeholders from 85 partner organisations. During the 12 week consultation period, seven theme based summits were held, which were well attended by partners. Dan explained that the public were able to provide input to the consultation through the Citizens Panels, and that the Partnership website contained lots of information for both the public and partners.

10 written responses to the consultation were received. However the majority of the feedback from partners had already been contributed through the July conference and themed summits.

- The Committee expressed some concern at the apparent low level of public input to the review. Whilst Members accepted that the public had been able to contribute to the review, they felt that the public may place more emphasis on other issues, such as crime, housing growth and matters concerned with Travellers, and whether public concerns of this type should perhaps feature more heavily in the final document.
- The Committee acknowledged the hard work that had gone into producing the consultation document and accepted that it was difficult to produce a high-level document that took into account the variances and complexities within Essex. However, they noted that whilst the safeguarding of the vulnerable was highlighted as a key objective of the Essex Strategy, safeguarding of children was not specifically referenced. Dan explained that this had already been pointed out to him and improvements to this area would be made in the final edition.
- Members suggested that the use of the word 'wicked' to describe the outcomes be re-considered with a view to replacing it with a more suitable phrase. It was explained that the word had been used in an effort to describe issues that are truly complex and remained persistent despite considerable effort to resolve them.
- The Committee felt that the consultation document did not contain sufficient facts and figures to demonstrate the progress that was being made and the direction of travel that partners were heading in. Dan emphasised that the consultation document was a summary of evidence for the review and was not the actual Strategy. The completed document would contain a chapter for each partner and would contain far more facts and figures than the consultation.

- The Committee were concerned that there was no priority order for the 'wicked' issues. Members felt that if there were reductions in funding or grants, it would be beneficial to clarify the precedence of each 'wicked' theme from the outset.

Ian Davidson, Corporate Area Assessment Lead, Audit Commission

Ian advised the Committee that Essex County Council had the highest number of public bodies/partners within its boundaries, resulting in the most complex set of public service arrangements in the country. However, despite this, over the last 3-4 years engagement with partners had become much more positive.

Ian was present at the Essex Conference in July and found it to be very well attended by partner organisations. He felt the success of this conference may go some way to explaining the low formal response rate. The Conference had been especially beneficial to some partners who had left the venue with action plans meaning that good practice was being shared effectively.

- Ian drew attention to section 8.2 of the consultation document, 'Safeguarding the Most Vulnerable', which he considered did not make sufficiently clear the safeguarding responsibilities of the Council and its partners towards children. The Council was not alone in its safeguarding responsibilities, and it was important to ensure that the Strategy emphasised the two-way obligations between the Council and its partners.

Ian drew attention to the progress that had been made in the 'Health Inequalities' area. The appointment of a Joint Director for Public Health had made a difference, and assisted in the NHS and partners in Local Authorities understanding each others agendas and moving to sharing skills.

Ian commented that the consultation document was well presented with a helpful layout and could not have been an easy publication to produce.

Kevin Jones, Head of Environmental Strategy, Essex County Council

Kevin worked with colleagues in the District and Borough Councils to tackle climate change and CO² emissions.

He advised the Committee that he had attended both the July conference and Essex climate change summit in the Autumn, and found that both events were well attended by partners. The success of these events had demonstrated just how much the partnerships had moved forward. There was an acknowledgement that the carbon reduction was an issue that would require partners to work consistently together, but the Essex Strategy had given a prominence to these issues and could lead to improvements for all parties.

Paul Bedwell, Chairman of the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board

Paul explained that the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board comprised of 40 to 50 partners who were all involved with vulnerable adults. The Board was not yet a statutory function but this was due to change with the introduction of new legislation. It is the Board's task to investigate instances of vulnerable adult abuse and they dealt with around 2,000 of such cases each year.

Paul had attended the safeguarding summit and also found it to be well attended by stakeholders. He felt that the Board had been given sufficient opportunity to feedback to the consultation even though this was not done formally. Even though the current climate and recent red flag for children's safeguarding the Council had received in the latest CAA inspection meant that focus was on the safeguarding of children, it was important to include vulnerable adults of all ages and from all spectrums in the Strategy.

- Whilst performance targets were included in the Strategy for the safeguarding of children, the same performance measures were not present for the safeguarding of adults. In view of the fact that the Board would soon become a statutory body, Members felt it would be of benefit to include performance measures for the safeguarding of vulnerable adults.

Councillor Pam Challis, Chairman of the Partnership Forum

Borough Councillor Pam Challis advised the Committee that the Essex Strategy was a joint forum for all the partners involved with the County Council in delivering services. The Council supported the Forum by providing administrative support, but the Strategy and the Forum were not the direct responsibility of the Council even though the Essex Works logo appeared on the Forum's publications.

In response to Members concerns around the amount of input from the public to the consultation, Councillor Challis explained that all of the District and Borough Councils have Citizens Panels that had all fed into the consultation, along with the Parish Councils.

The document was intended to be a living document that was flexible and able to reflect changes to priorities and force majeure such as the economic downturn.

- The Committee considered that the consultation document was not sufficiently critical for some areas where it was known that there were issues. It was considered that the document needed to be more balanced, highlighting both good practice and where service provision was not as good.

Andrea Atherton, Director of Public Health, South East Essex Primary Care Trust

Andrea advised the Committee that the PCT had good involvement in the Partnerships from the level of Chief Executive through to front line services. She had attended the health inequalities summit along with partners, members of LINKs and the public. Andrea recognised that health inequalities included access to services and recognised wider local issues as part of that theme.

The PCT had held its own public meetings regarding the Strategy and included public feedback in their response.

The Chairman thanked all the witnesses for their input and evidence.

Conclusions

The Committee recommends that the Essex Partnership Forum take the following findings and recommendations into account when finalising the Essex Partnership Strategy:

Findings	Recommendations
Following the evidence gathering session, the Committee agreed that the consultation process had been largely successful.	
Members found that some of the language and jargon contained within the consultation document was ambiguous.	The use of the word 'wicked' to describe the seven Strategy themes should be re-considered with a view to this being replaced with a more suitable word. Owner: Essex Partnership Forum Review Date: April 2010
	The seven 'wicked' themes should be placed into a priority order to take into account any funding issues that may arise. Owner: Essex Partnership Forum Review Date: April 2010
The consultation document did not contain sufficient facts and figures to	The consultation document should be developed to contain more facts and

demonstrate the progress that is being made against outcomes, or sufficiently demonstrate the general direction of travel.	<p>figures to show the direction of travel against outcomes.</p> <p>Owner: Essex Partnership Forum</p> <p>Review Date: When the next review of the Essex Strategy takes place.</p>
	<p>The Essex Strategy is developed to become more balanced, highlighting both good practice and where service provision is not as good.</p> <p>Owner: Essex Partnership Forum</p> <p>Review Date: April 2010</p>
	<p>The date of the next review for the Essex Strategy be included in the final document.</p> <p>Owner: Essex Partnership Forum</p> <p>Review Date: April 2010</p>
	<p>Performance targets should be included for the safeguarding of vulnerable adults.</p> <p>Owner: Essex Partnership Forum</p> <p>Review Date: April 2010</p>
	<p>The Essex Works logo should be removed from all Essex Partnership Forum publications.</p> <p>Owner: Essex Partnership Forum</p> <p>Review Date: April 2010</p>
That the safeguarding of vulnerable children is a key priority for the Council and its partners but is not given a sufficiently high enough profile in the Essex Strategy.	<p>The Essex Strategy must make the safeguarding responsibilities of the Council and its partners sufficiently clear and ensure that the safeguarding of children receives suitable prominence.</p> <p>Owner: Essex Partnership Forum</p> <p>Review Date: April 2010</p>

<p>Whilst individuals had been able to contribute to the review through the Citizens Panels, the Committee felt that the general public may place more emphasis on other issues, such as crime and housing growth.</p>	<p>Further work is carried out to ensure that public concerns are both identified and reflected in the final document.</p> <p>Owner: Essex Partnership Forum</p> <p>Review Date: April 2010</p>
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