

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11th June 2008

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
M Dunn	Apologies	Mrs R O'Shea	Apologies
Dr R L Evans	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
Ms L B Flint	Yes	W. Rose	Yes
M Gage (Chairman)	Yes	Ms C Sandbrook	Yes
J E B Gyford	Apologies	A F Shelton	Yes
A M Meyer	Apologies	F. Swallow	Yes

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

15. MINUTES

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30th April 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16. QUESTION TIME

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

17. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

(a) Scoping Report - How the Council Project Manages Significant Projects

Steve Bore, Scrutiny Manager presented the scoping report for this item setting out the extent of the study, the proposed terms of reference, the timetable and the arrangements for taking this investigation forward.

He highlighted that a meeting had been held between the Chairman and the Chief Executive concerning the provision of additional support resources for this study, and the Chief Executive had suggested that a representative of Alexander Consultants (who had previously undertaken work on behalf of the Council in assisting with the re-shaping of the organisation following the housing transfer, and business efficiency reviews – most recently in Cultural Services) should undertake some initial work with the Committee by providing a briefing session on the essential elements of project management processes

for local government. (The cost of the consultants involvement is likely to be approximately £250 - £300).

Following the briefing, the Committee would then test the theory against our practices by scrutinising a live project (to be identified from the Corporate Action Plan) as it progresses through the Project Management cycle.

It was also proposed that the Committee would in addition examine a project undertaken by one of the Council's external providers (e.g. Serco) to gain an insight as to how they undertake project management when working with the Council, and to ascertain whether there are any lessons that the Council can usefully assimilate.

Following discussion, it was agreed that a representative from Alexander Consultants should provide an initial briefing session to the Committee on the essential elements of Project Management processes for local government. This briefing session to be open to any other interested members of the Council to attend.

Members noted that the Scrutiny Manager was endeavouring to arrange this briefing to take place at the next meeting of the Committee on 23rd July.

DECISION:

(i) that the scope of the study, the terms of reference and the timetable as set out in paragraphs 2 to 4 of the Officer's report be approved;

(ii) that the briefing on project management to be provided by Alexander Consultants is to be open to any other interested members of the Council to attend.

ActionPoint: *that the Scrutiny Manager invites all members to the briefing session.*

(b) Scoping Report – A study to examine issues surrounding disabled provision across the District by consulting with relevant disabled groups/organisations.

Steve Bore presented the scoping report for this item setting out the extent of the study, the proposed terms of reference, the timetable and the arrangements for taking this investigation forward.

In view of the broadness of the subject, it was agreed that the Scrutiny Manager should write initially to the disabled groups/organisations in the District inviting them to:-

- * raise any specific concerns/issues that they would like to draw to the Committee's attention;
- * and how they feel the Committee can assist in remedying these issues/concerns.

Once the initial responses had been received, the Committee will look carefully at all the issues raised and focus on up to two topics that are of a particular interest and where members feel that they can make a difference.

The Scrutiny Manager advised members that since the report had been compiled there

were a number of additional disabled groups/organisations that had been added to the list to be consulted (see attached appendix).

Members agreed that CABs should also be added to the list.

Members are to advise Steve Bore of the contact details of any further groups/organisations that they would wish to see included.

DECISION:

- (i) that the scope of the study, the terms of reference and the timetable as set out in paragraphs 2 to 4 of the Officer's report be approved;
- (ii) that members be copied in on the letter that is sent to disabled groups/organisations.

In the context of this item, the Committee considered the file of papers that had been previously circulated to the Committee to provide further information and clarification in connection with the decision of the Braintree Local Committee not to recommend changes to the traffic regulation order that applied to Braintree High Street. Cllr. Wilkins had attended the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak on this item (see minute 6).

Included in the file of papers was the response dated 1st April 2008 received from the Essex County Council's Acting Highways Manager in response to concerns raised by Cllr. Wilkins in respect of possible discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The Acting Highways Manager had indicated that the traffic order in Braintree High Street does not discriminate against disabled persons as all highway users, except buses and the loading and unloading of goods, are banned from driving through. Members considered this to be a satisfactory response on this issue.

DECISION: that the e-mail dated 1st April 2008 from Essex County Council's Acting Highways Engineer be noted and the contents endorsed.

(c) Over-arching Work Plan – 2008/09

The Committee considered the draft work plan showing the expected timeline for the various projects included in this year's work programme.

DECISION: That the Draft Work Plan for 2008/09 be approved.

18. MEMBER TRAINING – BUDGET SCRUTINY

The Committee noted that following consultation with the facilitator/trainer Dr. P. Watt of INLOGOV the date, time and venue for this training had been agreed as follows:-

Date: Monday 6th October 2008 **Time:** 7.15pm **Venue:** Council Chamber, Causeway

An invitation to attend will be sent to all members of the Council this week.

Action Point: *that the Scrutiny Manager makes all the necessary arrangements for this training session.*

19. INVESTIGATION UNDERTAKEN BY THE FORMER SCRUTINY PANEL IN 2005 – STUDY INTO THE PERFORMANCE OF THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT LEISURE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION LTD. ‘VEHICLE’ IN RESPECT OF HOW THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS ARE WORKING AND UNDERSTOOD.

In the context of this study, the former Scrutiny Panel had been advised that by the time of the opening of the new Braintree Pool a consistent club hire charge would be in operation for all three of the Council’s swimming pools at Braintree, Halstead and Witham. The Panel had agreed to keep a watching brief on this issue.

The new Braintree Pool had opened at the end of March this year.

Members noted that the club hire rates for morning and evening sessions at the new pools at Halstead and Braintree were now consistent, as is the Gala rate for all three pools. However, the club hire rates at Bramston Sports Centre for morning and evening sessions are slightly lower than the Braintree and Halstead pools to take into account the age of the Bramston facilities.

DECISION: that the position be noted.

20. FEEDBACK AND MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMITTEE’S/TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS.

The Committee considered a report on a spreadsheet system to assist them in monitoring progress with the implementation of O and S/Task and Finish Group recommendations.

Once recommendations had been accepted by the Cabinet and the Lead Officer identified, the Lead Officer will be responsible for completing the progress and outcomes column of the relevant template in liaison with the relevant Portfolio holder.

The Scrutiny Manager will co-ordinate the process and the spreadsheets will be updated for each meeting of the Committee.

DECISION: that the templates and the arrangements for monitoring be approved.

21. FORWARD PLAN – 1ST JUNE 2008 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2008

Members received the four month Forward Plan for the above period.

DECISION: that the contents of the Forward Plan be received and noted.

22. TASK AND FINISH GROUP – THE COUNCIL’S FEES AND CHARGES

Councillor Sandbrook the Chairman of the Group presented a verbal report on progress.

The Group had now met on two occasions, and had identified over 700 different fees and charges which the Council can, if it so wishes, pass on to members of the public. There is a lot of work to be undertaken to classify the different charges and then to look at what level of income that will create.

The Group will also be examining the policy on concessions to ensure that it is applied consistently.

Initial indications are that the history of fees and charges is somewhat chequered and the audit trails are not particularly clear.

At the last meeting of the Group, members received a demonstration of a piece of software that provided a mechanism for tracking fees and charges as well as holding the pertinent background information for each individual fee and charge.

It is hoped that the outcome of the Group’s work will culminate in a consistent fees and charges policy which could potentially create additional income for the Council.

It was also apparent that many fees and charges had not been increased for some time.

Councillor Sandbrook expressed her appreciation for all the efforts and background work that had been contributed by Chris McCloud the Group’s Support Officer, and at the enthusiastic and positive contributions that had been made by members of the Group.

DECISION: that the progress report for the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group be received and noted.

23. COUNCILLOR MRS. R. O’SHEA

The Committee noted with sadness the recent bereavement suffered by Cllr. Mrs. O’Shea.

It was agreed that the Chairman would write a letter of condolence on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.14pm

M. Gage
Chairman

Appendix

Study to examine issues surrounding disabled provision across the District by consulting with relevant disabled groups/organisations.

List of Disabled Groups/Organisations

Braintree District Access Group
The Tabor Centre for Disabled Adults
Foley House Residential Home for Deaf People
Halstead Visually Handicapped Club
Essex Coalition of Disabled People
Disability Essex
Braintree Physically Handicapped Club
Social Club for the Blind
Braintree Arthritis Care
Braintree and District MS Society
Orange Circle for the Disabled
The Independent Living Advocacy Ltd.
Riding for the Disabled Association
Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes
Essex Blind Charity
Braintree Centre
Age Concern (Essex)
Braintree Deaf and Hard of Hearing
PARC Essex
Braintree Parkinson's Society
Chelmsford and District MIND
Royal Association for Deaf People
Hearing Help Essex Ltd.
Halstead Day Centre
Essex Respite Association
East Living
Sense Essex Branch
Families in Focus
CABs