

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
24 SEPTEMBER 2013, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D Hollebon (Chairman)
Councillors R Beeching, S Bull, C Rowley,
N Symonds, M Wood and C Woodward

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M Alexander, D Andrews,
L Haysey, S Rutland-Barsby and B Wrangles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Manager of Housing Services
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
Brian Simmonds	- Head of Community Safety and Health Services

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

David Lloyd	- Police Crime Commissioner
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250 POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER - GUEST
PRESENTATION

At the invitation of the Committee, Mr David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) gave a short presentation and introductory responses to the key issues of concern to Members. He stated that one of the main roles of the PCC, was to work with other partners for mutual benefit. At the moment the PCC was working to arrange 20 'District days' per annum as an opportunity to share and discuss concerns with local partners.

In terms of responses to the questions posed, he stated that in his view, the key principles underpinning the Policing Plan for Hertfordshire was working with partner organisations on the need to prevent crime and in resolving crimes. He referred Members to the document "Everyone's Business" and urged them to read the crime plan.

In relation to the issue of limited funding, the PCC explained that he had a number of initiatives to roll out from the Community Fund. He stated that the first £160,000 of bids had been agreed. By way of example, Mr Lloyd referred to the use of an old library bus which would be refurbished and used for youth related work, another initiative related to the vulnerable and giving them help with their front gardens to reduce the likelihood of them being targeted.

On the issue of reducing/ keeping crime low in East Herts and investment in new technology he hoped that keeping "feet on the street" and targeting the young who get drunk and making sure that they are properly supported would go some way to helping reduce crime. He acknowledged the important role of volunteers in the process. Mr Lloyd stated that from an investment viewpoint in tackling crime, there was a need to work with health partners particularly in the field of drug and alcohol strategies and addressing housing issues. He added that he had set up a quarterly Community Safety Board and was in the process of co-coordinating with various stakeholders. Mr Lloyd stressed the role of partnership working which he considered to be "core" business.

In response to questions about PCSOs, Mr Lloyd acknowledged that they had been a great success. He referred to their role in relation to the Waltham Cross riots which had been prevented largely as a result of their community “grass roots” knowledge and intelligence gathering, adding “that sort of intelligence is how we stop crime from happening”. Mr Lloyd explained that there was less and less funding available. He did not have an operating role and could not say how areas should be policed as this was a matter for the Police Chief Superintendent.

Mr Lloyd provided an update on crime in East Hertfordshire. The only statistics which had increased related to burglary as a result of a “one-man crime wave”. He stated that the particular individual was now behind bars.

Mr Lloyd reinforced the need to recruit more “Specials”.

The Chairman then invited questions from Members but reminded them to focus on the PCC’s areas of responsibilities and to avoid questions which were operational in nature and any specific crime related cases.

In response to a query from Councillor R Beeching regarding speed limits of 20mph and how effective they were, Mr Lloyd stated that this was not an issue within his purview but felt that localism should prevail. He expressed concerns regarding the ability to enforce a 20mph limit and that it could be right in some particular areas and specific times, e.g. where there were schools, adding that it was not a panacea for addressing underlying bad driving.

Councillor C Woodward stated that the ‘safer schools’ initiative had worked well in Bishop’s Stortford. He encouraged further use of PCSOs and queried whether it was possible to get match funding for them. The PCC referred to the “Buy One Get One Free” (BOGOF) initiative in terms of PCSOs and 50% Home Office funding which had now ended. He referred to the costs of a trainee PCSO compared to a police trainee.

In response to a query from Councillor R Beeching concerning crime rates in East Herts (acknowledged as low) and the fear of crime which was considered to be high by residents and whether there was a Police strategy to tackle this, Mr Lloyd explained that the District's close proximity to London and the news generated from the metropolis did much to fuel the fear of crime. He felt that it was important to get the right communication strategies developed to tackle the fear of crime and referred to the very low risk of getting burgled in this area. He was confident that crime rate figures were robust and reflected accurate levels of the more serious crime in the area. He acknowledged that there was likely to be under-reporting of some crimes such as 'race hate' but this was a national issue. He stated he did want to ensure reporting of domestic violence was as robust and complete as possible.

Councillor M Wood raised the issue of an increase in cyclists using the pavements and the absence of bells and asked if something could be done. Mr Lloyd said that he would take up the matter adding that the problem was not confined to East Herts.

The Head of Community Safety and Health Services thanked Mr Lloyd for attending. He stated that East Herts would welcome resources particularly in relation to PCSOs.

The Chairman on behalf of Members thanked Mr Lloyd acknowledging that partnership working was the way forward and extended an invitation for a return visit.

After Mr Lloyd had left the meeting, Members continued to express their concerns about PCSOs and asked the Executive Members present to keep this issue high on the agenda for further debate. Officers were asked to write to the Chief Constable and ask him to provide the Council with an update of his plan for the short and medium term for the deployment of neighbourhood teams in East Herts and to ask the Chief Constable to provide his definition of what now constituted a 'neighbourhood' in terms of policing.

RESOLVED – that (A) the presentation be received;

(B) the Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment ask the Executive to keep the issue of PCSOs high on the agenda for further debate; and

(C) Officers be requested to ask the Chief Constable, Andy Bliss if he is able to provide the Council with:

- (i) an update of his plan for the short and medium term for the deployment of neighbourhood teams and PCSOs in East Herts; and
- (ii) the constabulary's definition of what constitutes a "neighbourhood".

251 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors J Jones and P Moore. It was noted that Councillor C Rowley was substituting for Councillor P Moore.

252 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

253 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Committee noted that Councillor S Bull attended meetings of South Anglia Housing Association but that this was not a disclosable pecuniary interest.

254 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report outlining the future work programme for Community Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor N Symonds expressed concern regarding the role and expectations of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in ensuring that repairs and adaptations, particularly for the vulnerable, were carried out promptly and asked that Officers write to RSLs seeking information on their policies and performance against protocols. This was supported.

Members received the report and asked Officers to write to RSLs seeking information about their policies and performance against protocols.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and

(B) Officers write to Registered Social Landlords seeking information on their policies and performance against protocols on adaptations and repairs, particularly in relation to vulnerable tenants.

255 HERTFORD THEATRE END OF FINANCIAL YEAR REPORT

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report on the annual performance of Hertford Theatre for the Financial Year 2012/13, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and Essential Reference Papers.

The Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services welcomed what was another “good news” report on the theatre’s performance. From a financial viewpoint, he stated that performance had been monitored against the business plan and the theatre was doing well and that Officers would report back next year on the tracked variances, but that this year, the Council would be liable for a backdated VAT liability relating to the café and bar.

Councillor R Beeching drew Members’ attention to ticket sales in relation to two different films and said that it would be helpful to see what the ticket sales were against how many showings, as this would give a more accurate figure.

Councillor M Wood congratulated the team on the progress they had made, adding that the theatre had achieved the right balance on all counts. He felt that the projected figures for the forthcoming pantomime were encouraging and was also positive about the work with Hertford Regional College. He sought further clarification on the theatre's future governance arrangements. In response to the governance issue, the Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support stated that it was necessary to ensure that the theatre had strong foundations first and that it might be possible to look at the issue of governance again next year, when matters were clearer.

Councillor C Rowley welcomed the use of the apprentice scheme. The Director of Hertford Theatre explained that work experience at the theatre was offered as part of one Hertford Regional College's courses and that the theatre was doing everything it could to work with the HRC.

In respect of a request by the Chairman, Hertford Theatre Officers each provided a summary of some of their memorable highlights in working for the theatre.

In response to a query on the issues of seating, it was stated that the Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services had commissioned an independent technical assessment and would be undertaking a tender process to find out what needed to be done and this could then be considered by the Executive once costs were known.

In response to a query from Councillor C Rowley regarding attendances at the pantomime and the balance between live and film performances, Officers outlined the marketing strategy to encourage better attendances and explained that booking live acts needed at least six months to a year advance notice, but that film was more flexible.

Members received the Annual Report on Hertford Theatre for the year 2012/13 and thanked the team as a whole, including the cohort of volunteers for their contribution to the success of the venue.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Annual Report on Hertford Theatre for the year 2012/13 be received; and

(B) the team as a whole, be thanked, including the cohort of volunteers for their contribution to the success of the venue.

256 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT OF SOUTH ANGLIA AND RIVERSMEAD HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report on the progress made by the two large scale voluntary transfer housing associations on the three undertakings which remained following the end of the Delivery of Promises Programme 2007, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

Councillor N Symonds expressed concern that South Anglia had not met its target on Aids and Adaptations for 2012/13. The Manager of Housing Services pointed out that some minor work such as grab rails could be carried out via tenant self-referral and would then be costed under the more general repairs budget rather than the specialist adaptations one.

Members considered how South Anglia could be encouraged to be more proactive in meeting its target on aids and adaptations. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer Services stated the Council did have Council Members who were Board Members and that this was an opportunity to express the Council's concerns. This was supported.

Members received the performance report on Riversmead and South Anglia Housing Associations.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

257 EAST HERTS HOMELESS STRATEGY 2013-2018

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report setting out the Council's new Homeless Review and Strategy for 2013-18, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and within the supporting Essential Reference Papers.

In response to a query from Councillor C Woodward regarding achieving affordable housing targets of 40%, the Manager of Housing Services confirmed that this target was regularly achieved on eligible sites but acknowledged that sometimes, these could be negotiated down. If all sites were included, then the figure did come in at less than 40%.

Councillor N Symonds referred to unscrupulous practices of some private landlords and asked what the Council could do about this. The Manager of Housing Services explained the associated difficulties but essentially, the Council did not have a registration scheme for private rented landlords and that there was a lack of properties in multiple occupation.

In response to query from Councillor R Beeching, the Manager of Housing Services provided clarification of the definitions of rough sleepers and sofa surfers. She also explained the difference between housing applications and housing acceptances.

In response to a query from Councillor M Wood regarding the number of homeless applications this year, the Manager of Housing Services provided an update.

The Committee supported the Homeless Strategy as a basis for consultation with external partners and stakeholders.

RESOLVED – that the Homeless Strategy 2013-2018 be supported as a basis for consultation with external partners and stakeholders and that the Executive be so informed.

258 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK
MAY TO JULY 2013

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators relating to Community Scrutiny for the period May – July 2013. He drew Members’ attention to EHPI 3b (Usage: number of swims (16 - 60 year olds) which was showing as “red” for Quarter 1.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that performance figures for May to July 2013 as detailed in Essential Reference Paper “B” of the report now submitted, be received.

259 HEALTH AND WELLBEING PANEL

Councillor N Symonds, Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Panel, provided Members with an update on the work of the Panel. It was noted that she had a meeting shortly in Bedfordshire to consider the short supply of ambulances for use by the District.

RESOLVED – that (A) the verbal report be received; and

(B) the Minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Panel meeting held on 18 June 2013 be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Chairman
Date