

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 JANUARY 2010

REPORT BY VALDIS BELINIS

9. UPDATE ON BETTER WAYS OF WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To provide an update on developments which have taken place regarding the development of measures to improve working relations with parish and town councils since the matter was last considered by the committee in October 2009.

RECOMMENDATION FOR : Community Scrutiny Committee	
(A)	Consider and comment on the report.
(B)	Identify any further actions that could be taken to strengthen our working relations with parish and town councils.

1.0 Background

1.1 At the October meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee members made several comments regarding a possible action plan put forward by officers and asked for details of the support being offered parishes be made available at the following meeting.

2.0 Report

2.1 Following a reconsideration of the initial action plan put before members, officers reconsidered how the positive offer being made to parishes might be made more explicit and brought to the attention of parish clerks in a more helpful way. To this end a letter, Essential Reference Paper "B" (pages 9.4 – 9.7) was sent on 26 November 2009 to all parish and town clerks providing information on the services offered or provided by the district

council and how to best access those services. Other information and sources of information were also provided where officers felt this might be helpful.

- 2.2 The letter included a registration of interest form and an invitation to attend parish and town council planning information sessions and the Customer Service Briefing in 2010, Essential Reference Paper “C” pages 9.8 to 9.9). Parish clerks were asked to complete and return their registration of interest forms by 22 January.
- 2.3 While it is acknowledged that the district council may not be able to satisfy all the wishes expressed at the parish conference, officers believe that the correspondence demonstrates the council’s efforts to ensure parish councils have the support and capacity to get the best from their working with East Herts Council.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 There will be an opportunity for more detailed discussions with parish and town councils in 2010 at the Customer Services briefing and the rural parish conference.
- 3.2 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within Essential Reference Paper ‘A’ (Page 9.3).

Background Papers

None

Contact Member: Cllr Linda Haysey,
Portfolio: Community Development, Leisure and Culture

Contact Officer: Valdis Belinis – Contact Tel 01992 531605

Report Author: Valdis Belinis, Community Planning & Partnerships Manager

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives</p>	<p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Pride in East Herts <i>Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p>Shaping now, shaping the future <i>Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>Consultation took place at the East Herts Rural Parish Conference 27th May 2009</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>Provision of equipment and training to tackle digital exclusion to be decided.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>None.</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>None.</p>

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'B'

26th November 2010

Dear _____

We were delighted to see so many of you and your colleagues at the rural parish conference we organised in May this year. The feedback we received was that most attendees found it useful to share information, learn about things that are happening in the district and the opportunity it provided to network.

One of the sessions was a workshop where East Herts asked parish colleagues how we might do better. This produced an open debate about what was going well and thoughts around how arrangements might be improved. Most of the concerns related to improving communications and making access clearer. In response we have compiled this short briefing. It tells you about how our services can best be accessed, training opportunities we are providing and service improvements we have planned. We hope you find this helpful and that the information and advice will make your life easier and improve your experience when contacting or working with us.

1. Customer Services

The first point of contact for any query about a service provided by East Herts Council is Customer Services. You can contact us by telephone, (tel. 01279 655261) or email enquiries@eastherts.gov.uk. Email is the main communication system we use in house and our preferred means.

Some of our services are also available through our website at www.eastherts.gov.uk. We will be making more services available this way as we roll out our Customer Care Strategy.

You may also find it helpful to print the following documents which explain how the council's service delivery is organised and the safeguards we have put in place for all our customers:

- a. List of services and the departments which provide these services
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=6314>
- b. Customer Care Strategy
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/customercarestrategy>
- c. Service Standards/Targets
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/customercarestandards>
- d. Comments, compliments and complaints procedure
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/3coms>

If you do not have an internet connection and would like copies of these or any other documents we refer to, please advise us when you return the enclosed registration form.

2. District Councillors

The council prides itself on a high standard of service for all its residents. However, if for any reason you feel we are not delivering on our promise in any

way you are encouraged to contact your local district councillor.

A list of district councillors can be found at
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=1399>

3. Access to the Internet and Council Webpages

We know that not all parish clerks have access to the internet and council webpages. It is possible that some of the council's older computers may become available in the New Year under the personal computer renewal programme. If you would like to register an interest for one of our older (but still serviceable) machines please complete the attached registration form and email it to valdis.belinis@eastherts.gov.uk or return it in the enclosed pre-paid envelope to the East Herts Council, Community and Cultural Services, Wallfields, Peg's Lane, Hertford SG13 8EQ. .

We also invite you to register an interest if you would like to receive training on how to use a computer or how to access the internet.

4. Annual Customer Service Briefing Spring 2010

From spring 2010, parish clerks and councillors will be invited to the annual customer services briefing which is currently offered to district members. The briefing is an "open door" to come and have a look at what services are on offer and how to best access them. Staff will be on hand to offer tips on how to get the best out of customer services.

Numbers will be limited to two representatives from each parish council – possibly the parish clerk and chairman. If the clerk or chairman is unavailable you may nominate up to two other representatives to attend in their place. Please complete the relevant section of the registration form.

5. EHC website - Information on Parish Councils

Parish councillors and clerks have emphasised the importance of good cross-communications between district and parishes. As a first step, we intend to publish a simple directory of the parishes with links to their websites on the council web pages. If your parish council does not have a website, a standard information page can be prepared for you to populate.

If your parish council wishes to participate, please complete the relevant section of the registration form. *Please note it will be the responsibility of each parish council to update the directory by communicating any changes to our web team.*

6. Quarterly meetings with Chief Executive and the Director of Customer and Community Services.

Town clerks from the each of the five towns in the district are invited to attend a quarterly meeting with senior officers from the district council. It was suggested that a parish clerk representing the parish councils in the district should also attend this meeting. Please could you inform EHC Director of Customer and Community Services, George Robertson of the agreed representative for all parish councils in East Herts. George can be contacted at george.a.robertson@eastherts.gov.uk

7. Community Voice

The council established Community Voice to provide a regular opportunity for the council to be able to reach out to local communities, to listen to their views and to respond to them through better-informed decision making.

Community Voice is based around the five main towns within the district, Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware.

An open invitation is extended to all parish clerks and councillors to attend their area's Community Voice meeting.

I attach a list of the dates and venues for the next round of community voice which will take place in January/February 2010. The meetings will include presentations on Changing the Way We Work and Community Safety. All meetings commence at 7:30pm.

8. Local Strategic Partnership Forum

It is widely accepted that more gets done if people in an area work together. To this end EHC established the East Herts Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP is a group comprising organisations from the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors that work together to achieve different initiatives and services and support each other. That partnership, now calling itself "Everyone Matters", has recently published a new Sustainable Community Strategy. The structure of the partnership includes a Forum which meets twice a year primarily to exchange information and to raise issues for the partnership to consider. The dates and venue for next two meetings of the forum are **3 February 2010** and **30 June 2010** at **2pm in the council chamber, Wallfields, Hertford SG13 8EQ.**

If you wish to attend, it would be helpful if you could advise our committee section on the main switchboard number 01279 655261 or by post to Democratic Services, East Herts Council, Bishop's Stortford Office, The Causeway, Bishop's Stortford CM23 2EN.

I enclose the LSP Terms of Reference and structure diagram.

9. Parish Meetings

Parish councils said they are keen to have closer contact with the district council, including inviting district councillors to parish council meetings. To achieve this, parish clerks are invited to post dates of parish meetings to Democratic Services at the above-mentioned Causeway office or email committee.services@eastherts.gov.uk. A list of parish council meetings can then be placed on the council website and included in the weekly Members Information Bulletin circulated to all district members.

10. Planning

Where planning applications to which the parish council had objected had been approved, it was not always clear to the parish council why the objection had failed. Some felt communications could be improved, while others felt the process was not necessarily well understood at parish level.

To assist parish colleagues' understanding of the planning process a number Parish and Town Council Planning Information sessions were held this year which proved to be popular. Further sessions are planned for the early part of next year which will include scenarios of typical planning applications. The sessions should help participants to understand the legal constraints on planning and objections and so learn how to maximise their influence on the planning process. Please register your interest if you would like to be invited to the next round of these sessions.

Participants at this year's planning information sessions stressed how important it was for parish councils to receive a copy of the planning officer's report in such cases. When required, these can be easily obtained by telephoning the main switchboard 01279 655261 and asking for our planning administration section or by emailing planning@eastherts.gov.uk. The introduction of Planning Online in 2010 will provide interested parties with even greater access to information when the planning officer's report will be available from the council's website.

The council is currently preparing its Local Development Framework. Hard copies of the council's Local Development Framework bulletins reporting progress with the LDF are regularly circulated. Please contact the Planning Policy Team at planningpolicy@eastherts.gov.uk if you have not received the bulletins or would like to be added to the circulation list.

11. Parish Plans

EHC acknowledges the importance of parish plans. If you have an electronic version of your parish plan that you would like to share with ourselves and other parishes, please forward it to me and we will upload it to the council website.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who were able to attend for their engagement and contribution on the day. I would also urge you to mark out some time in your diary for our next conference which we expect to take place around the same time in 2010.

I do hope this letter proves helpful and would be happy to hear any further comments or suggestions you may have.

Yours sincerely

Valdis Belinis

V A Belinis
Community Planning and Partnerships Manager

- Enc. 1. Registration of interest form.
2. Local Strategic Partnership
 a. LSP Structure Diagram
 b. Terms of Reference
3. Schedule of Community Voice meetings January/February 2010.
4. Pre-paid envelope addressed to East Herts Council, Community and Cultural Services, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, HERTFORD, SG13 8EQ.

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'C'

Parish Council - Registration of Interest.

- | | YES | NO |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. PC renewal programme, computer training and placing of information on EHC website. | | |
| a) I would like to register an interest in the district council's PC Renewal Programme. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) I would like to receive training on how to make best use of East Herts Council website. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) I would like details of the parish council included on the EHC website. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) I would like to receive hard copies of documents describing the council's service delivery. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Parish Clerk: _____

Contact Details _____

Name of Parish Council _____

Parish council website (if appropriate) _____

2. Parish and Town Council Planning Information Sessions

Please register my interest in attending a Parish and Town Council Planning Information session due to take place in 2010.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Annual Customer Service Briefing Spring 2010

The following have expressed an interest in attending the event:

1. _____ Parish Clerk
2. _____ Chairman of Parish Council
3. _____ (Please insert name(s) of up to two
4. _____ alternative delegates in the event that either parish clerk or chairman cannot attend).

Thank you for completing this form which should be emailed to Valdis.belinis@eastherts.gov.uk or returned in the enclosed pre-paid envelope by January 22nd 2010.