



Essex Association of Local Councils

42B High Street, Great Dunmow, Essex CM6 1AH Tel: 01371 879722 Website: www.ealc.gov.uk

Minutes

Executive Committee

Thursday 21st March 2024, 10 am at 42B High Street, Great Dunmow, Essex, CM6 1AH

Committee members present:

Cllr. Peter Davey	Brentwood	Cllr. Jim Devlin	Basildon
Cllr. Paul Lees	Braintree	Cllr. Martin Lee	Braintree
		Cllr. John Gili-Ross	Colchester
Cllr. Sheila Jackman	Epping Forest	Beverley Rumsey	Epping Forest
Cllr. Mike Eldred	Local Council Forum Rep.	Cllr. Abdul Hafiz	Maldon
Cllr. Mark Platt	Essex County Council	Cllr. Sue Martin	Rochford
Cllr. Alan Townsend	Uttlesford	Cllr. Stephanie Gill	Uttlesford

Agenda

1. **Welcome from the Chair.** The Chair had hoped to welcome Cllr. Arscott, a new member of the Executive Committee representing Southend, Leigh on Sea Town Council. Unfortunately, Cllr. Arscott informed the office that he would try to join the meeting online but was unable to do so due to an urgent work matter.

2. **Declarations of interest.**

Cllr. Stephanie Gill declared an interest as a part-time tutor for the EALC.

3. **Apologies for Absence.**

Cllr. Brian Butcher

Cllr. Angelina Mariott

Cllr. Richard North

Cllr. Frank Belgrove

Cllr. McKinlay

Cllr. Bernard Arscott

Darren Horsman PFCC

4. **Minutes**

- 4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2024.

Proposed by: Cllr. Mike Eldred

Seconded by: Cllr. John Gili-Ross

One abstention. The vote was carried.

- 4.2 Actions report.

All actions noted and recorded.

5. **Personnel – The Personnel Sub-Committee update.**

- 5.1 Update from CEO.

Following a successful recruitment drive during February for two roles, EALC now have a support post for maternity cover, Gabrielle Bongard joined EALC on 4th March to give one week handover to MP whose last working day will be 8th March. Gabrielle Bongard brings a wealth of expertise and has worked for Essex Pension Fund for the past 9 years. As a Finance Officer for Essex Pension Fund for 9 years and latterly as Employer Analyst for the last two. Gabrielle Bongard is AAT level 3 qualified. The induction is taking place with the CEO simultaneously with a handover from MP.

Kristi Lewis joined the EALC on 26th February as Office Administrator and has completed two weeks of induction with the CEO. Kristi Lewis brings a wealth of experience from communications to PA and events marketing, with experience of working for RBS, Citi Group, and Ground Control. As CEO I believe Kristi Lewis could be a huge asset to the association for the future.

Both candidates have a lot to bring to the EALC. Staff retention and resilience building within the team is vital to the function of the business, therefore, future planning and marketing of the association is vital to its success. There is an obligation on behalf of ECC to monitor all grant funding from historical successful applications over a three-year period, the SLA should reflect this period to ensure there is funding for the role.

The CEO thanked Stephanie Robinson for supporting the recruitment and interviews. Also, thanked all staff for their support with the new posts, commitment and dedication to the work, as stated in their reports.

5.2 Staff reports.

The Chair acknowledges the staff have carried out a lot of work with the CRM system, the tutors and the new clerk pack.

All staff reports were acknowledged.

The two new staff members have been welcomed and acknowledged.

6 Finance Sub-Committee update.

6.1 Finance Sub-committee minutes from the meeting of 18th January 2024.

ACTION: In the future, the latest draft minutes need to be shared with the Executive Committee as they inform the subsequent Executive Committee Meeting.

6.2 Budget Report to February 2024.

Cllr. Stephanie Gill started by saying that the training line was a lesser figure than had been budgeted for but was still a very good effort.

Cllr. Gill suggested that courses for the winter months need to be looked at again, it cannot be expected that Councillors travel to and from day courses in the dark. Courses in that season need to be morning courses only.

The subcommittee had noted that there was only one course in April 2023 - but more courses had been put on throughout the year.

The subcommittee had also mentioned renting out the training room, but this is not feasible as there are no disabled toilets and the lease renewal next year must be considered.

Cllr. Gill said that the forward budget currently does not show any impacts on income or costs arising from the business and marketing plan as these are not yet written, and that the EALC can only move forward with what it is aware of now. There will need to be serious consideration of the impacts when they are known.

There is a predicted deficit for 2024/25 plan year, but this is offset by the anticipated profit for this year that has accrued. Obviously not the best position, but the business and marketing plans are needed to inform the exercise.

Noted.

6.3 Balance Sheet Report February 2024.

There are no concerns with the balance sheet.

6.4 Statement of Reserves held at 31st March 2024.

There is a small amount in the reserves for a Maldon bursary, the auditor has agreed to write the amount of £13 off in the accounts.

ACTION: The Councillor training bursary precept level is currently set at £25,000 and this should be looked at for the next Executive meeting. The report will be based on the previous recommendations and data of the uptake on the bursary by the CEO and the FO, for any recommendation of change to the threshold.

6.5 Grant Overview February 2024.

There has been an exercise to return funds to ECC and to close purchase orders that were live (but not in use of live funds). There is £100k being returned to ECC.

There is a further food support fund being launched. The fee was based on a 5% management fee, this has been paid and the excess paid (as not all the existing fund was taken up) will be offset against the management fee of the new fund.

There has been very little uptake on the Ride London fund.

Microgrants – it is unclear if these will be launched again in April. The fund was easily accessible for applicants and if this is taken in house with ECC the request is not to lose the momentum. It is unclear if there is a requirement for the microgrants at the moment. There needs to be clarification on the administration for microgrants from ECC.

Cllr. Martin Lee joined the meeting, 10:33am

The CIF Emergency Fund has been effectively less active. The criteria have been changed. This is Counties decision. There is capacity for three applications at £10K within this fund.

ACTION: Cllr Mark Platt to take this back to ECC, regarding the number and the level of funds that ECC wish for EALC to administer. This helps EALC to understand their workflow.

6.6 Financial Regulations.

Cllr. Peter Davey proposed to accept the content of the document, the template of the regulations document needs looking at and will be amended at another time.

Proposed by: Cllr. Peter Davey

Seconded by: Cllr. Mike Eldred

The majority vote was carried.

ACTION: The template is difficult to use, and it is not easily adaptable. This has been brought to the attention of the Communications Officer and the template will be changed.

6.7 Essex ALC Auditor terms of reference.

The audit terms of reference were agreed at the finance sub-committee meeting. There were no further comments.

6.8 EALC Draft Auditor Plan.

The audit plan was agreed at the finance sub-committee meeting, there were no further discussions made.

The audit of the funding streams was carried out on 18th March and will form part of the overall audit and report.

6.9 Client Relationship Management (CRM System)

Cllr Gill reported that at the Finance Subcommittee meeting of 7th March, three quotes and accompanying recommendations by the EALC Communications Officer for an online CRM were considered. It was determined to proceed with the SubscriberCRM quotation. As part of the website upgrade, phase three of the project was to implement a Client Relationship Management System (CRM) giving membership login access to a wealth of support, information and access to online booking functionality. This CRM system is going to be provided by a company called SubscriberCRM and will start to be implemented from 1st April to streamline our booking system. A webinar will be provided to the Executive Committee members on the launch of the CRM support to the membership. There is no pressure from the Executive Committee on the timeframe. This needs to be easy for the membership to use. CEO confirmed that a professional launch of the CRM system would go out to the membership.

7. Business and Marketing Plan update from the task and finish groups.

7.1 Business Plan update.

Cllr. John Gili-Ross gave an overview of the progress on the business plan working group. The initial meeting went through a SWOT analysis, which is incorporated in the business plan. This is in a draft version 4. This is now being shared with the working group as a copy for comments. This document will then be shared with the Executive committee.

The business plan is commercially sensitive. There is an overview with a direction of travel. There are two documents, the main business plan and the evidence document. Both documents will be shared with the working group. The Marketing Group Chair, Cllr. Mike Eldred has had an input into the document as the marketing plan feeds into the business plan. Both documents will be shared by the end of this week with the working group of the business plan. Cllr. Peter Davey acknowledged the work Cllr. John Gili-Ross had put into the business plan.

ACTION: An Evidence Report has been produced to help the reader appreciate the logic behind the Business Plan. This evidence document may have restricted circulation.

7.2 Marketing Plan Update.

Cllr. Mike Eldred gave an update on the marketing plan and thanked Cllr. John Gili-Ross for his input. The marketing plan document must remain separate from the main plan - as the marketing of any business must continually move forward. The website is developing, and this is a huge piece of work. Cllr. Mike Eldred has had conversations with our partners, and it transpires they are also doing the same work to increase their membership. The marketing plan needs to focus on the members who are not interacting. We need to get out more to see the members. The membership does not understand the full values and benefits. There is also uncertainty with central government changes. Marketing is a two-way initiative. Cllr. Mike Eldred would like to take pop up stalls in the areas of the membership who are not engaging, using our partners to drive this initiative forward. EALC are not in isolation. Cllr. Mike Eldred also confirmed that the RCCE were experiencing difficulties connecting with their members.

There could be potential funding opportunities with PFCC.

The marketing package is huge and will be linked to the business plan. This will be shared with the working group; this is then a staff initiative to drive forward.

The AGM conference is in September.

The two documents, the Business Plan and Marketing Plan will come together.

Cllr. Peter Davey asked that the final document could be ready for the next Executive Meeting in May. The full action plan will follow on from the Business Plan.

ACTION: 'What the EALC can do for you' document will be shared with the members to have as an item on their meeting agenda for the May meetings.

The plan needs to be sent to the Executive Committee for discussion and comments. The document should not be rushed. The business plan is very strategic; however, the marketing plan is already being driven forward.

Cllr Mike Eldred also gave an update following the Climate Summit. There were interesting initiatives around water meter installations.

ACTION: The information about water meter installations will be shared with the membership. Cllr Mike Eldred to provide details.

Pearl left the meeting 11:13am

The Chair thanked everyone for this work.

Pearl rejoined the meeting 11:15am

8. District Associations Communications Initiative by the CEO and Representatives Feedback.

8.1 Basildon

Cllr. Jim Devlin gave an update. The last meeting of the association has confirmed new membership and now Basildon ALC has 100% members; the borough is heading for an election.

8.2 Braintree

Cllr. Martin Lee gave an update. The association has not held a meeting since the last Executive. Cllr. Paul Lees has been meeting with Chairs in the district to promote the membership of BALC and EALC.

8.3 Brentwood

The Chair, Cllr. Peter Davey gave an update. The Clerk has left the BBPCA. They will be looking for a new Secretary. Reports have been shared on behalf of NALC and EALC to the members.

There are twelve parish councils in the district who are doing the work for the commission. The business, school and residents' packs have been updated. The ECC phone App has been updated.

8.4 Chelmsford

Charlene Slade gave an update. We appreciate the association has not been formed for some time. The work plan used for the Braintree Association will be replicated to reform and support this association.

8.5 Colchester

Cllr. John Gili-Ross gave an update on Colchester ALC which had the ECC LHP Chair present to the members on LHP developments and how the Parish & Town Council LHP Representatives can better interact within the LHP to achieve greater effect for the P&TC sector. CALC has two LHP representatives on the Colchester LHP. CALC meets remotely in the winter months and in person at other times, four times a year. A local social media group has been attending Colchester City Council meetings trying to highlight apparent illogical decisions being made by the council on a range of subjects including why are body searches required for members of the public attending CCC meetings as well as why CCC encourages solar panel installations when solar panels do not have adequate recycle strategies when they are considered toxic for the environment. This behaviour may spread to other Council meetings.

8.6 Epping Forest

Cllr. Sheila Jackman gave an update on the Bell Hotel – it is being closed and currently being used for asylum seekers. It will re-open as a hotel again.

The district council is in a difficult situation. There will be an election in May. There are dual hated Councillors in the district and the town council.

The association meetings have stalled. They are trying to rebuild relationships to ensure the meetings and the group continues. The group should remain separate from the chairs of the parish councils attending.

8.7 Maldon

Cllr. Abdul Hafiz gave an update about the St. Peter's Hospital being closed; this is due to it not being deemed fit for purpose. This is cause for concern for the residents as there are residents not able to travel to alternative hospital locations. The NHS has not invested money in the building. The NHS in Maldon is experiencing problems.

Cllr. Mark Platt stated he was aware of a Maldon summit hosted by Cllr. John Spence which had a focus on health provision in the area focusing on the St. Peter's Hospital imminent closure.

8.8 Rochford

Cllr. Sue Martin gave an update on the district with 95% membership. They are sending one or more representatives. They meet regularly to share ideas & local issues. Elections in May for Rochford, Hockley & Hullbridge.

The representative from Leigh-on-Sea TC was invited to attend this meeting.

The election period starts 22nd March.

8.9 Leigh on Sea Town Council.

Unfortunately, Cllr. Bernard Arscott was unable to attend the meeting representing Leigh-on-Sea Town Council.

8.10 Tendring

Unfortunately, Cllr. Frank Belgrove was unable to attend this meeting.

Cllr. John Gili-Ross asked if we knew when their next meeting was taking place.

This is part of a work stream to capture the meeting dates of every 'ALC's' meeting to ensure that the EALC is represented at each meeting.

8.11 Uttlesford

Cllr. Alan Townsend gave an update. They have an issue with the liaison meetings where the Uttlesford CEO is providing an update and there is a view that the UALC is not needed. UALC's license was revoked and there was a problem with the bin collection for quite a few weeks. There have not been any meetings and there is a view that people do not wish to commit to membership.

There is also an issue with firefighting planning applications as there is no up-to-date Local Plan and many do not have adopted Neighbourhood Plans. Uttlesford District Council (UDC) is still in special measures. At a recent Inspectorate Appeal, the inspector was appalled with the lack of knowledge of the planning officer. This is affecting the parish councils as they must hold themselves to high account with planning knowledge, or they will be pulled down with UDC.

9. Chair and Vice-Chair update / reports to the Executive.

9.1 Chair, Cllr. Peter Davey gave feedback following the commission, the Spring Climate Conference. The Commission and Health and Wellbeing committee do talk about the work of the town and parish councils.

The Police Expo 24 was a great event. This should include the town and parish councils in attendance.

Chair, Cllr. Peter Davey is also involved with NALC and the report is in the pack. CEO of EALC is working towards providing the Executive a similar quarterly report to look at KPI's and will produce one report.

NALC has sold 109 Great Russel Street with a book value of £1.8 million.

There is a reserve of £40K and the figure will be checked with the auditor to see as to how this is going to be spent.

There is now an office in Bloomsbury London costing £120K per year on an annual lease. An additional 5% increase in rent for conference use.

9.2 Vice Chair, Cllr. John Gili-Ross gave feedback from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and the Police Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP). PFCC elections are due on May 2nd and recent performance analysis by the PFCP of the PFCC Police and Fire & Rescue plan indicates the PFCC has performed well over the last 3 years. All crime categories have come down. The latest HMIFRS (HMI Fire and Rescue Report) arrived too late for the PFCP to discuss at its last meeting, A new Police and Fire & Rescue Plan will be developed after the May elections. Police and Fire & Rescue remain highly important services to the residents of Essex. Cllr. John Gili-Ross will be up for re-selection to the Essex PFCP in June 2024.

9.3 Vice Chair, Cllr. Mike Eldred gave feedback on activities; 12th March members of the EALC staff & Executive Committee attended the funeral of Ann's husband Mike Letch who was sadly lost. There will be an award set up in honour of Mike Letch and provided by Ann and Family, funded from Mike's estate. It will be for Clerks.

Pearl left the meeting at 12.01pm

Cllr. Mike Eldred gave an update on the High Sheriffs awards ceremony.

Comfort Break reconvene at 12:15

10. New Initiatives and other matters for discussion

10.1 Update from CEO and Vice-Chair, Cllr Mike Eldred – 80th AGM 26th September 2024.

Email from Colchester Stadium:

For us, Saturdays can be tricky. There isn't any change in the price, that remains the same. However, I wouldn't be able to confirm our Autumn availability until the end of June of that year. We tend to have a home football match every other week, and on this day, we cannot run any conferences as all rooms are in use for football hospitality. Therefore, we would have to wait until the end of June to confirm a date, or if you went ahead with a Saturday date before then you run the risk of me then having to cancel the AGM at the end of June. All the terms and conditions are that football supersedes any other bookings, so we will try and accommodate a booking if we can but ultimately if this isn't possible, we would cancel a conference. Because of the room you are using, and the timings of the event we would have to cancel if there was a clash on a Saturday.

Cllr. Mike Eldred gave an update on alternative event venues that will need to be looked at for the future of the AGM.

The timing of the event will be moved to the evening following the discussion with the Executive committee. This will be tried and tested. The view of the Executive was that an evening awards ceremony would not be a success.

10.2 Partner reports as received in person or in writing.

NALC quarterly report included in the pack.

RCCE update on RCCE and ERP.

PFCC will present in person at every other meeting with a written update.

10.3 White Ribbon Accreditation.

Recommendation to accredit as a supporter organization for White Ribbon Day.

There needs to be clarification with the staff that they are happy to proceed. The Executive committee needs further information to fully understand the implications of the actions and due diligence in the process. The committee will note it this time and a paper will be presented to finance.

ACTION: Present a paper to finance.

10.4 Civility and Respect initiative – EALC

There are two issues - one is the NALC, and one is the Councils initiative. Within EALC the ask to the membership is to sign up.

There have been questions raised around the sanctions. There is no legal authority for a standards committee. There is a new model code of conduct in this. Councillors sign up to and agree to training to the Civility and Respect.

In Essex, every district has signed up and the majority of councils have also signed up. The proposal in principle is to agree to rewrite the document to reflect it from the association's point of view.

Proposed by: Cllr. John Gili-Ross

Seconded by: Beverley Rumsey

The motion was carried.

ACTION: Proposal is to the office to start to modify the document from an EALC perspective.

- 10.5 Executive Committee to decide if the EALC should have a portrait of King Charles III.

Proposed by: Cllr. John Gili-Ross

Seconded by: Cllr. Peter Davey

All those present agreed to have a portrait of King Charles III.

Cllr. Sue Martin Left the meeting.

ACTION: To submit a request for the portrait by 28th March

11. Essex Matters

- 11.1 Essex County Council Report, update given by Cllr Mark Platt.

Cllr. Mark Platt gave an overview of the County initiatives including an update on Everyone's Essex which is an evolving document.

Headlines are:

Social value has increased with 1,425 full-time jobs created locally.

Sustainable housing decarbonization fund has now retrofitted 258 homes, increasing the EPC rating up to a 'c' grade, including L.E.D. lighting.

Cycling to work, Carpooling, and Park and Ride programmes have saved 100,243 miles through car journey initiatives.

37% increase on NHS health checks with 38,032 health checks taken place in the last 12 months.

ECC Cabinet held roundtable discussions with Microsoft about AI and how this could shape Councils of the future including supporting care technology, current ECC programs helping 9,022 people stay in their homes for longer safer when in receipt of care packages.

Household waste has gone down overall; however, this is not the case in all areas.

Cllr. Sheila Jackman left the meeting 13:02pm

- 11.2 ECC Initiatives update.

Visitor numbers to Essex Outdoors increased.

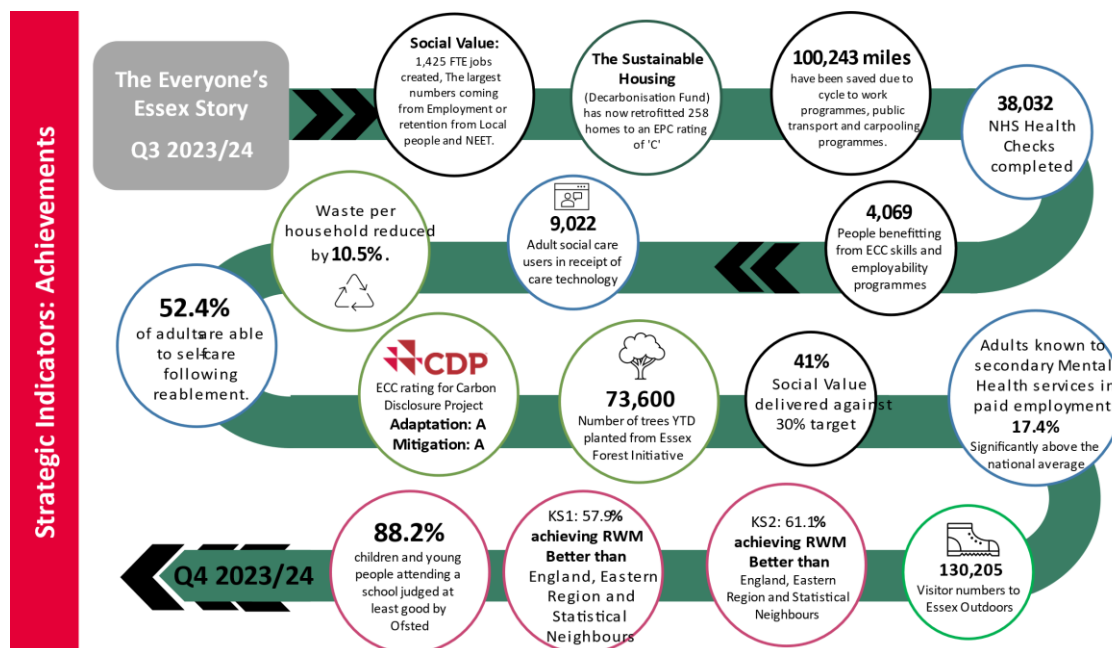
61% achieved reading writing and Math's better than statistical neighbours in Key Stage Two (KS2).

58% achieved reading writing and Math's better than statistical neighbours in Key Stage One (KS1).

88% of children and young people attending school are judged at 'Good' by Ofsted.

Questions were raised by members of the committee around the blueprint for new buildings design guide. To save retrofitting houses. This is a government initiative. Planning authorities hold the blueprint, and it depends on the district city or borough council agreement with the developer. Homes already built this year

will be on the list to retrofit. The other new homes will have heat pumps fitted. Until it becomes regulation there will always be an issue.



Reaching New Heights book is available online share.

Locality funds will continue to be used for council members.

Highway initiatives will be announced next week.

CIF update will follow.

Questions raised by members about the building of County Hall and what will happen to it. An assessment through a working party has been carried out on the estate, there are plans in place for the next administration to consider after May 2025.

With the creation of the 'Essex Film Office', Shire Hall has proved to be a valuable location for television production companies, this is due to its historic court room which was used recently with the film, Mr. Alan Bates v The Post Office and The Court Room.

11.3 ECC/EALC Meeting updates.

Core grant invoices will be invoiced 2nd April when the purchase orders have been received.

12. Items for the next Agenda

White Ribbon Day

13. Date of Next Meetings for 2024.

23rd May 2024 10am

11th July 2024 10 am

5th September 2024 10am

21st November 2024 10am

14. Meeting Closed at 1:10pm.