

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10th March 2010



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J. Baugh	Apologies	A. M. Meyer	Apologies
G. Cohen	Yes	R. Ramage	Yes
M. Dunn	Yes	D. E. A. Rice	Yes
Dr. R. L. Evans	Apologies	A. F. Shelton	Apologies
M. Gage (Chairman)	Yes	Mrs. J. Smith	Yes
J. E. B. Gyford	Yes	F. Swallow	Yes

Cllr. E. Lynch also attended the meeting for item 5 of the Agenda.

59. CLLR. DR. R. EVANS

The Chairman advised the Committee that Cllr. Dr. R. Evans had recently been hospitalised in order to have an operation.

It was agreed that the Committee would send a card to Cllr. Evans expressing Members' best wishes for a swift recovery.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

61. MINUTES

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27th January 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

62. QUESTION TIME

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

63. ACCOMMODATIONS OPTIONS REVIEW – MAYLAND HOUSE, WITHAM

At the last meeting of the Committee it was agreed that this item would be considered further in the light of the debate and the decision at full Council, with a view to determining whether the Committee wished to carry out post decision scrutiny in respect of the handling of the Mayland House issue.

Members had before them the report headed 'Accommodation Options Review' that was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1/2/10.

It was noted that the Council at its meeting on 15/2/10 had approved the Cabinet's recommendations that the Council retains and continues to occupy Causeway House, and that capital provision of £3.8m be made available in the Capital Programme for the refurbishment of Causeway House, and that options be explored with Essex County Council for that authority to purchase or lease Mayland House (or for the District Council to sell or rent Mayland House on the open market if the County Council do not wish to acquire the building).

The Chairman reminded the Committee that there would have been an opportunity for members to ask questions at full Council when this item was discussed, and that the Mayland House issue had not been an item that was eligible for 'Call-in' as it was not a key decision made by the Cabinet.

Some members were concerned at what they felt had been a lack of information during the period when the Mayland House issue was under consideration particularly in respect of certain costings and figures in relation to refurbishment costs of Causeway House. However, it was accepted that the report to Cabinet on 1/2/10 had been comprehensive, and had included appendices detailing planned maintenance costs for both Causeway House and Mayland House. That report had also indicated that future office space requirements at Causeway House were likely to reduce given that staffing numbers could reduce further over time as a result of shared services, new ways of working, restructuring of services etc.

There was a consensus amongst Members that the Council's decision to accept the Cabinet's recommendations had been the right one.

The Chairman invited Cllr. E. Lynch to address the Committee.

Cllr. Lynch referred to Cabinet meetings in July and September 2007 when the issue of "Braintree Joint Office and Customer Access Facility" had been considered and to the recommendation contained in the D. T. Z. survey that Causeway House was no longer fit for purpose. This recommendation had been accepted by Cabinet and had led to the decision to put a new build programme in place.

He was concerned that the decision that Causeway House was no longer fit for purpose was taken on the strength of two lines in the D. T. Z. report stating that the cost of refurbishment for Causeway House to make it a fit place would be £1000 a square metre costing over £6m in total.

Cllr. Lynch's question to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was "whether the Committee considered that this is the correct procedure to write off a building without any detailed costing on the say so of a two line statement?"

Members then considered further the issue of whether to undertake any post decision scrutiny.

Following discussion, it was agreed as follows:-

DECISION

The relevant Officer(s) prepare a report for the Committee consisting of a chronology of events relating to the review of accommodation from 2007 to date with supporting documentation, and focussing in particular on what information was available to Members

(and who supplied it) at the point at which a decision was made in 2007 that Causeway House was no longer fit for purpose.

(Cllr. E. Lynch will be kept informed of the outcome)

Action Point: Scrutiny Manager to take advice on which Officers should prepare this report and initiate accordingly.

64. REVIEW OF THIS YEAR'S BUDGET SCRUTINY PROCESS

The Committee gave consideration to the Scrutiny Manager's report which summarised the budget scrutiny process that the Committee had followed this year. Budget scrutiny had comprised of three separate sessions with Groups of Cabinet Members who had answered questions from pre-set question plans. The opening session in October had focused on the shape and size of the proposed budget, Cabinet priorities, and resources and had been attended by the Leader and his deputy and the Portfolio Holder for Efficiency and Resources. This had been followed by two subsequent sessions in December and January with Groups of individual Portfolio Holders to scrutinise their respective proposed budgets.

In respect of the December and January sessions, Appendix 2 attached to the report summarised the Witness Feedback Forms that had been completed by Cabinet Members, and the Survey Forms that had been completed by Members of the Committee.

Some Members commented that they would wish to have prior notice of any additional presentations by Officers/Members at the two latter budget scrutiny sessions e.g. the officer presentation on the initial results of the public consultation exercise concerning budget options, that was given at the December session.

DECISION

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Committee would continue with the same system, but with the following amendments:-

(i) that in respect of the two latter sessions with Groups of individual Portfolio Holders the Portfolio Holders are to provide written responses to the set questions that are to be circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. These sessions would then begin immediately with Members supplementary questions. (Members will meet informally prior to the meeting to discuss supplementary questions);

(ii) the set questions will be reviewed at a later meeting to see if they need to be amended, and whether any additional questions need to be set.

Action Point: Scrutiny Manager to put an item on the Agenda later in the year.

In respect of the latter two budget scrutiny sessions with groups of Portfolio Holders, it was also agreed that the Chairman of the Committee would raise at the Group Leaders meeting the Committee's expectations that all Portfolio Holders should be well briefed and prepared to ensure that there is a more consistent standard of performance by all Portfolio Holders who attend.

Action Point: Chairman to action.

65. ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL – HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROTOCOLS

The Committee considered the health overview and scrutiny protocols that had been established by Essex County Council who had responsibility under the legislation for conducting health scrutiny.

Borough/District Councils are able to make suggestions for health scrutiny reviews to the County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) which acts as the contact or 'gateway' between local authority scrutiny and the Essex Health services.

DECISION

That the health overview and scrutiny protocols be received and noted.

The Scrutiny Manager reported verbally that Cllr. Shelton, who was not able to attend the meeting, had asked the Committee to consider suggesting to the HOSC that a review of access to health outpatient services across Braintree District, should be undertaken.

DECISION

The Committee agreed to endorse the suggestion.

Action Point: Scrutiny Manager to forward the suggestion to the County Council's HOSC for consideration.

66. WORK PROGRAMME ITEM – STUDY INTO HOW CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS ARE MANAGED BY THE COUNCIL – UPDATE ON SCRUTINY HEARINGS

The Committee noted that arrangements had been made for Scrutiny Hearings to take place on:

Wednesday 31st March 2010 – 7.15pm – at Causeway House, Braintree – Hearing with Officers

and

Wednesday 7th April 2010 – 7.15pm – Causeway House, Braintree – Hearing with Parish Representatives.

Copies of the Question Plans and Agendas will be despatched in due course.

67. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

Cllr. R. Ramage the Chairman of the Public Services Provision for Older People Task and Finish Group gave a brief verbal update on progress.

The Group had quite a substantial workload, but was making good headway. At its last meeting on 2nd March the Group had received a very informative presentation from Andy Payne and Brid Boraks from Essex County Council's Adults Health and Community

Wellbeing Department, focusing on older people. There was a useful publication provided by the County Council called the Be Smart Be Safe Handbook a further supply of which was being sought to make available at Causeway House.

Arrangements were being made for a representative from the PCT to make a presentation at the next meeting.

Cllr. Gage suggested that the Group may wish to consider opening up that meeting to other members of the Council who may be interested in the presentation.

DECISION

That the verbal report be noted.

68. FORWARD PLAN – 1/3/10 to 30/6/10

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

DECISION

That the contents of the Forward Plan be received and noted.

The meeting closed at 8.47pm

M. Gage
Chairman