

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE WAYTEMORE ROOM,
BISHOP'S STORTFORD ON TUESDAY,
22 JULY 2008 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Woodward (Chairman).
Councillors P R Ballam, K Darby, A F Dearman,
A D Dodd, P Grethe, Mrs D M Hone, J J Taylor
and M Wood.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors L O Haysey, R L Parker, N C Poulton
and P A Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Housing Strategy and Policy Manager
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
Mekhola Ray	- Community Projects Team Leader
Sally Smallwood	- Housing Development Officer
Tracy Strange	- Head of Health and Housing
Sheila Winterburn	- Environmental Health Manager - Residential

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Debbie Fear	}	WRVS
Gillian Phasey		
Natalie Watts		

Chris Ellison	}	South Anglia Housing Association
Michelle Lock		
Tracy Mountford		
Steve Henning		- Riversmead Housing Association

167 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors N P Clark and A M Graham. It was noted that Councillor M Wood was substituting for Councillor A M Graham.

168 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed representatives from the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS), Circle Anglia and Riversmead Housing Associations.

The Chairman invited the Executive Member for Community Development, Leisure and Culture to comment on the issue of post office closures.

The Executive Member for Community Development, Leisure and Culture gave an assurance, based on advice from the Scrutiny Officer, that the Leader and the Executive would be happy to receive questions of concern in respect of planned post office closures in East Herts.

Members of the Committee made particular reference to the post office at Havers Parade in Bishop's Stortford. The Committee was advised that the consultation deadline was 26 August 2008 and all responses would have to be submitted to the Post Office and/or the County Council.

The Executive Member commented that the success rate of fending off closures via community involvement was low. She emphasised the importance of submitting strong

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positive arguments with very specific reasons why post offices should remain open when responding to the consultation.

169 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors J J Taylor and M Wood declared personal interests in the matter referred to at Minute 172 – Review of the Community Meals Service, by virtue of their roles within the Age Concern organisation.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION170 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor K Darby and seconded by Councillor P R Ballam that Councillor Mrs D M Hone be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee for the Civic Year.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Mrs D M Hone be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee for the Civic Year.

171 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendment of Minute 651 as follows:

Delete at start of third sentence 6th paragraph – ‘.....Woodard’ and replace with – ‘Woodward’.

172 REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY MEALS SERVICE

The Head of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report reviewing the first two years delivery of the three year community meals contract. He introduced and welcomed representatives of the Women’s Royal Voluntary

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Service (WRVS) to the meeting and invited them to submit a presentation on the service.

Councillor A D Dodd queried whether the revised service had been well received. He also asked how the service had been taken up around the District by town and parish. The Head of Community and Cultural Services commented that this information would be sent to Members.

Natalie Watts, territory manager for the former WRVS, gave a presentation relating to the operation of the community meals service. She referred to the background of the WRVS in East Herts and gave a detailed breakdown of the current service in the District.

Natalie Watts highlighted feedback from service users and commented on the value for money and choice of the service. She stated that WRVS actively signposted other essential services to service users where appropriate. Members were invited to visit the operations of the service.

The Committee was referred to a number of letters of thanks from service users and their carers and family. Natalie Watts detailed how the WRVS hoped to develop the meals on wheels service.

Councillor M Wood expressed concerns that the current unity of the service had been achieved at the expense of food quality. He emphasised this was not a criticism of the WRVS or the delivery staff but he highlighted a number of deficiencies that had been reported in Bishop's Stortford in respect of products supplied to WRVS.

Councillor J J Taylor commented that credit was due to WRVS for reducing the fragmented nature of the service. She expressed concerns in respect of the limited choice open to service users in Ware, particularly around Christmas & New Year time. Councillor Taylor referred to the previous high standards set by the previous supplier in Ware and that WRVS had a lot to live up to.

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Natalie Watts commented that the WRVS had explored a number of ways to rectify identified deficiencies in the service. She confirmed that feedback was analysed by area to identify whether reported problems were highly localised. She stated that East Herts Council was welcome to test the meals on any day without giving prior warning to WRVS. The Committee was reminded of the difficulties posed by the previous fragmented nature of the service.

In response to a query from Councillor A D Dodd on inconsistent delivery times, Gillian Phasey commented that all dinners were delivered prior to 2:30 pm and within a pre determined delivery window of one and a half hours.

Councillor Mrs D M Hone expressed concern in respect of feedback from the 29% of respondents who indicated their dietary or cultural requirements were not being met. Natalie Watts assured Members that all feedback would be followed up.

The Executive Member for Housing and Health also referred to the previous fragmented nature of the community meals service. He praised WRVS for providing a good service to residents in East Herts.

The Chairman commented that the issue of the preferred option for the future provision of the community meals service would be added to the Committee's future work programme.

RESOLVED – that the report and presentation from the WRVS be received.

173 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR RIVERSMEAD AND SOUTH ANGLIA HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

The Head of Housing and Health submitted a report updating the Committee on the progress made by the two housing associations on remaining undertakings following the completion of the promises programme in 2007.

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The Committee was referred to page 7.3 of the report now submitted for a breakdown of the performance of Riversmead and South Anglia Housing Associations.

Steve Henning, Chief Executive of Riversmead Housing Association, gave a presentation detailing the performance of the housing association as a landlord for tenants in East Herts. He highlighted a number of performance indicators in respect of repair times, rent income, customer service, complaints and investment.

The Committee was provided with the details of consultation and engagement undertaken by Riversmead. Steve Henning detailed outcomes of the consultation and commented that the housing association planned to introduce 500 new homes within existing management costs.

Steve Henning concluded by referring to measures being taken by Riversmead to be a sustainable organisation. He gave a detailed breakdown of the future plans of the housing association.

In respect of a query from Councillor A D Dodd on rising fuel costs, Steve Henning emphasised his concerns on this point and reported that Riversmead was investigating the options for funding supplementary insulation.

Chris Ellison, Managing Director of South Anglia Housing Association, gave a presentation on the performance of the housing association in East Herts. He submitted background information to the Circle Anglia Housing Group. The Committee was provided with assurances on the levels of scrutiny employed within the housing association.

Chris Ellison detailed the current stock figures for East Herts and gave a breakdown of headline performance targets for 2007/08. He referred to the situation in respect of planned and reactive works that had been undertaken in

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East Herts. He highlighted funds that had been spent on aids and adaptations to East Herts housing stock.

The Committee was advised of new developments under construction and was referred to the challenges posed by a customer led programme of planned improvements for East Herts tenants.

Councillor M Wood praised both housing associations for investment and improvements to aids and adaptations for housing stock in East Herts. In response to a query from the Chairman, the Head of Housing and Health updated the Committee on performance against a number of delivered projects in 2007/08.

The Executive Member for Housing and Health complimented the housing associations' performance in respect of choice based lettings and on reducing the number of days that properties remained vacant.

RESOLVED – that (A) performance on the housing association three remaining stock transfer undertakings be noted; and

(B) performance by Riversmead and South Anglia Housing Associations for the year 2007/08 be noted.

174 HOUSING STRATEGY 2008 - 2011

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager submitted a report to introduce the 2008 - 2011 Housing Strategy, action plan and affordable homes commissioning brief. She advised that the strategy would be subject to a review after 2 years, in addition to annual reports to the Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Housing Development Officer submitted a revised version of the appendix relating to the new affordable homes commissioning brief at page 8.62 of the agenda papers. In response to a query from the Chairman in

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respect of the completed proportion of the District wide target of 12,000 new homes, Officers undertook to supply the current figure outside of the meeting.

The Chairman commented on the close working relationship between Officers and Parish Council Members. He sought and was given an assurance that the working relationship with Town Councils would be looked into.

In respect of the examination in public of pitch provision for Gypsies and Travellers, the Committee was assured that Officers would be present.

Councillor M Wood referred to the target of bringing 12 empty homes back into use each year and expressed concern about a particular property in Bishop's Stortford. The Executive Member for Housing and Health commented that the Authority was meeting its targets in respect of empty homes. The Head of Housing and Health undertook to review the status of this particular building.

The Chairman referred to houses in multiple occupancy (HMOs) being of particular concern to East Herts Council. The Head of Health and Housing stated that the issue of HMOs was considered on a regular basis, with a particular emphasis on high risk HMOs.

In response to a request from Councillor M Wood, Officers undertook to provide information on the backlog of visits to HMOs.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Executive be recommended to adopt the East Herts Housing Strategy 2008 -11, and the accompanying action plan and New Affordable Home Commissioning Brief (as amended); and

(B) an annual report to monitor progress of the action plan, be submitted to Community Scrutiny Committee.

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The Head of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report updating the Committee on progress with the tendering of the Council's leisure facilities and also to commend the procurement process applied to the three tendered lots.

The Committee was advised that the contracts were for a 10 year period and would be awarded to the bidder who secured the highest points score for the tendered lots. The Chairman invited the Head of Community and Cultural Services to address a number of points raised by Councillor N P Clark in a detailed e-mail to Committee Members.

The Head of Community and Cultural Services stated that for Lots 1 and 2, two tenders had been returned from the 6 companies invited to submit bids. He advised that the four remaining companies withdrew from the process due to business commitments across the country.

The Committee was advised that of the 6 invitees for Lot 3, four had not managed an arts venue such as Castle Hall before, and were not invited to proceed to tender. Of the remaining two expressions of interest, one tender was returned and a second was submitted after the deadline so was not accepted. The one tender for Castle Hall was deemed unsuitable and the company was not invited to proceed to the second stage of negotiation. Members were assured of the robust nature of what had been a closely managed process.

The Head of Community and Cultural Services reported that a financial appraisal of the bidders had been carried out by an external company. He stated that negotiations were ongoing with Hertfordshire County Council and the schools in respect of contract liabilities for the shared-use premises. The Committee was advised that the

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recommendations of the procurement team would be referred to the Executive for a final decision.

In response to a query from Councillor M Wood, the Committee was advised that the contract would be awarded on the basis of current rates and concessions. Members were also advised the new contractor would be encouraged to submit best possible rates and any changes would be submitted to Community Scrutiny Committee and the Executive.

In response to a query from the Chairman, the Executive Member for Community Development, Leisure and Cultural stated that any proposed changes to programmes and staff discounts would be brought to Community Scrutiny Committee for consideration before being agreed with the contractor.

In respect of a query from Councillor Wood, the Head of Community and Cultural Services reported that there were no plans to attach a break clause to the new contract. He advised however, that the contract would be subject to annual review and performance monitoring.

The Chairman sought the Committee's views on whether the wording of the recommendation should be amended to delete the use of the word 'commended' and replaced with the word 'endorsed'. The Committee supported this amendment to the recommendation.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Executive be advised that the process deployed in seeking new contractual arrangements for the Council's leisure services, as outlined in the report, be endorsed; and

(B) on the basis of the process endorsed at recommendation (A), it be noted that the procurement team will be recommending to the Executive:

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- (i) a contract is awarded for Lots 1 and 2 (the five swimming pool based leisure facilities); and
- (ii) no contract is awarded for Lot 3, the Council's arts, entertainment and community venue, and that consequently, management of the facility is retained in house.

176 EAST HERTS DISTRICT CHILDREN'S TRUST PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN 2008/09

The Head of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report presenting the 2008/09 Children's Trust Partnership action plan for endorsement by the Committee.

The Chairman commented on the importance of the Authority giving support and guidance to Youth Councils, Community Forums and Parish Councils. He also expressed his satisfaction that the issue of smoking amongst young people had been included as an area of concern.

RESOLVED - that the East Herts District Children's Trust Partnership action plan for 2008/09, as attached at Appendix 'A10' of the report now submitted, be endorsed.

177 2008/09 ACTION PLAN FOR THE EAST HERTS LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (LSP) AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY BY APRIL 2009

The Head of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report presenting the East Herts Local Strategic Partnership (LSP's) action plan for 2008/09 and to report to the Committee on the development of a new sustainable community strategy from April 2009.

RESOLVED - that the LSP's action plan for 2008/09

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be endorsed and the process for developing a sustainable community strategy for April 2009 be noted.

178 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL: 12 MAY 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Health Engagement Panel meeting held on 12 May 2008 be received.

179 RESPONSES TO NHS AND PCT CONSULTATIONS

Councillor K Darby updated the Committee in respect of the responses in relation to recent consultations on GP-led health centres and on hospital Foundation status. She circulated letters which had been sent on behalf of East Herts Council. She also made available copies of the letter on the GP led health centre issue, which had been sent to the Secretary of State for Health from the Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor A D Dodd expressed concern that no consultation had been carried out in respect of out of County Hospitals such as the Princess Alexandra in Harlow.

Councillor Kim Darby also reported that the county Health Scrutiny Committee had altered their constitution to allow all 10 district council representatives to have voting rights. This has now been approved by full HCC council.

RESOLVED – that the responses sent to the PCT and NHS Trust on behalf of East Herts Council in relation to their respective consultation exercises, be noted.

180 WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Chief Executive submitted a report outlining the current work programme as a basis for planning future

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scrutiny work.

The Committee agreed to add to the work programme a report from the Castle Hall Way Forward Group, to be received at the earliest opportunity. The Committee also requested that an item be added for 27 January 2009, in respect of the preferred options for the future delivery of the community meals service.

Members requested that an item be added for 27 October 2009, in relation to the East Herts Housing Strategy 2008/11 and also in respect of the Annual Monitoring of the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

Members supported the work programme as amended as a basis for planning future scrutiny work of the Committee.

RESOLVED – that the report be used as a basis for reviewing the current work programme and planning the future work of Community Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 10.20 pm.

Chairman
Date

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