

1. Police & Crime Panel (PCP) – 20th February 2014

The main item on the agenda was to consider the revised proposed police precept following the Secretary of State for DCLG decision to require a local referendum if any proposed increase in precept was in excess of 2%.

As a result the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) proposed an amended increase in precept down from 3.5% to 1.97%.

The minutes of the meeting record the following:

“Councillor Butland reiterated his concerns expressed at the last meeting, namely that he believed the decision to increase the precept showed a lack of political acumen; that the Commissioner was showing the potential to be a serial increaser of taxation; that the impact of the budget on policing outcomes is not explicit. He considered that the percentage budget savings were at the lower end of those being faced by other local authorities which were coping and still delivering high quality services without raising taxes; the Commissioner by increasing the precept stood out against this trend.”

The PCC's proposals were agreed by the PCP with representatives of Basildon, Thurrock and Braintree recording dissent.

The meeting continued with a very informative report from the Chief Constable.

He reported that he had taken up office on 9 May last year, and was proud to have been appointed to the post. His focus is on keeping Essex safe. He wants the Force's senior management to be more visible to the public and to the Force in general.

He has re-emphasised standards and will be holding the senior leadership to account. He wants to engender a sense of pride in being part of the Essex Force.

With that in mind he has taken the three Seaxes from the County Badge and given each one a value as follows:

- reducing crime and harm
- the number of crimes solved
- the level of satisfaction with the service.

He is looking to simplify the performance regime, to drive out further efficiencies and to stress the importance of time management. He is also looking at demand profiling to help determine the most efficient use of resources. He also wants to have a better understanding of partnership working and the opportunities for efficiencies. He undertook to keep the Panel informed of the significant decisions that will need to be made.

He has decided to make a priority of the policing issues relating to the night time economy of the County, ensuring that people are able to enjoy themselves in safety.

The Chief Constable set out some figures for crime trends comparing 1 April with 31 December 2013, as set out on page 57 of the Agenda under Agenda item 8 (Police and Crime Plan Refresh 2014/15). These showed reductions in a number of categories of crime, but of concern to the Chief Constable were increases in the incidences of shoplifting, serious assaults and serious sexual crime.

He is also looking closely at sickness levels amongst officers which are causing him concern. In addition, he is giving his personal attention to the issues involved in responding to Domestic Abuse.

He stated that his commitment to the local policing model is absolute. He acknowledged that he had moved away from joint funding for PCSOs and was moving to a greater focus on local responsibility and working more effectively in policing hubs.

2. EELGA – Economic Growth in the East of England – 27th February 2014

Together with officers, Jon Hayden and Peter Smith, I attended this seminar on economic growth in the region at Girton College, Cambridge.

The half day event, chaired by Cllr Kevin Bentley, Essex County Council, examined the key challenges to generating sustainable growth in the region, the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), and how local authorities can rise to the challenge. It provided Members and officers the opportunity for learning and constructive debate on the practical steps being taken to progress economic growth ambitions in the East.

Copies of the presentations can be accessed at <http://www.eelga.gov.uk/events/leading-the-way-economic-growth-in-the-east-of-eng/>

3. Witham Industrial Watch (WIW) – 14th March 2014

Along with Cllr Chris Siddall and senior officers I attend the launch, by WIW, of its BID (Business Improvement District) 2014 at Tiptree Patisserie. The proposal document with plans for the next five years will be delivered to each business on the industrial estates in Witham and the rate payers will then have an opportunity to vote Yes or No in the July ballot.

The BID has clearly made some significant achievements in its first period and I very much support WIW's bid for an extension of the BID.

4. Business Excellence Awards – 25th March 2014

This award evening was held at Prested Hall, Feering and showcased the excellent service of many of our local businesses throughout the District. It was a very successful evening and I would like to congratulate all the businesses that took part and our staff for organising the event.

5. Braintree Joint Locality Board – 2nd April 2014

This meeting of the Board considered the following items:

- An update on Health & Social Care Integration
- An update on the work of the District's Health & Wellbeing Panel
- A report on the Domestic Abuse Pilot being carried out in the District and parts of Essex
- Broadband

The Board continues to provide a useful vehicle for co-ordinating the work of the County and District Councils.

6. Braintree Rural Businesses Event – 2nd April 2014

The Council's Chairman, Cllr Wendy Scattergood, hosted an evening for rural businesses at The Essex Club, Earls Colne.

Some 40 rural businesses were represented as were a number of exhibitors (both public and private) that interface with business. Feedback from the businesses was extremely positive and I would like to congratulate the Chairman on her fine initiative.

7. Essex Leaders' Meeting – 3rd April 2014

The following items were on the agenda for this meeting:

- Community Resilience Fund (CRF)
Bob Reitemeier, CEO of the Essex Community Foundation, gave a presentation on CRF. As we consider the future direction of our own Mi Community Fund I have invited Bob to Braintree to explore ways in which we may be able to make even more effective use of our community support resources.
- SELEP: Strategic Economic Plan 2014-21 (SEP)
Leaders considered a briefing paper on the SEP which set out:
 - Background and context for the SEP
 - Expectations on the Single Local Growth Fund (SLGF)
 - An overview of the proposed growth deal for Essex and the Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE)
 - An overview of LEP wide governance
 - The case for building on the SEP; and
 - Next steps for local partners

The SEP is the South East LEP's proposed growth deal with HM Government. It is hugely important as the Government is to make a sum of £2billion a year, for five years, available to the 39 LEPs through the SLGF. The fund brings together specific resources to support transport, housing, and skills, with transport funding making up the largest component.

After a process of negotiation between the LEP and Government, in mid-2014, an allocation from the SLGF will be made to LEPs to invest in growth from April 2015. It is a competitive process. The more convinced the Government is by the appetite and ability of a LEP to deliver growth, the more money it will get.

The Essex SEP is a part of the overall South East LEP plan which also covers Kent and East Sussex. Members wishing to see the full submission to Government should go to the SELEP website at www.southeastlep.com/

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Leader

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