

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

29th May 2013



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P R Barlow	Yes	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		

Cllr Wilson was also in attendance for Agenda item 5, Task and Finish Group – Review of Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency.

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:

- Councillor Barlow declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, Task and Finish Group – Review of Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency, as a Trustee and Board member of the Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Councillor Cadman declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, Task and Finish Group – Review of Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency, as Chairman of the Suffolk West Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Councillor Howell declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, Task and Finish Group – Review of Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency, as the Council's representative on the Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency.
- Councillor Sutton declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, Task and Finish Group – Review of Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency, as a Trustee and Board member of the Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau.

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.

2. **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

3. **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13th March 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP – REVIEW OF BRAINTREE HALSTEAD AND WITHAM CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT VOLUNTARY SUPPORT AGENCY.**

INFORMATION: Members received the report from Councillor Wilson, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, who thanked all those involved in the work of the group for their support.

Councillor Wilson provided the following responses to questions from members:

- The Group had considered the provision of Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) services in rural areas. The Group was of the view that as the CAB does not have boundaries, people are able to visit any CAB centre including out of the district to receive advice. The CAB is also accessible through online and telephone services;
- The Group recognised that the length of training of 12 to 18 months for volunteers to become a full CAB adviser is an issue. However, the Group also noted that the CAB's telephone "Gateway" process was resulting in people moving through the process quicker;
- The Group recognised that the current Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency (BDVSA) premises is not adequate for BDVSA's needs and discussions have been held with a range of organisations with a view to helping find new premises. The Group also recognised that funding any move to new premises would be an issue;
- The BDVSA Newsletter provides very useful information on related activities and developments in the district.

The Chairman invited Paul Hart, District Manager, and Don Smith, Chairman, Braintree, Halstead and Witham CAB, who were present at the meeting to add any comments to further inform members in respect of their questions. Mr Hart and Mr Smith provided the following:

- Whilst it can take 12 to 18 months to complete training certification programme for CAB Advisers, those undergoing training are advising members of the public after about 6 months. Completing the certification process is lengthy as advisers are required to build up a portfolio of evidence in order that they can advise in a range of topics. In some cases the opportunity to train on a topic is infrequent resulting in a lengthy process;
- The training to become a Gateway Assessor is shorter, at around 2 months, as Assessors are trained to gather information and not to provide advice;

- Whilst acknowledging that people wish to receive face to face advice, the Braintree Halstead and Witham CAB does not have the resources to provide this service in rural areas. Funding is not provided through the Service Level Agreement with the Council for an outreach service. An outreach service was trialled in Sible Heddingham. However, there was insufficient demand for the service which therefore, could not be supported. An outreach service is provided in Coggeshall as the Parish Council there provides a donation.

Councillors Cadman and Shelton noted that the CAB acknowledged that it is not providing a face to face service in rural areas due to a lack of funding. Both were concerned that the Council is providing funding to the Braintree, Halstead and Witham CAB supported by council taxes from residents from the whole of the district but not providing a service to rural communities.

Members agreed that the issue of face to face CAB services not being provided in rural areas should be included in the report to Council and Cabinet.

DECISION: That the Task and Finish Group Review of Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens Advice Bureau and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency be referred to Council and Cabinet.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider the Task and Finish Group report.

5. **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.

6. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

INFORMATION: Members agreed that in respect of the draft recommendation that the Council receives a report on the work of the Community Safety Partnership, this should be amended such that the report is received through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Subject to this amendment, members agreed that the report be referred to Council and to Cabinet.

DECISION:

1. That the report be referred to Council and to Cabinet.
2. That it be recommended to Cabinet:
 - a. That consideration is given in the Community Safety Partnership (CSP's) priorities to providing greater prominence to other community safety issues outside of the police and criminal justice system. e.g. Anti-Social Behaviour

- b. That the Annual Partnership Plan of the CSP be published and that all publically available CSP documents are reviewed to ensure the use of plain English throughout with the aim of encouraging the public to take a greater interest in the CSP.
- c. That the Council, through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, receives an annual report on the performance of the CSP which takes account of how the CSP has delivered against the Council's objectives.
- d. That in the case of the Fire Break project, follow up arrangements are put in place with the aim of ensuring that those young people who have gained certain experiences and qualities as a result of attending the project maintain these positive outcome.
- e. That in the case of the Domestic Abuse project, the benefits are drawn out in terms of the number of people referred to the service and those able to build a new life as a result of using the service.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider the Committee's draft report to scrutiny of the Braintree District CSP.

7. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14**

INFORMATION: Members considered establishing an additional Task and Finish Group to review the operation of the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme and the Universal Credit Scheme. Members agreed that there was insufficient information at this stage to conduct a review of either scheme although thought there may be sufficient to review the Council Tax Support Scheme around November. Members agreed that the Committee should receive a report on the proposed Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group at its meeting in September and that in the meantime, expressions of interest be sought from members wishing to serve on the Group.

In considering the proposed terms of reference of the Task and Finish Group reviewing the provision of public services in rural areas, members agreed to delete the proposal to evaluate the impact of the new localism fund on the delivery of these services. Members also agreed to amend consideration of costs to identify where costs of the provision services impact on rural areas.

Members also agreed that the Task and Finish Group reviewing the provision of public services in rural areas should also consider those delivered by other authorities outside of the district. In addition, members agreed the Group should consider the relationship of authorities and the proposed related RCCE led coordinated and streamlined volunteer advice services.

DECISION:

That the Committee's Annual Work Programme for 2013-14 comprises:

1. Main Scrutiny Topic for Scrutiny by the Committee

Moving young people who are NEET into Education, Employment or Training

Terms of Reference

- a. To identify the number and locations of young persons who are NEET and the problems this causes.
- b. To understand the skills gaps being faced by local employers and if the type training offered meets the gaps.
- c. To identify and evaluate the organisations, facilities and support services available to help move young people who are NEET into education, employment or training.
- d. Where appropriate, to recommend improvements to those organisations, facilities and support services to help move young people who are NEET into education, employment or training.

2. Topics for Scrutiny by a Task and Finish Group

A. Provision of Public Services in Rural Areas

Terms of Reference

- a. To identify any impacts specifically as a result of living in rural areas in the district to the delivery of public services (in particular, those delivered by Braintree District Council, Essex County Council, Police and Health Services). Impacts should include consideration if any result in social isolation or exclusion and those services delivered by authorities across district borders.
- b. To identify how the services in rural areas might be improved where any adverse impacts are identified.
- c. To identify where costs of the provision of services impact on rural areas.
- d. To consider the relationship between Essex County Council, Braintree District Council and Parish Councils in the delivery of these services and the proposed related RCCE led coordinated and streamlined volunteer advice services.

B. Operation of the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme

Terms of Reference to be considered by the Committee at its meeting in September 2013.

3. Regular Committee Scrutiny Items

a. Council's Budget

- b. Community Safety Partnership** – an invitation to the Chairman of the Braintree District to provide members with an update on the work of the CSP.

8. DECISION PLANNER.

INFORMATION: Some members wished to ensure that the Committee had sufficient time to discharge its scrutiny function. The Chairman agreed to seek a meeting with Chief Executive involving him and the Member Services Manager to consider the matter. It was noted that the scrutiny function in the Council also includes task and finish groups.

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st June 2013 to 30th September 2013 be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.10pm.

Dr R L Evans
Chairman