

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL HELD
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2008 AT
7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor K Darby (Chairman).
Councillors Mrs D M Hone

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor P R Ballam

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Barfoot	- Environmental Health Promotion Officer
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Mark Kingsland	- Health and Fitness Development Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Ian Sharratt	- Environmental Manager
Tracy Strange	- Head of Health and Housing
Paul Thomas	- Environmental Health Manager - Commercial

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors M Wood
and Mrs B Wrangles.

ACTIONRESOLVED ITEMS2 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2008 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3 FEEDBACK FROM CHAIRMAN – HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – (17 JUNE 2008)

The Chairman reported that a letter had been sent from Hertfordshire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee questioning the need for two GP Centres, but a reply had been received assuring the Committee of the need for these.

In addition, all Districts represented on the Committee now had voting rights.

A document on development of the QEII hospital was available from the Chairman upon request.

RESOLVED – that the Chairman's comments be noted.

4 PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THROUGH PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Chairman of the Health Engagement Panel submitted a report to give Members the opportunity to gain evidence on promoting physical activity through planning, transport and the physical environment which could be used in considering the Public Health Strategy.

The NHS National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) had published a public health document on "Promoting and creating built or natural environments

ACTION

that encourage and support public health”.

East Herts Council had responsibility for local planning policy, development control and some open spaces. It worked in partnership with the County Council which had responsibility for roads, pavements, paths and cycleways. The Council had a corporate priority that placed an emphasis on the prevention of ill-health and the targeting of services and resources for those in greatest need.

The East Herts Public Health Strategy would provide a five year framework for action from 2008-2013 for the prevention of ill-health, protection of positive health and well-being. The Strategy would be based on a partnership approach to delivering health based projects and initiatives.

It was reported that physical activity could contribute to wellbeing and good health including mental health. Recommended activity levels were given with some facts and figures on the decline in walking and cycling. The Chairman commented on a newly published statistic from the 2007 National Travel Survey which indicated 24% of people said they took a walk of '20 minutes or more' less than once a year or never. The environment needed to encourage people to change their behaviour in order to take a healthy amount of exercise as they go about their daily lives.

The Panel sought to review how physical activity was already being promoted and supported by East Herts through planning, transport and the physical environment. It explored opportunities and ideas for future promotion and support. Members asked a number of questions of Officers including the following:

Do local planners and others involved with built and natural environments understand the relationship between these environments and physical activity levels?

The Head of Planning and Building Control explained that policies which implicitly encouraged physical activity

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through the natural and built environment were included in the Local Plan and these were used by local planners in their work. Encouraging physical activity through the natural and built environment needed to be achieved through existing resources.

How are local policies, strategies and plans developed?

The Local Development Framework (LDF) was being prepared to replace the Local Plan. Following consultations eight themes were being proposed including themes to deal with recreation, leisure and travelling by foot or bicycle.

A wide range of local residents and partners were being involved in the development of the LDF.

Were the needs of people with impaired mobility considered when dealing with planning applications e.g. sheltered accommodation?

In some cases policies relating to access for the disabled could be applied.

How do local planners assess the potential effect of their decisions on the health of the population?

There was an implicit assessment of this before presenting proposals for approval. All information on planning applications was publicly available but this did not include an explicit assessment of the effect on health.

Does the local transport plan prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and users of other modes of transport that involve physical activity and how could District Councillors and Officers influence this area of County Council responsibility?

The District Council would be a consultee when the local transport plan was revised. The Panel would be able to scrutinise the plan in order to ensure this was prioritised.

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What provision has been made for walking, cycling and using other modes of transport involving physical activity?

The District did not have a comprehensive system of bridleways and footpaths but there were many such paths in the area and a number of informal circuits which were publicised.

Walking and cycling routes had been provided in the redevelopment of Herts and Essex Hospital and Hertford Regional College.

A new bridge across the River Stort had been provided encouraging people to walk to the railway station in Bishop's Stortford.

The standard of routes was considered appropriate to the nature of the District e.g. a group of volunteers might be recruited to maintain a footpath in a local park. Other routes might be formally adopted for maintenance by the County Council.

How are public open spaces developed and maintained?

Funding could be obtained from developers in certain cases.

The Council had adopted a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. This included an annual audit of public open spaces. The condition of the open spaces was monitored and a work programme was drawn up. The local community was fully involved and the Council had received a Green Flag Award for one open space.

Could play equipment be provided for older residents as recently publicised in the national newspapers?

ACTION

Officers had concentrated on providing equipment for teenagers as this was a group which created most problems of anti-social behaviour.

Older residents were being encouraged to swim, attend exercise classes and visit the gym.

The recently successful "Walk in the Park" event had involved a large number of residents including some older people.

Leaflets were provided on public path walks which could be suitable for elderly residents.

What was East Herts doing as an employer to encourage staff to be more physically active (including during the working day)?

Bike parks and storage were provided for staff.

There were showers if staff wanted to exercise on the way to work or in the lunch break. There were discounts for staff at local gyms. Twenty members of staff had completed a course on healthy eating and exercise.

Yoga and Pilates classes were offered to staff. Regular checks of weight and blood pressure were also offered.

Free parking was offered at Grange Paddocks which encouraged staff to walk to the Offices in Bishop's Stortford.

How were partners being involved in these issues and what was being done to combine work on them?

The Council worked with partners such as the PCT. GPs were encouraged to refer people for swimming and exercise at Council facilities where this would be therapeutic.

ACTION

Town Councils had helped with provision of Trim Trails in local parks.

Countryside Management Services helped with informal walks.

The Walk in the Park event had promoted the park as a place to walk and enjoy the outdoors with a health walk and guided walk as well as an older children's play area. This event had combined physical activity and outdoor spaces through internal and external partnership working and set a good foundation for future health walks and 'green gym' opportunities through developing a Friends of Southern Country Park Group.

Could Officers suggest ways of filling gaps in provision?

The work on obtaining a further Green Flag award would help.

A wider variety of media could be used to attract people to events and promote East Herts walking and cycling networks e.g. local radio. Teenage girls were given as an example of a recognised group that tend to lose interest in activity and more wider interests needed to be catered for to sustain uptake.

Officers could remain alert for opportunities to close gaps in the network of public paths when considering planning applications.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their help on this review and the Panel decided to use the knowledge gained when scrutinising the Public Health Strategy.

RESOLVED - that the knowledge gained by the review exercise be used to inform the scrutiny process and policy development of East Herts Public Health strategy when it was presented to the next Panel meeting.

DNS

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6 WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Chief Executive submitted a report inviting the Committee to review its work programme.

The Chairman highlighted the proposal to invite the Transport Project Manager for East and North Hertfordshire PCT to the next meeting.

The Panel decided to approve the work programme.

RESOLVED - that the work programme for 2008/09 as attached in Appendix A7 to the report before the Committee, be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.50 p.m.

Chairman
Date