

Meeting the Challenge of The Big Society



Annual Stakeholder Conference Report

February 2011

CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	3
SETTING THE SCENE.....	4
REVIEWING THE WORK OF THE LSP	6
<i>Introduction.....</i>	6
<i>Sustainable Communities.....</i>	6
<i>Safer Communities.....</i>	7
<i>Healthier Communities</i>	7
<i>Children’s Partnership</i>	7
<i>Supporting the Voluntary Sector.....</i>	8
REPORTS FROM WORKSHOPS	9
<i>The Big Society and Sustainable Communities.....</i>	9
<i>Safer Communities and the Big Society</i>	11
<i>The Big Society and building Healthier Communities... </i>	13
<i>Children’s services and the Big Society</i>	16
<i>The Big Society and joining up services.....</i>	18
<i>Question Time Panel.....</i>	20
<i>Conference Delegates by workshop.....</i>	22

Foreword



I have great pleasure in introducing the report of our recent conference, which looked at meeting the challenge of the Big Society in Epping Forest.

This year's event was the most successful one run yet by the partnership. Over 100 delegates from business, councils, police, and voluntary and community groups came together to learn about and discuss new opportunities for the district coming from the developing Big Society initiative.

We were very lucky to have the Right Honourable Eric Pickles MP, Minister for Local Government and Communities come along and set out the government's vision for the Big Society. Conference delegates also had the opportunity to ask the Minister some searching questions about how it might work in practice locally.

The workshop sessions, covering issues such as the Big Society and crime, health, children's services and issues around provision of a range of local services, gave delegates the chance to test our current arrangements and suggest practical steps to improve.

The question time session gave everyone the chance to quiz a panel of senior leaders from business, councils, police, health, and the voluntary sector. The proceedings were brought to an excellent conclusion by the inspirational singing of the Artability Choir which has been funded with help from our partnership.

The event would not have been such a success if it were not for the efforts and support of a number of organisations. In particular I would like to thank Eric Pickles for taking time out of a hectic schedule to come and speak to us, Epping Forest College for hosting the event and colleagues at Voluntary Action Epping Forest who did so much of the behind the scenes work to enable the day to pass without a hitch.

Those I talked to on the day were very impressed with the conference and the talent, commitment and range of organisations that are members of the One Epping Forest partnership. Epping Forest is clearly well placed to take forward the Big Society. This is one of the key messages of the conference and I have asked that a special Big Society Task and Finish Panel of the partnership is set up, involving leaders from across the district to make sure we take full advantage of all the opportunities that it brings.

I hope you find this report helpful. If you would like to know more about the partnership please go to www.oneeppingforest.org.uk. We are always interested in your views.

Cllr. Di Collins
Chairman, One Epping Forest

Setting the Scene

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Minister for Local Government and Communities



Eric Pickles, MP and Minister of Local Government and Communities set the scene for the One Epping Forest Annual Stakeholder Conference. Mr Pickles began by setting out some of the key principles of the Localism Bill, currently going through Parliament, which will empower communities with a right for local people and groups to buy and run buildings nominated on a register of community facilities. These include any redundant building which could be on the list such as old school buildings, pubs or

even churches. The point of the Big Society is to enable communities to play an active role in making their communities better places to live and to help support each other. The government is bringing in legislation and policy to support and make it easier for this to happen.

The Minister then moved on to the subject of the Big Society Bank which is being set up with the intention that it will help local groups fund worthwhile projects, funding itself through the money in dormant bank accounts. He also suggested that mainstream banks might themselves contribute in some way to this new initiative.

It was recognised in the speech and questions, the challenges of attracting funding to areas like Epping Forest where a high level of affluence can mask areas of real deprivation. Local bodies such as the council, which the Minister praised as a well run authority, need to work hard to make sure this is addressed effectively.

In terms of volunteering the Minister wanted the overly bureaucratic barriers that stifled community action to be swept away and stated that, “it is part of my job to remove some of the sillier petty restrictions that can sap the energy out of volunteers.” As an example he cited some of the issues coming up around organising street parties saying “you don’t need a full traffic management plan to close a side street to celebrate the Royal Wedding”

During the question session the Minister accepted there was some cynicism towards the Big Society, specifically the view that The Big Society was ‘Society on the cheap’, but he felt this was not justified and there was real opportunity in the idea. Mr. Pickles provided members of the Loughton festival and other groups with some advice on funding and insurance but he emphasised that it was his desire to get rid of red tape, “this is about people like you getting on with things that are important to you without getting bogged down in regulation.”

When questioned on the role of businesses in the Big Society the Minister said businesses should help to identify barriers to greater participation so the government could help to remove them, reminding them that no business exists by itself and that they are all part of the wider community.

The Minister was challenged on the unsettling effect of the Big Society and was asked what we might look like in three or four years' time. The Minister responded by saying he hoped it would be a place where those with imagination would thrive and be supported by the government when appropriate.

In response to a question about the future for town and parish councils, Mr. Pickles envisaged more planning powers at a local level in much the same way as councils in Germany and France operate. This boost for greater local control, such as Neighbourhood Plans was a key thrust of the government's new agenda.

Finally, Mr. Pickles offered his personal thanks to all the volunteers and delegates telling them that, "Our communities would not be what they are without your help. You make our communities better for what you do and I would like to thank you."

Reviewing the work of the LSP

Delegates received presentations detailing the activities and the various challenges facing groups within the Local Strategic Partnership over the past year.

Introduction



The LSP Manager's presentation, given by John Houston, dealt with the activities and challenges for the Local Strategic Partnership as a whole.

There was a brief outline of the structure of the LSP. This was followed by a list of achievements of the LSP such as the successful bid for the funding of £1.1 million for the Future Jobs Fund. This project was benefiting 176 local long-term unemployed people. The West Essex Prize scheme was encouraging academic improvement in primary schools, and a £435,000 grant for 8 schemes approved and recommended by the partnership had provided services ranging from improving community safety to new opportunities for adults with learning difficulties. The partnership had also set up the

Mini Data Observatory and produced ward profiles of all 32 wards, bringing together in one place for the first time key information about the district and how it was changing. The Observatory is being used by, among others, local groups to help them apply for funding.

Sustainable Communities



Cllr. Anne Grigg informed delegates about the activities and challenges encountered by the Sustainable Communities Theme Group. Cllr. Grigg spoke about the importance of balancing the need to protect the green and unique character of the district with the requirements to accommodate the many people on the housing waiting lists and tackle the congestion caused by living so close to London. Projects such as the Future Jobs Fund were helping the

unemployed; the new business charter would support local companies, while the charter for volunteers would hopefully help people to engage in the Big Society. A new environmental charter would set out in detail what we can all do to reduce carbon emissions.

Safer Communities



The activities and challenges encountered by the Safer Communities Theme Group over the last year were presented by Ch. Supt Simon Williams. Some highlights of the past year included the continuation of established and successful programmes such as 'Reality Roadshow' and 'Crucial Crew', designed to increase school children's awareness of crime while giving them information on staying safe. He outlined plans for the future around promoting respect as a starting point for everyone, and supporting local people to play a more active role in making their communities safer.

The need to tackle the fear of crime, which is amongst the highest in the region, was addressed during this presentation together with the need to build links with partners in London in order to tackle cross border crime.

Healthier Communities



Dr. Pam Hall gave a presentation outlining the activities and challenges encountered by the Healthier Communities Theme Group. The group was carrying out detailed research into health inequalities in the district, which was a central theme of its work. Neighbourhood healthy living programmes had been supported and a new Health Briefing newsletter was being produced. The presentation also reminded delegates of the ageing population demographics, the need to adapt services to changing need, and the radical proposals for changes in the NHS.

Children's Partnership



Julie Chandler gave a brief presentation on behalf of the Children's Partnership, which also picked up on concerns about young people and health including the increase in childhood obesity. The Children's Partnership was successfully bringing together all the key players who work with young people in the district to coordinate activity and undertake new projects. A key recent success was securing over £100,000 for a new project with young people in Waltham Abbey, and the range of children's activities run throughout the last year. A challenge would be to protect services for children and young people as the reductions in budgets came into effect.

Supporting the Voluntary Sector



Jacqui Foile, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Epping Forest, the umbrella group for voluntary groups in the district, picked up on the challenges facing the sector and how they would seek to address them. Her presentation placed the importance of the voluntary sector into context. In a snapshot of the district she said that approximately 34,000 local people benefited directly from the work of volunteers. Sixty per cent of the groups providing voluntary services have no paid staff at all and she estimated 2,300 volunteers made contributions to the life of the community each week. She felt that the potential significant reductions to voluntary sector funding could come in the short and medium term and the impact of cuts such as the Performance Reward Grant had already affected the services they could provide. The voluntary sector

in the district was strong and if there were real opportunities flowing from the Big Society then they were eager to work with colleagues to maximise their benefits locally.

Reports from Workshops

The Big Society and Sustainable Communities

Workshop Chair Cllr. Anne Grigg

Welcome and purpose of workshop

The workshop began with the chair welcoming delegates to the workshop. Members were then asked to introduce themselves and describe the work their organisations did. The chair then gave a brief outline of the questions to be covered in the workshop.

Key issues

The workshop dealt with issues around involving people in key decisions such as sustainability, planning, the Big Society, etc. There was general agreement amongst the workshop members on the difficulty of finding a happy medium between a top down versus bottom up approach in terms of deciding policies and making decisions. There is a need to find a balance between informed groups that are knowledgeable on the bigger picture and the public/local interest. Local communities need to identify their priorities through neighbourhood planning, but there are difficulties in gauging the view of local communities as a very small proportion (it was thought less than 10%) engage via the public consultation process, and District Councils are restricted in their capacity to reach out to every part of the community.

There was recognition by the workshop that neighbourhood planning is meant to encourage greater involvement from a wider range of people, i.e. it is the responsibility of local people as well as planners to take issues forward. However, the issue was also raised that the Big Society might see a reduction in the funding required to train community members in the skills necessary to confidently get involved in the planning process. It was acknowledged that it takes time for capacity building in communities and to train people to take part. It was also recognised that there are many different ways that public engagement can be achieved; the most important point being that people feel empowered and also feel that what they're saying makes a difference.

There was also a discussion about a current general confusion and the lack of guidelines surrounding the key objectives that Local Authorities are expected to deliver and it was mentioned that the interface between the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Development Framework (LDF) was very unclear and needed to be addressed.

Key actions for the future

Neighbourhood Plans are meant for local people to positively formulate the aspirations and priorities of their area, and these plans shouldn't be used to allow neighbourhoods to say they don't want any development in their area, as that may lead areas to be prone to 'NIMBYism' and a resultant lack of sustainability. This was of particular concern in relation to affordable housing. On the other hand, it was felt that leaving decisions to the "experts" without the input of local people was not a solution either. It was noted that LDF frameworks will still be in place, but Neighbourhood Plans would provide comments within this framework.

It was pointed out that the district has an ageing population, in part, because younger generations can't afford to live here or set up business here. The key solution to many issues seemed to be to identify specific gaps in neighbourhoods/communities and together figure out how to close them.

Unfortunately, the workshop felt it had run short on time but the final point in the discussion was that although the future will see a reduction in local funding, there is funding available from other areas, such as the European Union. It was also emphasised that better sources of information are needed to raise awareness of funding and a question was raised as to how this knowledge could be communicated across groups and other districts. It was felt that this is something the Local Strategic Partnership might help address.

Most attendees felt that more information was still needed on what is expected in practice from local organisations in the Big Society. In general, the feeling was that the Big Society idea has potential but because of the complexity of the issue, much work is needed in investment of time, skills and learning to inform and engage the local people in decision making.



Safer Communities and the Big Society

Workshop Chair Caroline Wiggins

Welcome and purpose of workshop

The workshop began with the chair welcoming delegates to the workshop. Members were then asked to introduce themselves and the relevance of their organisations to the workshop. The chair then gave a brief outline of the questions to be covered in the workshop.

Key issues

The workshop felt that locally we have a mature and effective partnership. The key issue is communication ensuring that Town and Parish Councils, residents and community groups are informed of the work of the partnership, key messages are delivered and they are able to inform and help deliver the work of the partnership.

It was agreed by the workshop that the perception of crime is still relatively high compared to the actual crime figures and this was picked up in the presentation by Chief Supt Williams. Residents are urging further involvement and finance for Neighbourhood Watch. The workshop was informed of the need for better information to be delivered to Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAPs) including the arrest and prosecution of offenders where appropriate.

The Youth Council informed the workshop that they are involved in helping keep young people safe by making a DVD about different subject matters including behaviour on buses, alcohol and so on.

The workshop was informed by Chief Superintendent Simon Williams that the transport Neighbourhood Action Panel, "Vigilance", was not currently meeting, but he was sure it was going to start up again soon.

The delegates reported extremely positive responses in regards to the "Safe and Sound" initiative which is in place to help vulnerable people, particularly those who have recently been victims of crime. The public have been impressed with the efforts being made to look after people and the perception is that the programme is going the extra mile to address the issue.

Members from the Youth Council felt concerned that 'rivalry' in schools isn't always effectively tackled. A problem was noted in respect that, if it gets reported directly to the school, it may not get reported to the police and then the figures aren't accurate. If the wider partnership isn't aware of this issue from official figures then it doesn't get picked up or addressed effectively.

Key Actions for the future

It was agreed that there needs to be a greater awareness as to how to report crime efficiently.

More needs to be done in terms of spreading the message that the Police are available and that front line services are not being cut. There is a dilemma as how best to get the police message across: use of media is fine but does not always get to the people that they want to read it, e.g. the elderly often can't use the internet. Later in the workshop, the possibility of an informative TV display in local libraries was discussed.

Members of the town and parish councils do not feel they are adequately informed and it was agreed that there needs to be a review into how the police and the wider partnership better engage with town and parish councils.

Some in the workshop felt that we need to reduce bureaucracy and should only hold meetings when necessary. There was also a suggestion put forward that social media, such as free conference calling, be implemented as they can potentially save time and money.

It was agreed that the partnership should be better at advertising the things that they are doing and the successes they are having, and what they can achieve for people. This was not to be done for 'self congratulatory' reasons but so that they may encourage a more engaged response.

It was also agreed that low-level crimes can be further addressed by volunteer groups and communities, if they are given the appropriate help. Police Community Support Officers are seen as a good resource in improving the public's perception of policing as they engage in a non-threatening way with communities.



The Big Society and building Healthier Communities

Workshop Chair Dr. Pam Hall

Welcome and purpose of workshop

The Chair introduced the workshop and key themes and asked delegates to introduce themselves and the contribution their organisation currently makes to the health improvement agenda. The delegates came from a range of organisations including local voluntary agencies, parish, district and county councils and the NHS. The workshop's purpose was to discuss what the various groups thought were the key issues surrounding their organisation in relation to the Big Society and health, and discuss the various ways in which One Epping Forest could move these issues forward.

Key Issues

The first question the workshop covered was the challenges currently facing partners and the health agenda in general. Issues brought up included the layers of bureaucracy, the enormous amounts of form filling and the need to monitor the impact of reduced funding. It was agreed that there was a pressing need for everyone to be clearer about barriers to progress and how to remove them and, most importantly, how to cope with reduced funding and come up with new innovative ideas to achieve positive outcomes for the community.

It was noted almost unanimously that funding is an issue, the lack of which means partners will be working differently in the future. The workshop agreed that given this situation the partnership needs to be very clear on its priorities and keep a real focus on these. There also needs to be clarity about what the voluntary sector can provide to help achieve our key priorities.

A major issue for the workshop was the massive amount of change in structures, funding and a lack of understanding about how it will all look in the future and how it will work in practice, and an uncertainty about how to engage and with whom. This was causing frustration for partners and it was felt that this frustration would increase. The workshop felt it was crucial that effective links were made and kept with partners to help navigate through this difficult process and good communication was really important.

The workshop was also informed that cutbacks are already impacting on frontline services; with some being reduced by 20% at short/no notice, causing real problems for the elderly in particular. Other services which make a real contribution to health such as the trampolining service etc are also vulnerable and it's the whole impact of reductions to services, not just in the health service budget, which will cause problems. The issue of changes to housing was mentioned as an example of possible 'knock on' impacts on health: loss of secure tenancies, increases in rents (to up to 80% of market rents) and the reductions in subsidies which may result in more people on benefits. Partners informed the workshop that they were expecting more transient clients that the health service will need to reach and support. It was agreed that access to services in a place like Epping Forest would be a real issue for the future

Key actions for the future

The workshop talked about opportunities that the partnership could take advantage of. Some workshop members felt that one potential opportunity could be a real growth in volunteering. However, national volunteer rates are dropping and it was suggested that it was the better off who were more likely to volunteer. There is, therefore, an opportunity to get people who wouldn't normally volunteer to look at volunteering, especially those 'who aren't used to not always having something to do'. Volunteering can have major career benefits, particularly for 18-24 year olds that have little work experience. There is an opportunity to push them towards volunteering as a way that may lead to their getting a job if they are unemployed.

The workshop felt that this was a good time to take a fresh look at what was provided and why, and to join up and coordinate activity more. Reducing inefficiencies was talked about 10 years ago but there is still a lot of duplication. The 'Total Place' initiative which looked at all public funding streams, what needs doing in an area and how best to do it, through all the public money being spent was really useful. This was being replaced with 'Place Based Budgeting', which could also help to increase integration and reduce duplication. Delegates felt however the major problem with these initiatives was that most cuts happen before the radical review has happened.

The workshop looked at some practical examples of service developments including adult teams and 'virtual wards' supporting patients being cared for in the community. People are thinking about how they use their resources more than they ever had done. There would be a lot more flexibility in the way we deliver services in the future. We also need to plan for the growth in the number of elderly which services will need to look after.



The workshop then discussed the ways in which it felt that One Epping Forest could move things forward. A key role for the partnership was seen as addressing the issue for communities of not having their voice heard effectively as the LSP is good at raising the concerns of our partners. Good relationships exist between the partners in Epping Forest and these relationships need to be built upon. The partnership knows where the pockets of economic deprivation are in the district and should be a champion for deprived areas making sure their needs are adequately met. The partnership should also promote itself more, showing people what it does and all the projects run by partners so local groups are more aware of how they can get involved. In particular, the partnership should champion projects and services that have had a positive impact and to share the learning. Finally, the partnership, with all the key groups involved and with all the needs data it has amassed, is in a good position to set out clear priorities for everyone to address when budgets are getting very tight.

Children's services and the Big Society

Workshop Chair Julie Chandler

Welcome and purpose of workshop

The Chair introduced the workshop, set out what was hoped to be achieved and asked people to introduce themselves and how their organisations contributed to work with children.

Key Issues

The Chair asked groups from around the table to identify the key issues and challenges they were facing. The Ethnic Minority and Travellers Advisory Service (EMTAS) reported that there was significant anecdotal evidence that racism is currently being under-reported within the district as well as stating that children's centres are beginning to focus on providing advice and support for BME families. There was a deep concern that as funding for EMTAS was no longer ring-fenced and schools would now receive the money that had previously been set aside for the service, would schools chose to use the service less frequently? There had also been concern expressed that there had been no Equality Impact Assessment yet carried out for changes to Essex Integrated Youth Service.

Epping Field Centre reported to the workshop that as a service they were currently doing well but there was apprehension that the cuts to school funding could negatively affect their future work.

A representative of the schools partnership reported that this past year had been very successful in terms of supporting young people, however, they felt that even though schools wished to continue working collaboratively, this was likely to become increasingly problematic as a result of the cuts and there is a fear that this will have a negative effect on young people and undo the good work that has been done.

The Loughton Youth Project reported that it continues to be able to work flexibly but it is dependent on the continuation of partnership working. It also reported that a lack of clarity surrounding the strategic future of Essex Integrated Youth Services is hindering their ability to plan and provide services.

Epping Forest College felt that the cut of the Educational Maintenance Allowance would cause real problems. It will affect those in rural areas and those travelling in from London making it more expensive to travel. They also expressed concern that the threats to the Elective Enrichment Programme would in turn threaten non curricular activities at the College e.g. lunch activities.

Key Actions for the future

The workshop as a whole agreed that the partnership should be re-examining, re-evaluating and possibly reframing existing aims, resources and opportunities. In particular, there should be a greater emphasis at looking at what is needed and what works in practical terms.

There was a general agreement that there needs to be continued networking in the future as funds were being cut.

It was also noted that the Big Society may give young people the opportunities to take responsibility and to engage with activities such as fundraising, although this empowerment of young people requires infrastructure support which is being threatened somewhat by cuts. Epping Field Centre also expressed the view that the Big Society presented an opportunity to market work to community groups as well as schools.

There was also an agreement that going forward One Epping Forest, with all the key leaders involved, should put more emphasis towards providing advocacy at the highest levels with strategic leaders and funding organisations to support the valuable work with children and young people.



The Big Society and joining up services

Workshop Chair Derek Macnab

Welcome and purpose of workshop

A brief introduction was given setting out some key questions for the workshop and outlining some of the activity that was taking place to join up, share services and make efficiencies across public bodies in these difficult economic times. The workshops task was to review what was currently going on, think about any gaps or new opportunities and feedback on any problems they see with the current approach.

Key Issues

The workshop received a brief summary of current activity. Given the reductions in funding to councils, police, health service, voluntary sector etc that were already impacting on groups, new approaches to providing services that local people rely on were being investigated. Councils across West Essex had already signed a memorandum of understanding to trade with each other, the voluntary sector across West Essex was building tighter links and sharing staff and services in some areas, but would this be enough? One Epping Forest, along with Harlow 2020 and Uttlesford Futures had just set up a Task and Finish Panel to look at this whole area and make recommendations for change. The outcomes of the workshop would be fed to them to inform discussions.

The workshop agreed that this would be a very challenging time given the budget reductions, and that everyone needed to 'think out of the box' and look at new solutions and new ways of working. There would no doubt be opportunities for the voluntary sector but initially probably for the larger organisations that are more able to take risks. It would be beneficial for smaller organisations to work in partnership to embark on some of the opportunities Big Society may bring, e.g. delivery of different services. There was some concern about loss of local control as things merged together. The idea of a Public Sector Board approach, where the leaders of councils, police, health, business and voluntary sector could come together across West Essex and manage all public services together was discussed. Delegates liked the idea of doing away with layers of bureaucracy and organisations having tighter management arrangements. This body could be the key vehicle for making savings and coordinating all the reductions that would need to be made more effectively. Importantly, delegates felt it could also stand up for the area and lobby for funds and support from county, regional and government bodies. The area could speak with a single voice where possible.

The Minister had talked about local communities being more directly involved in running/taking over public services like libraries, parks etc. Delegates were asked if there was scope or capacity for this at the moment. There seemed to be a few organisations that were contemplating this move but it was early days and people were still trying to sort out how it all might work. There was, however, very broad support for local groups working with a new West Essex partnership to take over running County Council services in this area, such as services for children. The workshop felt that all the managers who deliver these services already work closely with the partnership and if things were devolved with local control of budgets that a much more local service would emerge, more efficient at tackling problems that were local. Members felt that this is something that should be investigated.

Members spoke at length about the need to support community action, those groups that currently exist and ones that might be set up. There was general acknowledgment of the excellent work that VAEF do to support volunteering but a concern that not enough good links have been made with the business community around support for the voluntary sector. Some of the engagement difficulties with business are due to capacity issues. Business representatives on the workshop felt that there is definitely an opportunity to get more business involvement in the voluntary sector, whether through direct funding, having staff volunteer or just accessing expertise and advice in key areas. It was agreed that this was clearly a way forward and contact would be made outside the workshop to help this happen. Jobcentre Plus felt that they could support this work more actively.

Members felt that the whole area was too complex to cover adequately in detail in an hour long workshop and that the partnership should sponsor more work around the Big Society theme and allow local groups to have a very active contribution to this work and shape whatever proposals the partnership takes forward. Partners did, however, acknowledge that excellent work is already going on in our district and felt we weren't starting from a blank sheet and we had lots of capacity and experience that could provide a solid basis for the future.

Key actions for the future

The workshop agreed that the partnership should strive to develop the West Essex public service model more and continue to join up services but be mindful of the democratic deficit and losing too much local control.

Linking the voluntary and community sector together with local business was also deemed to be a top priority.

There was a consensus amongst the group that the LSP should set up a working group to look at the whole Big Society idea and its operation locally and respond to opportunities quickly.

Finally, there was agreement by the members of the workshop that more should be done to support real localism and tender for county services to be provided as locally as possible, but initially across West Essex with real involvement of local people in how they are designed and run.



Question Time Panel

The Panel

Keith Brown - Federation of Small Businesses
Cllr. Kevin Bentley – Essex County Council.
Cllr. Di Collins – One Epping Forest
Dr. Pam Hall – NHS West Essex
Ch. Superintendent Simon Williams – Essex Police
Jacqui Folie - Voluntary Action Epping Forest
Julie Chandler – Epping Forest District Council



The questions time session was opened by a question from Linda Riley who asked how voluntary groups should access funds as demands on services increase.

Panel members acknowledged that things were very difficult for groups at the minute but felt that there were simply no magic answers, but suggested some areas of support. CVS operates a volunteer service with a national database of volunteers. Opportunities to work more closely between local councils and voluntary groups, perhaps sharing back offices services was highlighted, and prioritising work with youth services. Sharing information and seminars on funding sources was suggested. Working more closely with the business community was also mentioned. Many businesses had social responsibility programmes and could help, not just with funding but with lending time, knowledge and expertise. We should be asking each other more for support in difficult times.

The panel was asked how churches could get “stuck in” more to help communities.

Panel members acknowledged the good work already being done by churches locally. Initiatives for the future could include Operation Teutonic, a project involving Street Pastors that has been used in Harlow to help identify vulnerable people who would not otherwise be seen. The police have seen some violent crime drop in Harlow Town Centre as a result. The Street Pastors are seen as a reassuring presence. They have been found to have a positive impact and police are looking at bringing this to Epping Forest. Churches can also help communities by providing work placements and employment opportunities; this is currently being looked at in West Essex.

Concerns were raised about the future viability of small businesses in places like Ongar and the impact on carbon footprint if people have to travel further to access services,

It was pointed out Epping Forest district has a number of small market towns and it is important that they survive for employment, trade, services, and impact on our carbon footprint. There have been a number of proposals for instance; encouraging people to trade locally and generally support their local towns. This needed to continue.

Panel members were invited to give their views on car parking charges, and future provision in the district.

The panel noted that car parking seems to be becoming more centralised and this has an impact on revenue. The district council was keen to help small towns but it's quite challenging. The council has sought to support business through management of car parks where charges have not been increased in a number of years, unlike some other councils, and the cost is less than in most areas. However, it might not be possible to keep prices frozen much longer as councils face an increase in enforcement costs. It was proposed that the council or others introduce a rebate on parking if people shop in local stores. This has been successful elsewhere. The panel also felt that at least a proportion of business rates should stay local.

One delegate was concerned, given the recent coverage of government's sales of woods and forests about the future of Epping Forest.

Panel members were unaware of any legislation or policy initiative that would affect the future of Epping Forest in this respect

The growth of large shopping centres and their impact on local high streets like Ongar was highlighted as an issue and the panel were asked how they could protect local business in the face of some of the biggest complexes in Europe opening locally.

The panel felt that there was little they could do to stop developments such as that in Stratford which already had planning permission but help could be given to make local business more robust and high streets more attractive to shoppers. No doubt Stratford will initially be a big draw. There must be a capitalisation on the strength of the independent shops in the district. Activities such as the Christmas lights events were packed and drew in shoppers. Partners should look at doing more events like these. There should be a conscious push showing what makes us different. The 2012 Olympics will have a knock on and promotional effect to business and areas of north London.

The final question to the panel asked them to consider, if they had a magic wand, what they would wish for to improve service or to make life better in the district.

Julie Chandler chose additional resources to provide early intervention services for work with children and young people. Jacqui Foile wanted more preventative services in the district, while Ch. Supt. Simon Williams wanted the downward trend in the number of victims of crime in the district to continue. Dr. Pam Hall chose health, and in particular, an increase in preventative measures which could stop this young generation from becoming less healthy than their parents were at the same age. Cllr. Di Collins would like government to look at the consequences of their decisions more, especially the impact of decisions on the elderly and young people. Keith Brown had two wishes, an upsurge in community spirit and a climate that supports local businesses.

Conference Delegates by workshop

Sustainable Communities and the Big Society

Christine	Baker	Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce
Tim	Brooks	Moat Housing Society
Keith	Brown	Federation of Small Businesses
Sarah	Creitzman	Epping Forest District Council
Haris	Dukerich	Epping Forest Youth Council
Norma	Green	Waltham Abbey Town Partnership
Anne	Grigg	Chairman of Council
Keith	Hughes	East of England IDB
Cathy	MacBride	Epping Forest District Council
Bob	Palmer	Epping Forest District Council
Kassandra	Polyzoides	Epping Forest District Council
Rachael	Price	Essex County Council
Franco	Pullara	Coronation Nursery
Cath	Shaw	Harlow Council
Penny	Smith	Chairman of SCP
Colin	Thompson	Moreton, Bobbington and Lavers Parish Council
Paul	Thomson	City of London
Stephen	Wilkinson	Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
David	Wixley	Loughton Town Council

Safer Communities and the Big Society

Jason	Amos	Moat Housing Society
David	Barrett	Epping Forest District Council
Richard	Berry	High Ongar Parish Council
Bill	Davies	Waltham Abbey NAP
David	Eyles	Epping Forest District Council
Alan	Jefcoate	Federation of Small Businesses
Claire	Lomax	Moat Housing Society
Bill	Miller	Epping Upland Parish Council
Chris	Pond	Essex County Councillor
Nick	Robinson	Loughton Youth Project
Richard	Searle	Essex County Council
Marina	Sherriff	Harlow 2020 LSP
Scarlett	Stock	Epping Forest Youth Council
Joyce	Sweeney	Essex County Council
Sue	Taylor	Loughton Festival
Gill	Wallis	Epping Forest District Council
Enid	Walsh	Loughton Town Council
Chris	Weatherburn	Epping Forest District Council
Yvette	Wetton	Essex County Council
Caroline	Wiggins	Epping Forest District Council
Simon	Williams	Essex Police

Healthier Communities and the Big Society

Simon	Banks	Essex County Council
Gill	Close	Government Pension Service
Joyce	Darby	Buckhurst Hill Parish Council
Pat	Farrington	Home Start Epping Forest
Pam	Hall	NHS West Essex
Chris	Holmes	Healthy Schools - West Essex
George	Howard	Theydon Bois Parish Council
Wendy	Jackson	Essex County Council
John	Lefever	Hastoe Housing Association
Valerie	Loftis	Epping Forest District Council
Ulrike	Maccariello	Hastoe Housing Association
Lynn	Marston	Maldon LSP
Jim	Nolan	Epping Forest District Council
Chris	Overend	Epping Forest District Council
Jackie	Scott	Extended Schools (South of District)
Morag	Strycharczyk	NHS West Essex
Philip	Swanton	One Epping Forest
Lonica	Vanclay	Essex County Council
James	Warwick	Epping Forest District Council

Children's Services and the Big Society

Annie	Armitage	Epping Forest Youth Council
Diane	Butler	Epping Forest District Council
Julie	Chandler	Epping Forest District Council
Felicity	Hall	Epping Forest Arts
Julie	Harper	High Beech School
Duncan	Haslam	Epping Forest Youth Council
Anneke	Kempton	Epping Forest Field Centre
Geoff	Mangan	14 - 19 Area Planning Group
Gill	Mann	VAEF Trustee and Homestart
Daisy	Morecroft	Epping Forest Youth Council
Simon	Morris	Essex County Council (MAAG)
Jekin	Patel	Epping Forest Youth Council
Prue	Reynolds	EMTAS
Helen	Russell-Grant	ECC - Early Years Childcare
Martin	Scarth	Loughton Youth Project
Gerry	Smith	Loughton Youth Project
Barbara	Stock	Epping Forest College
Paul	Vincent	Theydon Bois Parish Council
Gill	Wallis	Epping Forest District Council
Annie	Wood	Theydon Bois Parish Council

The Big Society and joining up public services

Tony	Barritt	Business Link
Barbara	Copson	Epping Forest District Council
Tina	Dulieu	Coaching Dynamics and FSB
Jacqui	Foile	Voluntary Action Epping Forest
Jill	Holland	West Essex Children's Trust
John	Houston	One Epping Forest
Sukhbreet	Kaur	Citizen's Advice Bureau
Malcom	Macdonald	St Marys Church Loughton
Derek	Macnab	Epping Forest District Council
Michael	Murray	Jobcentre Plus
Pauline	Nischal	Jobcentre Plus
Deborah	Ollett	Age UK
Andy	Pepper	Government Pension Service
Jo	Petchey	Braintree LSP
Kathryn	Richmond	Waltham Abbey Town Council
Linda	Riley	Voluntary Sector Training
Mark	Squire	Ongar Town Council
Brian	Surtees	Ongar Town Council
Janet	Whitehouse	Epping Forest District Council