

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

28th November 2012



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P R Barlow	Apologies	F Ricci	Yes
C A Cadman	Yes	W J Rose	Yes
Dr R L Evans (Chairman)	Yes	A F Shelton	Yes
P Horner	Yes	J S Sutton	Yes
S A Howell	Yes	J R Swift	Yes
R P Ramage	Yes		

All Cabinet Members were also in attendance for item 5, Scrutiny of the Council's Priorities and Budget Position as follows.

Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council;
Councillor Beavis, Cabinet Member, People and Participation;
Councillor Bebb, Cabinet Member, Performance and Efficiency;
Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member, Planning and Property;
Councillor Schmitt, Cabinet Member, Place;
Councillor Siddall, Cabinet Member, Prosperity and Growth.

The following members were also in present: Councillors Banthorpe, Baugh, Canning, Cunningham, Finbow, Fincken, Johnston, Lager, Mitchell, Money, Parker, Reid, Santomauro, Tattersley, Thompson, L Walters, R Walters and Wright

Councillors Cunningham and Tattersley were also present to present Agenda items 6b, Task And Finish Group – Affordable Housing, Update and Agenda item 6c, Task and Finish Group - Scrutiny of the Council's Land and Property Investment Policies respectively.

21. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:

- Councillor Cadman declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 6c, Task and Finish Group – Braintree, Halstead And Witham Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency (BDVSA) as Chairman of the Board of Suffolk West CAB;
- Councillor Howell declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 6c, Task and Finish Group – Braintree, Halstead and Witham CAB and BDVSA as the Council's representative on the BDVSA.

- Councillor Sutton declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 6c, Task and Finish Group – Braintree, Halstead and Witham CAB and BDVSA as Trustee on the CAB Board.
- Councillor Lager declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 6d, Cabinet Response to the Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group's Report on Local Highway Liaison as a member of Essex County Council.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, all councillors remained in the meeting for all items and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

22. **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

23. **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26th September 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. **SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES AND BUDGET POSITION.**

Committee members received a presentation from Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, on the Council's Priorities for 3013-14 and Budget Position. Priorities include:

- Town Centres;
- Economic Growth and Infrastructure;
- Health/Well-being;
- Housing;
- Transportation and Congestion;

Cabinet members provided the following information in response to questions raised by Committee members and other members present:

- Savings in the health and well-being budget are being achieved through the new leisure contract with Fusion. The Council is in fact investing more in health and well-being with the new leisure centre in Witham due to open in 2014 and more fitness suites in Braintree.
- The Council's has made land provision though the Core Strategy for various uses including employment and residential. The Council is making land provision for 14,000 jobs through to 2026. Site allocations are being considered by the Local Development Framework Sub-committee. It is expected that a public consultation on the site allocations will be carried out around February 2013. Completion of the process will be critical to defend the district against development on inappropriate sites.

- The removal of Council Tax discounts for empty homes is justified given changes taking place to welfare benefits. It may also encourage empty homes to come back in use and help tackle homelessness.
- As part of its efforts to tackle fuel poverty, the Council is developing a fuel scheme encouraging groups of residents to get together to buy energy as a group with the aim of achieving a cheaper price. The Council is also encouraging home insulation.
- The Parish Support grant needs to be revised. There will be no changes to the Parish Support Grant system in 2013-14. However, the Council has commissioned a report by CIPFA reviewing options for payments to Parish and Town Councils. The report will be shared with the Braintree Association of Local Councils and all members. It is hoped that a discussion on the Parish Support Grant will be launched at a Parish Summit at the end of January. The Leader cited inequalities with current Parish Council Taxes raised and added that localism is about local people having the powers to raise taxes to pay for services they wish to have delivered locally.
- Design work for the redevelopment of the junction of South Street and Fairfield Road, Braintree has been drawn up. It is expected that the redevelopment will be completed in 2013.
- There are several infrastructure projects which the Council believes are key to the future development of the district. For example, the Braintree Branch Line Loop.
- The Council is also seeking to encourage businesses both existing and new to expand in the district.
- Businesses in Halstead and Braintree had taken up the offer to participate in a promotional guide to business in the towns related to Christmas. Businesses in Witham had declined the opportunity to participate.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for his presentation and Cabinet members for the responses to questions asked by members. The Chairman also thanked members for their questions.

25. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP - SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S LAND AND PROPERTY INVESTMENT POLICIES**

DECISION: That the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group, the conclusions and recommendations reached in the report be noted and that the report be referred to Council and Cabinet.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider the Task and Finish Group's Scrutiny of the Council's Land and Property Investment Policies.

26. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP – AFFORDABLE HOUSING -BRIEF UPDATE**

DECISION: That the progress of the Affordable and Social Housing Task and Finish Group be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To monitor progress of the work of the Affordable and Social Housing Task and Finish Group.

27. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP – BRAINTREE, HALSTEAD AND WITHAM CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT VOLUNTARY SUPPORT AGENCY**

INFORMATION: Councillor Cunningham added to the progress report that members of the Task and Finish Group had recently met with representatives of the CAB and BDVSA who had given informative presentations on their work and the pressures they are facing. Members are making informal visits to CAB centres and to the BDVSA in order that they might see the issues faced first hand. Another meeting of the Group is to be held on 4th December and it is the Group's intention to present a report to the Committee around March 2013.

In response to a question, Councillor Cunningham agreed to enquire if a report from the BDVSA to Task and Finish Group members could be made available to Committee members.

DECISION: That the progress made by the CAB and BDVSA Task and Finish Group be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To monitor progress of the work of the CAB and BDVSA Task and Finish Group

28. **CABINET RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP'S REPORT ON LOCAL HIGHWAY LIAISON**

DECISION: That Cabinet's response be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To note Cabinet's response to the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on Local Highway Liaison.

29. **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman commented that it was pleasing to see the Task and Finish Groups well on course. He congratulated the Chairmen concerned.

The Member Services Manager reported that he had received quotations to provide a member development event on Overview and Scrutiny Committee matters. He would be assessing the quotations with the Chairman of the Committee. Members would be advised of the date for the event shortly. The event would be open to all members.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.35pm.

Dr R L Evans
Chairman