

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
22 NOVEMBER 2011, AT 7.00 PM

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Dave Cooper	- Performance Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Marianne McWhinnie	-
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
Claire Pullen	-
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Brian Simmonds	- Head of Community Safety

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

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433 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of

Councillor D Hone.

434 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked Councillor S Bull for standing in as Chairman for the 20 September 2011 meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman advised that he would be amending the running order so that Agenda item 9 – 2011/12 Service Plans would be dealt with after Agenda item 5 – Health Engagement Panel.

The Chairman advised Members of the good news that the Royal Society of Public Health Award had been awarded to the Authority.

435 MINUTES

In respect of Minute 300 – Minutes, the Director of Customer and Community Services advised that there were 70 apprenticeships registered at Hertford Regional College. Members were provided with a breakdown of this figure for the major towns in East Herts. Members were advised that these apprenticeships included cookery, carpentry and a technical apprenticeship at Hertford Theatre.

Also in respect of Minute 300 – Minutes, Councillor P Ruffles stated that the Micro Hydro Plan for Hertford Theatre should be kept in the spotlight now that it had been through Scrutiny. The Director agreed and referred to the Micro Hydro Plan as an exciting project for East Herts.

The Director advised that the Micro Hydro Plan would be reported to the next Environment Scrutiny Committee as part of the Climate Change Action Plan annual update. He emphasised that the Authority would not lose sight of this project.

Councillor S Bull expressed concern that there had been no mention of Buntingford in respect of apprenticeships in East Herts. He referred to the excellent facilities at Freman College.

In respect of Minute 300 – Minutes, Councillor C Woodward referred to whether there had been any progress with enhancing disabled access to the swimming pool at Grange Paddocks. The Director advised that when the Authority had approved the works to Grange Paddocks, Members had focussed on enhancements to the gym and the changing rooms.

The Director advised that Sports and Leisure Management (SLM) had carried out an accessibility assessment and was working with disability and special needs groups. He undertook to raise the issue at his next meeting with SLM.

Councillor Woodward suggested that the Grange Paddocks pool was tired, beyond its time and in need of some tender loving care. The Director reiterated that Members had resolved to invest in the gym and the changing rooms on an invest to save basis.

In response to comments from Councillor N Symonds in respect of a reduction in free swimming provision and access for the elderly, the Director advised that SLM was consulting with those groups that did not currently use the pool.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

436 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL

The Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor D Hone, provided a summary of the work of the Panel and the County Council Health Scrutiny Committee.

Members were advised that Councillor Hone had attended a meeting of the County Council Health Scrutiny Committee at the QE2 Hospital where Sarah Brierley, North Herts Hospitals Trust, had given a presentation in relation to the future of accident and emergency provision. There had also been focus groups at the Lister and QE2 hospitals on this subject.

The Committee was reminded of the 3 year award to the Authority from the Royal Society of Public Health. The Scrutiny Officer stated that Councillor Hone would be travelling to the House of Lords with Environmental Health Promotion Officer to be presented with the award on 29 November 2011. The award would be formally presented to Members at Council on 14 December 2011.

The Scrutiny Officer stated that the Health Scrutiny Committee had met on 29 October 2011 and had split into groups to scrutinise Quality Innovation Productivity Prevention (QIPP) with the 5 local trusts. Any resulting recommendations would be presented to the 13 December 2011 meeting of the Health Scrutiny Committee.

Members were advised of a Public Health Conference in Hertfordshire on 18 November 2011 at Campus West, Welwyn Garden City. The main emphasis of this event was Health and Wellbeing Boards. There had also been a number of local workshops that had been well attended.

Councillor E Buckmaster stated that he had attended a workshop at the QE2 Hospital with Councillor N Symonds. He stated that he had also attended a workshop at the Lister Hospital with Councillor L Haysey. He commented that the focus had been how to communicate service changes in Accident and Emergency at the Lister and QE2 to the public. Councillor Buckmaster emphasised that there had been agreement that communication methods such as the internet and social media should be used as much as possible to keep costs down.

The Committee was advised that local Councillors had a key role to play in acting as champions within communities when liaising with schools and community groups. One key issue of concern was transport between hospitals and how to access key transport links more generally.

Councillor Symonds stressed the importance of using appropriate methods of informing the public of changes to Health Services in East Herts. She stated that communication methods should vary for different groups of people. She also commented that there should be better synergy between housing providers and health service providers.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the update be noted.

437 2011/12 SERVICE PLANS - SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND EXCEPTIONS REPORT

The Leader of the Council submitted a summary of the 2011/12 Service Plan actions relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee which had been achieved and details of those which had revised completion dates.

Members were advised that 4 actions had been achieved as well as 1 action from the 2010/11 Customer and Community Services Action Plan. Members were also advised that there was one action requiring a revised completion date in that the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service had a revised “go live” date of 5 December 2011.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the summary of progress against the 2011/12 Service Plan actions be noted; and

(B) the action requiring a revised completion date be noted.

438 UPDATE ON COMMUNITY GRANTS

The Community Planning and Partnerships Manager submitted a report updating Members on the community grants process, in particular, the range of grant “pots” and how they might be refocused to better achieve the Council’s corporate priorities.

Members were advised that an Officer review of grants had suggested the use of a single grants fund would simplify the decision making process. A more flexible approach would allow budgets to be allocated purely on the basis of demand.

Another proposal considered was that Officers could be granted delegated authority to authorise grants up to £2000. A smaller grants process with a lighter touch could be used so that grants of this size were allocated quickly. Members were advised that special one off criteria for grants could be put in place in relation to the 2012 Olympics and the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee.

In response to a query from Councillor E Buckmaster, the Community Planning and Partnerships Manager confirmed that if Officers were provided with more flexibility then any under spend could be used in future rather than being lost at the end of the year.

Councillor P Ruffles commented that a less bureaucratic approach should be adopted, in line with the County Council locality budgets. The Director of Customer and Community Services advised that, as this would require a policy change, a decision would have to be taken by the Executive or Council.

Councillor G McAndrew stated that a small working group could be set up to discuss Community Grants in more

detail and bring back recommendations to the Community Scrutiny Committee. Councillor C Woodward agreed that Officers should have more delegated authority to take decisions in respect of Community Grants.

Councillor T Herbert stated that if Members were to have more responsibility in relation to Community Grant allocations then appropriate guidance should be made available to Councillors.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) progress on community grants processes as detailed in Section 2.2 of the report now submitted be noted; and

(B) a short-life advisory working group of Members and lead Officers be set up to discuss Community Grants in more detail and bring back recommendations to the Community Scrutiny Committee.

439 EQUALITIES: DELIVERING BETTER SERVICES FOR OUR CUSTOMERS

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report updating Members on progress made since the last annual report was presented to Community Scrutiny Committee. The report also alerted Members to the evolving equalities legislation, particularly, Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force in April 2011.

Members were referred to pages 34 – 36 of the report now submitted for the findings of the equality assessment programme. The Equalities Officer stated that any subsequent changes to the Council's existing policies would be minor in nature.

The Equalities Officer advised that all previous equality issues such as race, gender or disability were now

referred to as protected characteristics following changes to equalities legislation and the public sector equality duty.

Councillor C Woodward referred to his concerns that, following the impending “go live” date for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, there could be issues with the service being “Stevenage-centric” and the equality of service provision suffering as a result.

The Director emphasised that this should not be an issue as the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service was not relocating to Stevenage and Officers from that Authority would be coming to East Herts. Members were advised that an equalities impact assessment would be carried out for the new shared service.

Councillor N Symonds expressed concerns that, despite the excellent efforts of the Officers based at Bishop’s Stortford, vulnerable clients were still falling through the net and ending up in court for relatively small amounts of debt.

The Director advised that if Members were aware of any vulnerable clients they should be reported to the team so that Officers could investigate. Councillor Symonds stated that she was in regular contact with the Head of Service and her team. The Director commented that by the time the courts and bailiffs had become involved, Officers would have already done all they could for those people in greatest need.

Councillor P Ruffles stated that the support offered by the East Herts Council Officers responsible for looking after vulnerable residents cheered him enormously. He thanked Officers for their enthusiasm for this important task.

Councillor P Moore expressed concerns that 16 to 17 year olds were receiving priority in terms of housing need when there were whole families in dire need of housing.

The Director stated that he would seek a written response from the Housing Strategy and Policy Manager.

Members had a general discussion around Youth Councils across the District. The Committee was advised that the East Herts Youth Council had been disbanded but there was an active Youth Council in Bishop's Stortford. Councillor S Bull stated that Buntingford also had a very active Youth Council.

In response to a query from Councillor C Woodward in respect of recruitment, the Director advised that Manpower ensured that all appropriate standards were met and maintained in relation to equalities and recruitment at East Herts Council.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the summary of key findings from the Equalities Impact Assessment Work Programme for 2008 - 11, be noted so that the information gathered is used to prioritise future equality actions;

(B) the revision of the existing Corporate Equality Policy, Scheme and Action Plan in 2012/2013 be endorsed; and

(C) the changes in obligation to the Council arising from the new Public Sector Equality Duty that came into force in April 2011, be noted.

440 COMMUNITY SAFETY: A FOCUSSED REVIEW - TASK AND FINISH GROUP INTERIM REPORT

The Head of Community Safety and Health Services submitted a report to inform the Committee of the scope and progress on the review of Community Safety and also to invite the Committee to consider and comment on the early findings of the Task and Finish Group.

Members were advised that all of the projects funded via grants received this funding from the Community Safety Partnership. The recommendations were designed to be passed onto the Partnership in terms of how the reduced funding was spent across the District.

Members were referred to page 60 of the report now submitted for a suggested order that could be applied to any reductions in funding. The Head of Community Safety and Health Services referred to the importance of diversionary activities and taxi marshals in preventing problems before they arose.

Councillor N Symonds commented that it was a lack of diversionary activities that had led to cars being overturned and disturbances around Halloween in Bishop's Stortford. The Head of Community Safety and Health Services highlighted the importance of match funding in maintaining the activities covered by Community Safety initiatives. He stated that Officers would welcome suggestions for alternative funding options.

Members were advised that the cost of a PCSO was £126,000 and the cost to East Herts Council was £45,000. Members were reminded of the fragility of this arrangement in that if one organisation in the Community Safety Partnership withdrew funding then a PCSO could be lost if the remaining organisations were unable to increase their funding offer.

The Committee was advised that grant funding was diminishing so partnership funded activities were under threat. Members were advised that a recruitment drive for Special Constables (who had the full powers of Police Officers but worked on a voluntary basis and were unpaid) might go some way to mitigate any reduction in PCSOs.

The Head of Community Safety and Health Services stated that the Life Project was difficult to maintain even

with the support of funding from the Community Safety Partnership. Members were referred again to page 60 of the report now submitted for a suggested order of items Members could consider when making recommendations to the Community Safety Partnership.

In reference to CCTV Members were advised that, whilst there had been no firm considerations, the task and finish group asked scrutiny to support the principle of equity and parity in respect of CCTV funding/charging across the District introduced over a 2 to 3 year period. Councillor Symonds agreed that there should be equity and parity in CCTV provision for East Herts.

Councillor C Woodward commented that PCSOs had proved to be invaluable in intelligence gathering and working with young people. Councillor Woodward stressed that Special Constables could not be viewed as a replacement for PCSOs as they were not available at times during the day.

Councillor D Andrews commented that Special Constables should not be seen as a replacement for PCSOs as they only worked about 4 hours in a given week, although they did have the full powers of the regular police force. Councillor Andrews referred to the exclusively positive feedback he had received in relation to the activities of PCSOs in his ward.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the work undertaken and planned in respect of Community Safety be noted;

(B) the early findings of the Community Safety Task and Finish Group be noted;

(C) that the Executive be advised that any reduction in funding should be recommended to the Community Safety Partnership on the basis of the order of items detailed on page 60 of the report

now submitted; and

(D) the Executive be advised that the Community Scrutiny Committee was of the view that the principle of equity and parity in respect of CCTV funding/charging across the District should be applied and reached in a 2 to 3 year stepped process.

441 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTH CHECK REPORT AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER 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 August to September 2011, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

The Director apologised that the data detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B' in respect of swimming numbers was inaccurate and a revised version would be recirculated to Members as soon as possible.

Councillor N Symonds stated that she was glad to see that the performance status for the Revenues and Benefits service had returned to being green.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

442 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered items for scrutiny during the civic year 2011/12.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that there were no new items to be added to the Committee's work programme. Members were advised that there would be a presentation to the next meeting of the Health Engagement Panel in respect of Mental Health Services

in the East of the District.

Members were further advised that local Councillors might wish to consider participating in a guided tour of the East Herts Council leisure facilities to talk to users of the facilities and to see what was on offer for the residents of East Herts. An invitation could be sent to Members to ensure that any visits took place prior to the next meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman commented that Executive Members could be invited to attend a future Scrutiny Committee meeting to be scrutinised on issues that Members felt particularly strongly about. Members were advised that the slot occupied by the Sustainable Communities Strategy for the 28 February 2012 meeting could be used for a report relating to the Ageing Well Project. Following Members' agreement, the Scrutiny Officer undertook to extend an invitation to the Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support.

Members were advised that the suggestion to delay the Sustainable Communities Strategy to the 12 June 2012 meeting of the Committee was to allow for a complete refresh of the Strategy in line with the three new LSP priorities just agreed. Submitting a revised version to the 12 June 2012 meeting would allow Officers sufficient time to do justice to revising this important document.

The Committee approved the Work Programme as amended.

RESOLVED – that the work programme as amended be agreed.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm

Chairman

Date
