

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON THURSDAY, 11 MAY 2006

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).
Councillors R N Copping, A D Dodd, J Hedley,
Mrs D L E Hollebon, G McAndrew, D Richards,
N Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors M R Alexander, M G Carver,
P A Ruffles, A P Jackson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Andrews	- Acting Development Plans Manager
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Contract Services
Chris Clowes	- Community Protection Manager (Enforcement)
Tracy Ferguson	- Head of Environmental Health
Andrea Gilmour	- Development Control Manager
Melvin Hartley	- Community Safety and Partnerships Manager
Nick Kirby	- Inspection Supervisor
Will O'Neill	- Head of Housing and Community Development
Mary Orton	- Director of Policy
Paul Pullin	- Economic Development Manager
Jackie Sayers	- Scrutiny Officer

Jan Spong	- Head of Community Protection
Bryan Thomsett	- Head of Planning Policy
David Thorogood	- Environmental Co-ordinator
Annabel Tighe	- Environmental Health Manager
Trevor Watkins	- Waste Services Manager

871 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors H G S Banks and Mrs M H Goldspink.

872 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor G McAndrew declared a personal interest in Minute 876 – Long term Leisure Strategy Group, by virtue of his being a trustee of a school involved.

873 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members that they were looking at the final corporate priority in a series in order to review whether policies were enabling work to be done to support the Council's corporate objectives. The Committee would consider if new policies needed to be adjusted or introduced. New Corporate Priorities would be agreed at the next meeting of Council.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

874 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of 25 April 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ACTION875 ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME ENFORCEMENT

The Head of Contract Services submitted a report on the implications of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. The Act had been introduced to give local authorities new powers to improve and protect the environment. Final government guidance had been published in March 2006 and many of the measures would be effective from April 2006.

The Council's officers conducted enforcement in accordance with its policy. The policy and practice changes involved in the new legislation mainly affected Contract Services, Development Control and Environmental Health. It had been suggested by Government that the new legislation should have its own enforcement policy.

The main changes involved considering environmental crime when developing crime and disorder reduction strategies; abandoned vehicles; dropping and clearing litter, fly posting, stray dogs, audible intruder alarms; noise at night, artificial light nuisance, insects and shopping trolleys. Fixed penalty notices could be used to enforce the powers available.

Consultation with the Council's partners and the public on the policy was required.

The Committee considered the points for inclusion in the Council's draft Environmental Crime Enforcement policies and made some amendments. It highlighted the need to take a balanced approach to enforcement and noted that this would be achieved because only the proposed enforcement policy, which required a proportionate response, would be followed and resources would be limited.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the draft enforcement measures detailed in the report submitted to the Committee should be approved, subject to consultation with partners and the public as required and the following amendments:

10. - delete “where appropriate” and add “as part of targeted public education and awareness campaign work”;

11. – replace “safety” with “support”;

22. – add “Council owned allotments”;

23. - delete “All ponds, rivers and water features and all allotments”, add “Council owned” before “land”;

26. - add “and the scheme be publicised”;

27. - add “but not light pollution”;

29. - the figures in the table be amended to show the highest level of fixed amount and the largest discount possible under the law to encourage prompt payment;

31. - add “and retailers be advised that the Council will charge for recovery, return, storage or disposal of shopping trolleys if retailers do not take appropriate measures to deal with this problem”;

32. - add “per day” after £2.

ACTION876 REPORT OF THE LONG TERM LEISURE STRATEGY GROUP

The Executive Member for Community Development submitted a report summarising the investigations and conclusions of the Long Term Leisure Strategy Group, which had been set up to consider the long-term plans for the Council's leisure facilities.

The management of the five swimming pools had been out-sourced whilst the Council considered longer-term leisure priorities and service delivery requirements.

The Audit Commission had made some criticisms of the Council's leisure service and recommended it developed a strategy and communicated it to the community.

The Executive Member for Community Development had indicated that he was eager for the Council to give more emphasis to sport and leisure in its Corporate Priorities and had asked officers to draft a new leisure strategy.

The District's swimming pools had been built in the 1970s when the public service was usually the sole provider of these facilities. There had been fewer alternative leisure choices and the current public health concerns were not an issue. The existing pools were ageing and offered limited facilities.

The Group thought a new approach needed to be developed. The Council could take on a commissioning role rather than acting as a provider.

A strategy could encourage more people to take part in sport and active leisure to improve health and well being of communities and enable East Herts to make the most of the opportunities offered by the 2012 Olympic Games.

The Council's facilities fell into three main categories – wholly owned facilities e.g. swimming pools/gyms; joint

ACTION

provision swimming pools linked to schools and outdoor sports facilities e.g. football pitches, tennis courts, pitch and putt. It was suggested that a sports pitch strategy should be commissioned to look into these in more detail.

The Strategy Group had considered the findings of PPG17 leisure facilities audit. The audit had found a lack of indoor facilities and suggested this could be improved by negotiating joint use with schools. Several schools sports halls had been developed recently. However, joint use would not meet all the sporting needs of the community.

The audit showed an over provision of gyms because those in nearby areas were included. This was unfortunate as funds from a gym could off set the costs of a swimming pool.

The audit also found an over supply of swimming pools but it was not clear if residents of neighbouring areas were using East Herts pools. Numbers of people participating in casual swimming was declining

The strategy group had explored the legal agreements covering the joint use pools and concluded that more use by clubs and for swimming lessons could be encouraged.

The Committee considered the recommendations in the report and agreed with them subject to certain amendments.

In addition, it thought officers should investigate the relaxation of a planning condition at St Mary's School, Bishop's Stortford that would limit the use of the new sports hall by the community.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee has the following comments on the Council's long-term leisure strategy:

ACTION

(A) the focus of the leisure and sport strategy should be to encourage more people to take part in sport and active leisure in order to improve the health and well-being of our communities; and to enable East Herts to make the most of the opportunities offered by the 2012 Olympic Games;

(B) the strategy should take a wide-ranging view of the role of the Council as a commissioner/facilitator of sporting opportunities and that the partnership opportunities to promote public health and well-being should be fully explored;

(C) a sports pitch strategy should be commissioned looking in more detail at the usage of Council-owned and school/club pitches in order to develop strategies for sports development and investment in new facilities without delay;

(D) the Council should support detailed market research into the demand for casual swimming, swimming lessons, club swimming and other club activities eg aerobics, water polo in the catchment areas of the three joint provision pools;

(E) the Council should support a feasibility study into the provision of a multi-purpose flagship leisure centre in the east of the District and perhaps with the schools; and

(F) officers should be asked to investigate relaxing the planning condition restricting the use of the new sports hall at St Mary's School, Bishop's Stortford by the community.

DPP

ACTION877 STARTER TENANCIES FOR SOUTH ANGLIA HOUSING

The Executive Member for Community Development had submitted a report on a proposal by South Anglia Housing Association to introduce starter tenancies. This would involve giving new customers a one-year assured shorthold tenancy. It would then be made clear that if there was evidence of severe and persistent anti social behaviour repossession could be sought through the court with the court having no discretion in the matter. Elsewhere this had helped to reduce anti-social behaviour and increased the ability to deal with it.

The Committee decided to authorise officers in consultation with the Chairman to consider recommending the introduction of these starter tenancies by South Anglia Housing (formerly known as Stort Valley Housing Association).

RESOLVED - that officers be authorised in consultation with the Chairman, to inform the Executive whether it should support the introduction of starter tenancies by South Anglia Housing.

878 CORPORATE PRIORITY - PRESERVE THE UNIQUE MIX OF RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES ENSURING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES ARE GENERATED FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL

A number of presentations were given to illustrate how the Council's objective of preserving the unique mix of rural and urban communities ensuring that economic opportunities are generated for the benefit of all had been achieved. These covered work involving land use, planning, development control, environmental measures, economic development and the night-time economy.

The Committee asked a number of questions and agreed to make a number of recommendations to the Executive.

ACTION

These included topics such as:

- The need to retain employment sites in town and rural areas;
- Limited extensions to properties located in the Metropolitan Green Belt and Rural Area beyond the Green Belt;
- Setting up a database of land, which could be sold, and the proceeds used to buy land of greater use to the community;
- Giving modernisation and diversification of the economy a higher profile through a separate economic policy for the Council;
- Publicity for economic development in 'The Link' magazine;
- The inclusion of the night time economy in the economic development policy.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee considers:

(A) the development of a local implementation plan for selling land in order to buy land for use by the community should be supported;

(B) consideration should be given to strengthening economic development policies by introducing a separate strategy for economic development; and

(C) the Economic Development Officer be asked to publicise the work of his section with an article in "The Link" magazine.

DPP

ACTION879 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2006/07

The Interim Executive Director submitted a report on the work programme for 2006/7.

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the Committee's work programme until the next meeting.

RESOLVED - that the Committee's Work Programme be considered at the next meeting.

ED

The meeting closed at 10.30 pm.