

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CENTRAL SERVICES POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD 15 FEBRUARY 2010

Membership

Councillors

* B Aspinell	* G McEwen
* Mrs S Barker Chairman)	* L Mead (Vice-Chairman)
J Dornan	* J Pike (Substitute for E Johnson)
* J Knapman	* Mrs M Webster
* M Lager	* A Turrell (Vice-Chairman)
* S Mayzes	
* present	

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Vivien Door	Committee Officer
Hannah Cleary	Governance Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00.

8. Apologies and Substitute Notices

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
J Pike	E Johnson

9. Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were recorded:

Cllr S Barker	Personal interest in Item 5, Performance Indicator on Asset Management as her son was employed by this service.
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10. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record with the amendment that Councillor J Pike was substituting for M Lager.

11. Essex Strategy Refresh Scrutiny Review

The Committee considered report CS/03/10 on the refresh of the Essex Strategy presented by Hannah Cleary, Governance Officer.

The Committee **Agreed:**

- i) The report with the amendment that an extra recommendations be added on the travellers;
- ii) The report would be sent to all the stakeholders requesting initial feedback and comments by April 2010.

12. Performance Indicator on Overall Satisfaction

The Committee received the background report, CS/04/10, presented by Richard Puleston, Assistant Chief Executive and Kay Asuni, Policy and Public Engagement Officer.

There was no single Action Plan for the County. The main focus of the survey was to provide a better service for the people of Essex. Service improvement targets were driven by the Local Area Agreement, the Corporate Plan and the Transformation Programme. It had been found that the public were less satisfied where they were unable to influence the data, but they were more satisfied with the services that Essex provides. Analysis by Ipsos MORI have found that factors which the Council cannot change influenced the public, for example, areas of deprivation. The Government provides questions in the Place survey. Essex County Council adds its own questions in the Tracker survey.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Members felt that these surveys were forward looking but did not reflect on what the Council had achieved and should promote the achievement of the previous nine pledges which should be looked at at the mid point (six months) and also the 12 month period;
- That information could be added to the bottom of the Council pay slip that employees receive;
- Some Members felt that the funding used on these surveys could have been put to better use in the front line services;
- Members were concerned that the public were not being surveyed about Adult and Children's Social Care and the state of the roads;
- Both the Place and the Tracker surveys were high level surveys and not designed to pick up the detail. The service areas send out their own surveys;
- Members commented on the data from Mosaic social marketing and informed the officers that Members worked closely with the public and were aware of their satisfaction. Members were concerned that they were not sent a questionnaire as they felt that they were better informed;
- Members were concerned that these questionnaires were sent in the post as some people were not comfortable with filling in forms and preferred face to face contact;
- 8,000 surveys were sent out with a response of 30 to 35% response;
- Members wanted to investigate the number of surveys organised by the Council, both centrally and in the service areas and how much this cost. A Member Task and Finish group would be set up;
- The Council needs to be aware of the public's needs and satisfaction levels regarding the services that it offers;
- The Council should learn from the private retail sector on how to manage the public's expectations.

The Committee **Agreed** that a Task and Finish group will be formed to investigate the number and cost of all the surveys produced by the Council.

The Chairman thanked Richard Puleston and Kay Asuni for their contributions to this meeting.

13. Performance Indicator on Asset Management

The Committee received evidence from Roger Moore, Head of Estates, in December 2009, in relation to the performance indicator on capital receipts. Further information was required about the Council's property portfolio. The Committee received report CS/05/10 by Roger Moore, Head of Estates.

The Council's portfolio constantly changes as leases fall out of the portfolio or come back into it, as it changes the value rises or decreases. Operational properties were those where services were offered from the venue, and non-operational were for services like Essex Cares who were no longer under the Council remit. The Council holds a variety of tenures, leasehold, freehold and others which may include voluntary controlled schools. Most of the property was let to the Council services and or schools whilst a small proportion was let to other providers, some was part shared with, for example, the NHS.

There was an office reduction strategy of work stations by 25% but Service areas were not obliged to work to this rigidly, as some areas have a higher number of employees who use their desks for a large part of the working day. Due to the recession it had been difficult to meet the target monetary figure when selling properties. One fifth of the portfolio was valued every year to gauge the market value, then the value was adjusted for the whole portfolio. When property becomes vacant, the Service take the opportunity to develop the property to either sell or improve for occupation of a different service. The service converts about 50% to receipts over two years, which should bring in £15 million per year, at the moment the Service were £70 million short. There was an acknowledgement that this target needs resetting.

During discussion the following points were made:

- That it was difficult to dispose of land as a large number were very small parcels of land, the service do have strategy but it had not been its priority and takes a lot of resources to dispose of this land. This work could be outsourced on a no win no fee basis;
- There was an initial outlay in IT investment for the hot desking strategy and new appropriate furniture provided;
- There was no Local Authority standard to make these savings. The service would benefit from a Member led Property Board and would therefore have more persuasion with Member backing;
- Some office buildings could be converted into housing accommodation but some accommodation was adjoining schools and therefore the service had to be careful of its use. Office accommodation was only 5% of the portfolio;
- Districts/Borough and the County could share some accommodation where appropriate;
- Originally the service area had to sell property at a target level of £90 million over a three year period, it was then reset to a target of £200 million over 5 year period, this had been difficult to achieve within this economic climate. Due to the economic climate it had now be reset from £40 million a year to £15 million;

- Some of the non-operational property, cannot be let out as it was of heritage value, for example, St Peters Chapel;
- Small parcels of land could be sold to local community ventures, but it would need to be at the market value;
- Services within the Council were not always aware of other property vacancies;
- The Property Service were available to Districts and Boroughs to buy in its services;
- Dunmow Library offers work spaces and meeting rooms but due to the insurance there had to be an ECC staff member on duty, which limits the times that this building could be used.

The Chairman thanked Roger Moore for their honesty and contributions to this meeting.

14. **Forward Look**

The Committee received the Forward Look CS/06/10 from the Chairman. The Committee **agreed** the Forward Look.

15. **Dates for Future Meetings**

The Committee received the future meeting dates report, CS/07/10, for 2010/11 from Vivien Door, Committee Officer.

The Committee **Agreed** the future meeting dates for 2010/11 and confirmed that they may comprise:

- Meetings in private
- Meetings in public
- Working groups
- Sub-Committee meetings
- Outside visits

Monday 15 March 2010

Monday 19 April 2010

Monday 21 June 2010

Monday 19 July 2010

Monday 20 September 2010

Monday 18 October 2010

Monday 22 November 2010

Monday 20 December 2010

Monday 24 January 2011

Monday 14 February 2011

Monday 14 March 2011

Monday 18 April 2011

Monday 23 May 2011

16. Urgent Business

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 12:05 pm

Chairman