

**CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2009**

Agenda item 10(i)

**CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Mrs Joanne Beavis**

**CABINET PORTFOLIO: Customers & Communication**

Portfolio covers:-

- Member Development
- Rural and Locality (Place Shaping) Development
- External Communications and Marketing Strategy
- Customer Access Strategy
- Democratic Support
- Corporate Consultation
- Customer Standards and Relationships

**REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 27<sup>th</sup> October 2009 and ending 13<sup>th</sup> December 2009.**

**RURAL ISSUES**

At the end of November the Essex Rural Partnership launched its new 5-year Essex Rural Strategy, with a new 10-year vision to 2020. I would encourage all members to read this strategy. A link can be found on the LSP website.

The launch was extremely well attended and some of the key speakers included: Lord Petre (Lord Lieutenant of Essex), Lord Hanningfield, and George Courtauld.

The Essex Rural Strategy establishes a new vision for the county's rural areas. It seeks to create a vibrant future for rural Essex, based upon six strategic aims:

- Active and caring communities.
- Improved access to services.
- Greater availability of affordable housing.
- A thriving economy.
- A rich and vibrant environment.
- A responsive planning and policy framework.

But, fundamentally the strategy has been written to raise the profile of rural Essex. It was said that for too long there has been a tendency to encourage 'mainstreaming' of rural issues; to resist the temptation to identify rural as being different, and to consider rural issues alongside urban, merely sometimes accepting that a difference solution may be required according to geography. This runs the risk of rural issues losing their identity, and being overlooked when actions are implemented.

Rural deprivation tends to be more widely spread than urban, occurring in smaller pockets, which make it hard to identify.

The Village Agents Project was recognised amongst members as being a visible success into tackling the issues of rural deprivation. Members felt that the two-year pilot should be watched and if successful replicated in other areas in Essex.

I am currently working with the appropriate Officer to bring forward a new Rural Strategy for Braintree District Council. We will be considering many issues including Rural Proofing to ensure that the services we deliver reach out to all in our communities.

### **Communication and Corporate Consultation.**

The new Contact magazine is out. Thank you to those members who have raised the issue of other advertising material being inserted into our magazine. The appropriate Officer is working hard to establish how this issue arises. I would be grateful for any other comments you have in regard to the new look Contact magazine.

With the budget process in mind we have engaged with the public in many ways to establish local views in terms of service and expenditure. This has been undertaken in many ways: The Peoples Panel, Face to Face, over the internet, a value for money survey and of course the three Local committees.

### **Youth engagement.**

The launch of our birthday card competition during Local Democracy Week was a success with many colorful contributions. The competition winners will enjoy a visit to the Palace of Westminster.

I was delighted to receive, along with other members, a group of young school councillors from some of our rural schools. I always find these sessions refreshing and I am constantly amazed at how well our young understand the issues on the ground. The session was constructive and I feel we must harvest our young and their ideas and continue to embrace them in our democratic processes.

### **Community Achievement Awards.**

Nominations for these awards continue to filter in. Soon we will establish the judging panel with a view to holding the awards evening in March 2010.

## **LOCALITY AND PLACE SHAPING.**

I have just written to all of our town and parish councils to explain some of the new thinking around Parish Support. The current system of Cluster Meetings, informing our towns and parishes via the Parish Update Magazine and holding meetings for our town and parish council clerks I feel needs to be reviewed and refreshed. The response, so far, to transform this area has been positive.

I value the role of our town and parish councils greatly. They are front line, committed, empowered and able to deal with so many local issues. Like us, they too, value training and learning opportunities and I support this. Of late, we have included town and parish councillors in many of our own training sessions. We are also planning to host a yearly seminar for town and parish councils. This is aimed at the chairmen and clerks to help us to understand their issues and concerns.

Parish and town councils may still wish to meet collectively if common issues arise.

## **MEMBERS ISSUES.**

The Christmas edition of Democracy Counts will soon be delivered, mostly electronically, to all members.

This communication will illustrate how we have progressed over the past few months in terms of Member Development. I hope that all Members will agree that a Member led approach to Member Development and support is key.

The proposed Member Development Programme 2010 has now been endorsed by the Local Government Review Cabinet Sub-group and is now before the Cabinet for approval. Following Cabinet approval it will be forwarded to all Members.

### **2010 and beyond.**

The new year looks challenging. Change and transformation will mean that Members will need to be well briefed and up to speed. With this in mind, we are planning to hold a Members Evening at the earliest opportunity in the New Year.

The Member Development Group will be meeting in early January to discuss the Members Evening in greater depth.

***FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:***

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***Our further contact details are now available on the Councillors Portal.***