

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, PEGS LANE,
HERTFORD, ON TUESDAY, 27
OCTOBER 2009 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Woodward (Chairman).
Councillors P Ballam, N Clark, A D Dodd,
P Grethe, G McAndrew (substitute for K Darby),
D M Hone, J O Ranger (substitute for G
Lawrence), V Shaw, J J Taylor.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors D Andrews, R Beeching, S A Bull,
N C Poulton, P A Ruffles and M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Housing Strategy and Policy Manager
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Dave Cooper	- Performance Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Marianne McWhinnie	- Community Projects Officer (Equalities)
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Tracy Strange	- Head of Health and Housing
Sheila Winterburn	- Environmental Health Manager - Residential

336 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors G Lawrence and K Darby. It was noted that Councillors G McAndrew and J O Ranger were substituting for Councillors K Darby and G Lawrence respectively.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION337 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2009, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

338 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL – 20 OCTOBER 2009

The Chairman welcomed the minutes and expressed his concern that only three Members had attended the Panel meeting.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Health Engagement Panel meeting held on 20 October be received.

339 EAST HERTS HOUSING STRATEGY 2009 -2011: ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Executive Member for Housing and Health submitted a report on the first year's successful performance of the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008-2011. The report sought Members' comments in relation to a proposed additional target (Ensure that Housing Policies and Practices Promote Equalities and Diversity) to accord with advice following a Gypsy and Traveller technical study and a new action (Reduce levels of fuel poverty, particularly for vulnerable groups) following a successful joint bid of £6.6 Million with the London Commuter Belt (LCB) to the East of England Regional Assembly for energy efficiency

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measures in homes.

Councillor J O Ranger noted that it had been a successful year, but that there had been some disappointments. He expressed concern that the Council had only achieved 20% affordable homes against a target of 40%. He commented that two-thirds of properties built had been apartments/flats and that a higher number of affordable homes could have been negotiated with the developers. He commented that the Council's previous target was 30% and that the Council had achieved 25% on occasion. He commented that achieving 20% needed to be highlighted for attention. The Head of Health and Housing undertook to investigate the fall to 20% affordable housing from the targets set and write to the Member.

In response to a query from Councillor G McAndrew on whether the target was fixed or rolling, the Head of Health and Housing confirmed that it was a five year target. She commented that the figure of 200 properties was aspirational and that so far this year, only 52 properties had been built. She commented that targets set needed to be challenging. The Head of Health and Housing confirmed that affordable homes built by Registered Social Landlords were built to a higher specification than private build. Councillor G McAndrew commented that targets should be realistic.

Councillor J O Ranger commented that the Local Development Framework would impose a 40% target for affordable homes and this was to be welcomed. Councillor J J Taylor suggested that this target should also be applied to sheltered housing. It was suggested that there should be greater co-ordination with Planning Officers on this issue of targets for affordable homes.

The Head of Health and Housing commented that information was awaited from the Strategic Housing Assessment.

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Councillor J O Ranger commented that given the fact that the South East was one of the driest areas, in relation to theme number 19, the word “water” be incorporated after the word “energy”. Members supported this approach.

RESOLVED - that (A) the successful progress of the the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008 – 2011 be noted; and

(B) the additional target and proposed new action be supported and the comments of Community Scrutiny Committee be noted.

DNS

340 BETTER WAYS OF WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the development of an action plan to improve working arrangements with Parish and Town Councils. Following the Rural Parish Conference in May 2009, Parish Clerks and Parish Councillors made a number of suggestions on how to improve liaison with the District Council, particularly in relation to the quality of communication and planning matters.

The Director of Customer and Community Services commented that an action plan had been produced with an emphasis on training for Parish Clerks and Councillors, understanding how the organisation works and how to best access services. He commented that training around planning matters had been undertaken and more was planned. At the moment, Parish Councils might make an objection to a planning application and when this did not result in a change, Parish Councils were unhappy with the process.

Councillor N Clark expressed his disappointment with the report. He commented that there had been no consultation on the content of the report. He further commented that Parish Clerks and Councillors were the front line and that many issues could be resolved by using that front line

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service. Councillor N Clark suggested that all District Councillors should be attending their Parish Council meetings.

Councillor N C Poulton commented that Parish meetings were the main link and that there was no need for a Parish Liaison Officer. He commented that, as a District Councillor, it was his understanding that he would act as a conduit between the Parish, District and County Councils. Councillor J O Ranger also commented on the difficulty in attending Parish Councils when a Member's area covered more than one Parish and of dates which conflicted with other Parish Meetings. He commented that he did not like the phrase used in the report that Parish Clerks should be "treated like any other customer". He suggested that they should receive a little more help and assistance.

The Director of Customer and Community Services apologised for the insensitivity of the wording. Councillor V Shaw commented that to treat them as ordinary people was not fair.

Councillor G McAndrew suggested that Parish Clerks should be given additional help and not grouped together as a member of the public.

Councillor N C Poulton commented that a major problem was in relation to planning issues and improving communication. He believed that Parish Councils were unhappy when their objections to planning applications were interpreted as being ignored. He commented that many Parish Clerks were retired ladies and gentlemen, undertaking the role on a voluntary basis.

Councillor P R Ballam commented that many of the Clerks were on minimum pay.

Councillor R Beeching commented that small parishes did not have planning meetings and passed plans around in an envelope which would then be sent back to the Parish Clerk. He further commented that Parish Councils may

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make emotive decisions rather than those based on planning issues. He suggested further training to help Parish Clerks on this matter. The Director agreed that training was possibly the best way that such matters could be resolved in the longer term and reminded Members that some had already taken place and that more was planned.

The Director of Customer and Community Services commented that regular sessions were held with Town Clerks. He further commented on the role of rural parish councils and building links with Parish Clerks and of the efforts made to manage the business as economically as possible.

Members agreed that the Director of Customer and Community Services be requested to report back on the support given to Parish Clerks to the next meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee on 26 January 2010.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report and Action Plan be noted; and

(B) the Director of Customer and Community Services be requested to report back on the support to Parish Councils and Clerks.

DCCS

341 UPDATE AND REVIEW OF THE COMPREHENSIVE CORPORATE EQUALITY ACTION PLAN 2008 - 2011

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report updating Members on the progress made in meeting the Council's statutory obligations in relation to equalities and of the progress made on the three year Action Plan. It was noted that a series of impact assessments had been carried out which had highlighted three key areas for further consideration before equalities could be fully mainstreamed, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted. The Director of Customer and Community Services commented that he was pleased with the progress but that further work was need to ensure that the processes adopted reflected throughout customer

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service provision. It was proposed that a further report updating Members would be submitted in six months.

In response to a query concerning the Council's status, the Community Projects Officer explained that the Council had self assessed at Level 2. The Director explained that the Council would work to achieve the new strand and intended to achieve the old Level 3.

Members commented on the importance of the location of venues and accessibility. In response to a query from Councillor J O Ranger, concerning the profiling of the workforce and how this would be undertaken, the Director of Customer and Community Services undertook to ensure a written response was provided.

RESOLVED – that (A) Members' comments on the progress and Action Plan be received;

(B) Officers introduce a standard Council-wide equalities monitoring form/process; the creation of an equalities evidential database; and an improved strategy of consultation with hard to reach groups; and

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(C) a further report be submitted to Community Scrutiny Committee on 7 April 2010 showing how the work already undertaken would be translated into improved outcomes for service users.

DCCS

342 REVIEW OF MARKETS IN EAST HERTS – INITIAL REPORT AND SCOPE

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group submitted a report detailing the first stages of the review in the light of the economic environment. A scoping document for further consideration was attached to the report now submitted as Essential Reference Paper 'B'.

Councillor C Woodward suggested that the Town Centre Manager for Bishop's Stortford be included as a witness

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and also someone from the Town Centre Management Partnership. Members supported this suggestion.

Councillor J O Ranger commented that the scoping document should be amended to reflect Farmers' Markets and the legality aspect in terms of appearing on the same day as the ordinary market. Members supported this suggestion.

RESOLVED – that (A) the scoping document for a Review of Markets in East Herts as amended, be approved; and

(B) the Task and Finish Group be asked to report back to Community Scrutiny Committee on 27 April 2010.

DCCS

343 2009/10 SERVICE PLANS – SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND EXCEPTIONS REPORT

The Leader of the Council submitted an exception report of 2009/10 Service Plan Actions relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee which have been achieved and those requiring a revised completion date.

Councillor N Clark commented on the subsidised bus route and the need to recognise the work of Sawbridgeworth and Bishop's Stortford Town Councils in working together.

RESOLVED – that (A) the 2009/10 Service Plan actions be received and Members' comments, as now detailed be forwarded to the Executive; and

(B) the revised completion dates be noted.

344 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK JUNE – AUGUST 2009

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted an exception report on the performance of the

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key indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee. An update of the graphs was tabled which corrected the scale of those contained in Essential Reference Paper 'B', attached to the report now submitted.

Councillor J O Ranger commented that in relation to Performance Indicator NI181, the action shown as "none" was incorrect, as a great deal of work had been taken by Housing and Benefits to clear a backlog of work.

In response to a query from Councillor N Clark regarding EHPI2 and the fall from £11.44 to £3.89 between quarters on the net cost/subsidy per visit, the Head of Community and Cultural Services explained how the attendance recording processes now worked. Councillor N Clark commented on the need to have relevant data by pool and gym user so that accurate information could be obtained on how the leisure facilities were performing. The Director of Customer and Community Services commented that as the facilities were now being managed under a 10 year contract, Members' focus could now be on quality of service.

Councillor V Shaw commented that in relation to EHP1213 (Prevention Homelessness) no targets had been provided and this should be addressed. The Head of Health and Housing undertook to write to the Member.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

345 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

The Chairman invited Members to review the work programme of Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that there would be a joint meeting of Committees on 1 December 2009 to consider Service Options for all three scrutiny committees.

Members noted that the Council had been invited to give evidence to the Youth Connexions Topic Group on 14

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December 2009. Members commented on the tight timeframe and supported a proposal to forward any comments to the Scrutiny Officer for onward transmission to the Executive Member.

Members noted that the Council had been invited to give evidence to the 'role and effectiveness of PSCOs' Topic Group in spring 2010. Members supported the suggestion that Executive member with responsibility for Community Safety and Protection be invited to the next meeting of Community Scrutiny to discuss the topic, hear the views of scrutiny members and outline the evidence he plans to give to HCC Topic Group.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the Task and Finish Group's Review of Markets would be programmed for 27 April 2010.

RESOLVED – that the Work Programme, as amended, be approved.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

Chairman
Date