

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
28 FEBRUARY 2012, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor G McAndrew (Chairman)
Councillors E Buckmaster, S Bull, T Herbert,
Mrs D Hone, J Mayes, P Moore, N Poulton,
P Ruffles and C Woodward

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews, W Ashley, K Crofton,
P Gray, L Haysey, P Phillips, C Rowley and
B Wrangles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Housing Strategy and Policy Officer
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Mark Kingsland	- Leisure Services Manager
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

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635 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor N Symonds. It was noted that Councillor N Poulton was substituting for Councillor N Symonds.

636 MINUTES

In respect of Minute 438 Councillor P Ruffles sought an update in relation to the working group which had been set up to discuss Community Grants. The Director of Customer and Community Services advised that this update had been circulated electronically and was now being advertised in the community.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

637 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Mathew Nicolson and Alison Norman from Sport and Leisure Management (SLM) to the meeting.

638 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL

Councillor D Hone, Chairman of the Health Engagement Panel provided a summary of the work of the Panel. It was noted that Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny had taken place on 9 February 2012 when the main item had been a seminar on modern nursing and the challenges faced in ensuring high quality patient care. It was noted that a programme of topic groups had also been organised which the Chairman was also involved with.

It was noted that Councillor G McAndrew had been in attendance at the meeting on 12 December 2011 and not Councillor D Andrews as shown in the minutes. The Health Engagement Panel would be asked to amend the minutes as necessary at their next meeting.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

639 ANNUAL REVIEW OF LEISURE CONTRACT - YEAR 3:
SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT LTD (SLM)

The Leisure Services Manager submitted a report reviewing the annual performance of the leisure contract by Sport and Leisure Management (SLM) Limited. Mathew Nicolson provided an overview of the contract to date. The Council's investment of £3.58m had transformed leisure facilities in the District. It was noted that membership throughout the District had increased generally, although there had been a slight decrease in membership at Ward Freman. This was explained. It was anticipated that there might be a growth in swimming in 2012 due to the Olympics.

Mr Nicolson referred to a recent survey of customer satisfaction via Gov.Metric which sought feedback on five specific areas. Generally, this had been positive. It was noted that SLM planned to invest an additional £20,000 at Grange Paddocks on fitness equipment which currently had 100 stations. Updates were provided in relation to leisure facilities at Fanshawe (which had received 3rd place in a national health club award), Leventhorpe and Presdales. It was noted that East Herts was the third top performing contract in the South East Region.

Mr Nicolson outlined SLM's eight-point leisure plan to mark the Olympics.

Councillor S Bull queried the cessation of free swimming for

the 60plus age group. Mr Nicolson explained that this was consistent with what was happening with other contracts locally. In terms of encouraging the 60plus age group to swim, he explained that the swimming timetable had been amended by the inclusion of another swimming "slot" for this age group.

The Chairman queried what SLM was doing to minimise energy usage and reduce its "carbon footprint". Mr Nicolson explained that that a variable speed device would be bought by the end of March 2012 which would reduce electricity usage by between 45-50%. The use of pool covers was also being investigated.

Councillor N Poulton commented that the rural villages were not provided with promotional leisure literature and asked that Councillors be provided with this information for dissemination.

Councillor C Woodward praised SLM for their award winning successes. Mr Nicolson stated that SLM would be submitting their "Quest" award status entry at the end of March. Councillor C Woodward referred to the comments submitted in relation to football, littering and complaints. Ms Norman stated that she was receiving less and less complaints on this issue.

Mr Nicolson provided guidance on the percentage of the respondent group involved in the survey.

Councillor E Buckmaster queried what new initiatives' SLM might be undertaking. Ms Norman provided a summary.

Councillor P Ruffles complemented SLM on the "good news" and welcomed the report. He sought assurances from SLM that more comparative information be included within the report. By way of an example, he referred to his difficulty in being able to understand the certain scores contained in the report.

Councillor T Herbert expressed concern at the distinctions on

gym usage between those who paid by direct debit and those who used the “pay as you go” arrangement. Mr Nicholson explained the need to incorporate elements of control which were not intimidating, for those not paying by direct debit.

The Chairman referred to the card system and that this did not record those who were using the gym and swimming on the same occasion. Mr Nicholson outlined how the software worked in terms of it making a “percentage guess”.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members congratulated SLM on their award successes and on the progress made.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

640 EAST HERTS HOUSING STRATEGY 2008-2011 - UPDATE AND ACTION PLAN; DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2012-2015

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report which highlighted the successful performance of the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008 - 2011 in achieving the three strategic objectives set out in the report now submitted. Members’ comments were also sought on the draft Housing Strategy for 2012 - 2015, the detail of which was set out in Essential Reference Paper ‘B’ of the report now submitted.

Councillor N Poulton referred to the need to promote homes which were under occupied and expressed his concern regarding a response he had received involving a particular case. The Housing Services Manager agreed to investigate this matter with Circle Anglia.

In response to queries from Councillor E Buckmaster and T Herbert regarding the definition of affordable housing and its application, the Housing Services Manager explained the Council’s policy. The Housing Services Manager referred to

the District's high levels of rent and property prices and the disparity in incomes which was particularly hard for young people.

Councillor K Crofton referred to the Council's Housing Policy (the points system) and the anti-social behaviour of some families which was making life difficult for residents in some villages. He stated that these families did not have community ties with the area and contributed to their dysfunctional attitude. Councillor K Crofton suggested that the points system be modified and that the policy should be applied flexibly. The Housing Services Manager explained how the points policy was applied and that the Localism Bill did allow an element of discretion in this regard.

Councillor C Woodward expressed concern at the level of empty homes in the District which currently stood at 585. He referred to the Council's reliance on the public to report those empty homes.

Councillor P Ruffles referred to under-occupation and sought clarification on the bedroom standard. He said that it was important that the character of neighbourhoods should be retained and of the aspirations of individuals in home owning. The Housing Services Manager explained the links with planning policy and the Local Development Framework. She undertook to provide a written response regarding the bedroom standard.

Members received the report.

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

(B) the draft Housing Strategy 2012 – 2015 be supported for the purpose of consultation with external partners and stakeholders.

REASSURANCE

The Head of Community Safety and Health Services submitted a report on the findings of the Task and Finish group investigation into the public perception of crime and public reassurance, the detail of which was set out in Essential Reference Paper 'B' to the report now submitted. Councillor D Andrews, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, stated that it was a question of continuing to work with partners to target decreasing resources at public reassurance to get the message across that East Herts was a safe place to live and work.

The Head of Community Safety and Health Services outlined the remit of the Task and Finish Group and drew attention to the discussion points and conclusions set out in the Essential Reference Papers. He referred to the need to launch a positive marketing campaign to illustrate what a safe place East Herts was to live and work in and to the need to continue to work with partners to deliver focussed information relating to community safety, including improving communication with vulnerable groups to get the message across. The need to continue to deal with anti-social issues in a timely manner such as littering and graffiti was raised as this was felt to create negative impressions.

Notwithstanding a recent newspaper article, the Head of Community Safety and Health Services commented on the good working relationship the Council had with the police. This was confirmed by the Director of Customer and Community Services. Councillor T Herbert commented on the need to get the Council's point across to the newspaper. The Head of Community Safety and Health Services suggested that any campaign should not have the Council's brand or logo but be undertaken independently. The good work of the PCSOs was recognised.

Members received the report and supported the action set out in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Council's Communications

Team, work with partners to design and deliver a common positive marketing campaign message aimed at promoting East Herts as a safe place to live for use by all partners and Members;

(B) the Council and its partners identify and improve communications with vulnerable target groups to deliver better focussed information and solutions relating to community safety; and

(C) the Council and its partners (including private / commercial concerns where appropriate) continue to deal with graffiti cleaning, litter collection, dog fouling, fly-posting and fly tipping in a timely manner to minimise any risk of creating negative impressions.

642 AGEING WELL - HOW IS EAST HERTS WORKING TO MAKE THE DISTRICT A GOOD PLACE TO GROW OLD IN?

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report which considered how East Herts could make the District a good one to grow older in. Following consideration of the issue at Community Scrutiny Committee on 22 November 2011, Members agreed to review the issue in an effort to initiate a discussion with the Executive to establish the Council's resilience and sustainability in terms of an "ageing well" and the "later life" agenda.

An overview of the population from a national and local perspective was detailed in the report now submitted. The report acknowledged that the Council did not have direct liability for issues such as retirement pensions or NHS health care, but that the "knock on" effect that constrained public finances could have on second and third tier authorities. That said, the Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support suggested that strategic questions centred on key themes set out in the report now submitted, be the basis on which to structure discussion with the Executive. The Executive Member stressed the need for a partnership and "joined up" approach in terms of the Council's policies

and best practice.

Councillor P Gray urged Members to establish a general picture on how the Council approached age, what people wanted and what the Council could do in the future.

Councillor J Mayes suggested that the Church groups be approached given their involvement with the elderly and referred to their wish to retain financial independence.

Councillor C Rowley commented on the need for intergenerational involvement. Councillor P Ruffles referred to the rural element and problems of isolation particularly so, should there be an issue of ethnicity given that cultural backgrounds could have serious issues for small groups of people. Councillor K Crofton reaffirmed the issue of the Council's points system and the need to keep people together.

Members supported the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) Corporate Management Team and Senior Officers be asked to look at best practice around the “ageing well” agenda and to report back to Community Scrutiny Committee on 28 August 2012 on what action the Council might take and the financial implications of such action;

(B) an informal Member Group of six be established to look at Members' role within respective wards; and

(C) the Council continue to work with its partners to establish where it can be of mutual help to one another.

643 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY: CORPORATE HEALTH CHECK
OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2011

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee during the period October – December 2011. The Director drew Members' attention to the fact that there was one issue of concern which referred to the

time taken to process Housing and Council Tax new claims. He assured Members that this had not been due to staff shortages, but related to a peak in demand.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

644 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered items for scrutiny during the civic year 2012/13 and supported the inclusion of a report concerning “Ageing Well in East Herts” in August 2012.

The Scrutiny Officer stated that workshops would be established in April 2012 to consider future items for scrutiny.

The Committee approved the Work Programme as amended.

RESOLVED – that the work programme as amended, be agreed.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm

Chairman
Date