

# Minutes

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7<sup>th</sup> March 2018



### Present

<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Present</b>
P Barlow (Chairman)	Yes	G Maclure	Yes
Mrs. M Cunningham	Yes	Mrs. I Parker	Yes
Mrs. D Garrod	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
J Goodman	Yes	B Rose	Yes
A Hensman	Yes	P Schwier	Yes
P Horner	Apologies	C Siddall (Vice Chairman)	Apologies

### 37 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** There were no Declarations of Interest made.

### 38 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**INFORMATION:** There were no questions asked, or statements made.

### 39 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** That the Minutes of the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 40 **TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT ON TOURISM**

**INFORMATION:** Members received a presentation from Councillor Mary Cunningham, on behalf of Councillor Jackie Pell, who was unable to attend the meeting.

Members were given information that the Task and Finish Group had met with several different representatives during their research into tourism in the District. The Council had explored the current economic impact of tourism on the district, the role the Council could have in promoting Tourism and how an increase spend on Tourism could affect the District. Members were informed that the Braintree District offered rural villages, as well as Market Towns, and that the gateways such as Harwich, Stanstead, and the A12 offered huge potential.

Members were informed that networking and marketing research was a valuable insight and many representatives had struggled with this due to financial and time limitations. A strong media presence was important, Social Media as well as in particular a website was invaluable as long as they were easy to navigate.

Braintree only had 520 serviced hotel rooms, which was a small amount for comparable District areas, these were predominantly 3 Star, and there was a distinct lack of boutique hotels and other accommodation types. This was a serious inhibitor to Tourism in the District.

The 7 recommendations were:

- The Council should establish a tourism strategy to help guide its activities to support tourism businesses and the industry in the District.
- The Council should, as part of the Tourism Strategy, establish a dedicated tourism website to better promote the District externally and increase its Digital Presence.
- The Council should continue to support the “Grape and Grain Trail” initiative across the District and consider further external partnerships.
- The Council should consider other, similar, promotional opportunities to the Grape and Grain Trail to raise awareness of the depth of offer within the District.
- The Council needs to better understand its ‘bed stock’ including quality and promote accordingly.
- To consider sponsorship and charging opportunities across our tourism information to provide a source of ongoing revenue funding.
- Cabinet should consider an increase in staff and financial resources to harness the District’s tourism potential for the benefit of economic growth.

Members agreed that this had been a very useful Task and Finish Group, which really showed that Tourism was a severely under-utilised element of Braintree and there was massive potential there, it was not just about the direct benefits that Tourism provided but also the indirect benefits such as creating a sense of place, and making the District a nicer place to live for the residents. In respect of the recommendations regarding the Website, it was recognised that Officers had already put in a lot of work which they should be congratulated for.

Members thanked the Task and Finish Group for the report; and there was concern that the Council did not have a dedicated Tourism Officer, who was in charge of marketing and promoting the area.

In response to a Member questions, the Committee was informed that Council did have dialogue with neighbouring Authorities, such as Maldon District Council. It was also reported that The Council has had dialogue with further Authorities with regard to the Grape and Grain Trail, as well as other Tourism organisations. It was also made clear that the Council was meeting with the Museum, which provided a historical link to the District.

Members expressed concerns about the lack of a bed-stock in the District, but it was discussed that there was also the the issue of attracting people to the District in order to create the demand for hotels, but at the same time a supply of hotels was important to create a demand to visit, it was accepted that this was a problem other Authorities had to deal with and found solutions to so it was possible.

One Member provided specific examples of people arriving in Witham looking to find a hotel and the only hotels on offer in the area were not chain or easily recognisable names and therefore created a problem, as well as losing out on tourism potential. In respect of planning permission for hotels, it was reported that it was easier to move from a hotel to other uses but it wasn’t as easy to move from other areas to a hotel. The

Holiday Inn, Great Notley was referenced, with regard to how many years changes to plans that took. It was suggested that it may be useful for the committee to look at how this works, for instance Pubs are protected in certain ways and perhaps this could be transferred to hotels, to make it easier to facilitate.

The Chairman made a point that at the Essex Vision talk, it was discussed that Essex had no one or two identities unlike other Counties; therefore it was thought that there needed to be a push to create an image or identity.

**DECISION:** That the Task and Finish Group report was considered, and recommended to Council, for consideration prior to being referred to Cabinet for a response.

#### 41 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO EMPLOYMENT SITES AND PREMISES**

**INFORMATION:** Members were asked to consider the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the recommendations.

The Chairman informed Members that there were number of points in the previous Minutes in respect of broadband and traffic, that should be included in to the final recommendation on infrastructure.

The Chairman added that some of the research and findings they had undertaken, had already been taken on board by Cabinet and Council, which could be evidenced in the latest purchase of land by Great Notley, which showed the Authority was not just looking for land for housing but also for jobs.

In response to a Member question, the Committee was informed that there was a reference to the surveys in the recommendations and report. The Chairman also suggested that positives should be taken from the report because if people did have a large problem with the way the Council would have operated they would have contacted and replied via the Survey but the majority of replies were positive and that an optimistic outlook should be taken from this.

A Member also added that the report was very good, however more focus should be made on the Town-centric employment provision and more needed to be done for encouraging start-ups in the countryside, with regard to broadband and premises. In response to this, Officers noted that in reference to comments in the previous meeting, there were amendments in recommendation 3 which made reference to rural sites such as Haverhill and Sudbury.

**DECISION:** That the Review and Recommendations were approved, subject to approval by the Chairman of a final report recommended to Council for consideration prior to being referred to Cabinet for a response.

#### 42 **ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2018-19**

**INFORMATION:** That the topic for the Scrutiny Review be set by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members were provided with an overview of all the topics that were suggested, as well as all comments that were made by Scrutiny Steering Board and Management Board.

It was recommended that the topic for the Scrutiny Review was the Operation of Highways functions in terms of liaison with the District to reflect local priorities and to influence use of various budgets to focus on the District's needs.

It was also recommended that the topics for the Task and Finish Group were Re-cycling, Reuse, Reduce and Tackling Isolation and Loneliness.

It was suggested that the put forward on accessibility for disabled people and their carers in the District was brought back for consideration next year when a longer review may be able to consider the topic. It was also suggested it would be included in the Member Induction Programme following the Elections in May 2019.

It was suggested that that the topic submission of "The use of IT to enable meeting attendance" be recommended to the Member Development Work Group for consideration within their work programme.

In response to a Member question, it was reported that the Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Review topic 'Role of Highway Authority in the Braintree District', were in draft and could be altered. It was agreed that reference to public rights of way would be added to the Terms of Reference.

The Chairman added that Gavin Jones, Chief Executive of Essex County Council, had suggested that the County Council would try and work more with the District Council. The Chairman also added that The Lengthmans Scheme seemed useful where if Parish Councils had a fund they could be used for maintaining road signs.

In response to a Member question, it was added that whilst it was possible to change the Terms of Reference to also include Highways England, the time limitations would mean that the research that could be done would not be as thorough. It was also noted that information about that Agency would be indirectly found even if it was not explored directly by the Scrutiny Review.

In response to a Member's example of a lack of communication with the Highway Authority, it was noted that this could be covered by point B of the Terms of Reference and therefore, this could be used as one of the examples that could be put to Officers of the Highway Authority.

Members were advised that the topics put forward were submitted by Members, these were not vetted or changed; the observation by Management Board was not an exercise in direction, and more to help and assist. He cited an example of how a piece of research in Halstead in respect of Loneliness, which was brought to officers attention fitted in with one of the recommended topics and that context could assist Members in considering the topic. It was added that possibly additional information could be added to make the process more clear that Members were determining the topics for Scrutiny Reviews.

**DECISION:** It was agreed that:

1) That the topic for Scrutiny Review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is:

Operation of ECC Highways functions in terms of liaison with the District to reflect local priorities and to influence use of various budgets to focus on the District's needs (Short Title: Role of the Highway Authority in the Braintree District).

The Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Review into Role of the Highway Authority in the Braintree District are:

The Scrutiny Review would explore the functions of the Highway Authority to give:

- a. A broad understanding of the functions and the role of the Highway Authority.
- b. An understanding of the relationship between the Highway Authority and the District Council.
- c. The functions of the Braintree District Highways Panel and how that fits in to the relationship between the Highway Authority and Braintree District Council.
- d. The management of highway functions including:
  - Highway maintenance including Public Rights of Way
  - Management and maintenance including cutting of grass verges
  - NEPP

2) That the topics for Scrutiny Review by the Task and Finish Group are:

- a) Re-cycling, Reuse, Reduce
- b) Tackling isolation and Loneliness

3) That elements of “How accepting, accommodating and accessible is our District towards disabled people and their carers?” are included in the in the Induction Programme for Members following the Elections in May 2019, and topic is brought back for consideration when a longer review is able to consider the topic.

4) That the topic “The use of IT to enable meeting attendance” is recommended to the Member Development Work Group for consideration within their Work Programme.

5) That the Governance and Members Manager commenced the call for expression of interest for Members to form Task and Finish Groups.

6) That the determination of the Membership and Terms of Reference of the Task and Finish Groups are delegated to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in consultation with the Scrutiny Steering Board

#### 43 **DECISION PLANNER**

**DECISION:** That the Decision Planner for the period 1st April 2018 to 31st July 2018 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9:15pm

Councillor P Barlow  
(Chairman)