

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CENTRAL SERVICES POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON 17 APRIL 2009

Membership

Councillors

* P Baker (Chairman)	* I. Gale
* Mrs S Barker	* M Lager (Vice-Chairman)
* R. Bourne	* L. Lee
* M. Cossens	* N. Edey
* M. Howard	

(* present)

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Colin Ismay, Governance Manager
Antoinette Mortley, Committee Officer

The following witnesses were in attendance:

Claire Ziwa, Head of Media & Public Relations, Essex Police HQ
Scott Morrow, Corporate Communications, Fire & Rescue
Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Director for Commissioning SCF
Margaret Bonner, Team Leader, Customer Services Development
Terry Daily, Director Customer Excellence
Clare Hardy, Executive Support Manager, Adults Health & Community Wellbeing

12. Apologies and Substitution Notices

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Lager

13. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were noted

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. Effective communication with the public

The Chairman welcomed Members and witnesses to the last meeting of this administration. Witnesses are asked for their views on Essex County Council's efforts in engaging with the public. The following points were noted:

Witnesses believed Essex County Council's strategy to engage a range of audiences and work closer with teams in house was positive, however

emphasised the need to keep up to date with the needs of customers and how they need to be communicated with targeting communication direct to specific target groups and maximising on the range of media available. Resource sharing through partnerships is again seen as positive in understanding and managing the development of effective communication.

Witnesses were asked to explain communications and their purpose with specific reference to branding. Witnesses highlighted the need to make a better connection enabling residents to understand the areas that Essex County Council and other agencies are responsible for, as well as seeking the views of constituents to incorporate into future strategies. Members expressed the benefits of consulting with local Councillors who are able to provide valuable insight to the needs and demographic of a specific area. The group heard when selecting a brand the logo and slogan need to be simple, understanding the audience will aide this process however it will take time for people to make links and associations with any brand. Evaluate campaigns using focus groups before and after they are implemented; along with getting the right people on board to deliver campaigns was also seen as a necessary tool.

The group believe that often the services provided by Essex County Council are widely used without realising it and considered the possibility of increasing adverts on County Council vehicles. Furthermore the group heard that in some cases Essex residents are not aware of what department to access for specific services, which highlighted the need for communications within Essex County Council to be managed at a corporate level fed by consultation with directorates. Giles Roca cited a paper agreed by the DLT which reiterates the need for centralized communications however this raises issues with the buying back for departments who have used this services. In consideration of the fact that communications should be linked to service delivery departments would need to see improvements.

16. Complaints Monitoring

Members heard that historically each directorate managed complaints within Essex County Council, by sending a monthly complaints log to the customer service department. Failure to respond is the highest-ranking complaint. Directorates with statutory requirements process complaints differently to the rest of the organisation. The group were informed that some department heads have rejected the idea of centralized complaints monitoring preferring to retain ownership.

A central complaint management IT system 'CDS Respond' is due to pilot in May 2009. The system allows complaint managers and officers to see all areas of the system. Residents will be able to log a complaint online and using a specific reference number check the progress, furthermore reports will show Councillors how complaints are being dealt with in their area.

The 75 staff of central complaint monitoring team has no powers over the management of complaints retained by specific directorates meaning the quality and progress of responses will vary across the organisation. Members heard that often complaints could span business areas and thus receive more than one response. Complaints from Councillors are often forwarded to corporate heads; the customer service department has clear deadlines and hierarchies for

managing all aspects of customer feedback, the aim is for levels to be clear across the organisation.

Members were advised that 1½ thousand complaints were logged last year however this does not show a true picture of the number of complaints received. There is no specific complaints budget except for directorates with statutory responsibilities i.e. Children, Adults and Families however the new complaints system IT has been funded by the customer services department who also provide the admin time for the management of all customer feedback. The group heard that accountability and quality need to be at the forefront of complaint monitoring and were assured that the directorate in question would be responsible for fines incurred by complaints upheld. The customer service department

17. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting will be confirmed once the new administration has been agreed.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 12:00

Chairman