

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
24 JUNE 2014, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D Hollebon (Chairman).
Councillors S Bull, J Jones, J Mayes,
P Moore, N Symonds, K Warnell, M Wood
and J Wyllie.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors L Haysey, P Phillips, P Ruffles
and S Rutland-Barsby.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Manager of Housing Services
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Claire Pullen	- Engagement and Partnerships Officer (Grants)
Mekhola Ray	- Community Projects Team Manager
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services

55 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor N Symonds and seconded by Councillor J Mayes, that Councillor P Moore be appointed Vice-Chairman of Community Scrutiny Committee for the 2014/15 civic year.

RESOLVED – that Councillor P Moore be appointed Vice–Chairman of Community Scrutiny Committee for the 2014/15 civic year.

56 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor G Cutting.

57 MINUTES – 11 MARCH 2014

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

58 REPORT FROM HEALTH AND WELLBEING PANEL

Councillor N Symonds referred to the recent visit by Roma Mills of Carers in Herts, guest speaker at the Health and Wellbeing Panel. She asked, with the Chairman's permission, that a handout circulated at that meeting be provided to Members. This was agreed.

Councillor N Symonds reported that the Panel was interested in visiting St Albans City Council in the hope that both Councils could learn from one another in respect of support for Health and Wellbeing activity in their respective areas.

59 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the future work programme for Community Scrutiny Committee for the civic year 2014/15. The Scrutiny Officer explained that there was some flexibility within the November and March meetings. The Scrutiny Officer referred to the suggested topic of Markets and the problem of this clashing with the procurement and tender process.

Councillor J Wyllie queried where the Council stood in

relation to the market tender process, adding that this was taking a “long time”. He asked when the process would be finished and what was happening in the meantime.

The Executive Member for Economic Development stated that the tendering process was being handled by the Procurement Officer and it was anticipated that the tender would go out next month. Councillor Wyllie expressed concern that Bishop’s Stortford was losing its market and that “Ad hoc” markets were being turned away. The Executive Member for Economic Development and the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services said that they had no knowledge of “ad hoc” markets being turned away and that anyone could apply for a licence to run a market. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services reassured Councillor Wyllie that no “ad hoc” approaches had been made or turned away and explained the difficulties in terms of resources available for the complex process of procurement.

Councillor Wyllie referred to a lady who had applied for an “exotic market” and who had been turned away and agreed to provide the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services with the details. Councillor Wyllie suggested that the outcome of the market procurement process and plans for the future be provisionally booked in for consideration at the November meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee. This was supported.

The Chairman referred to Essential Reference Paper “A” in terms of the implications of “risk management” and the need to have close regard to this.

RESOLVED – that the work programme as now detailed, be approved.

60 UPDATE ON COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAMME

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and

Community Support submitted a report reviewing grant allocations for the period 1 October 2013 to 31 March 2014. The Engagements and Partnerships Officer provided a summary of the key areas of grant funding.

In response to a query from Councillor K Warnell regarding various pots of funding and who determined each area of funding, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained the process in terms of reviewing the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and challenging service budgets based on affordability. He added that some grants increased incrementally each year or had unused funds 'rolled over' into the following year resulting in the pots being odd amounts and not rounded figures.

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Service suggested that it might be helpful if the Officer sent Councillor Warnell the Grant Assessment Criteria. She stated that all grants required endorsement by the local Councillor which helped keep the Member informed of what was going on locally and ensured that the organisation seeking the grant was not one which might bring the Council into disrepute.

In response to a query from Councillor J Mayes concerning a Parish Council Grant, the Officer confirmed that it was for a community engagement event in the Chipping and Buckland area.

Councillor J Jones expressed concern about the criteria which needed to be met by very small community groups in terms of bank accounts and having a constitution. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services acknowledged the Member's concerns but as grants were public money, there was a need to ensure that appropriate checks and balances were in place. He stated that there were organisations which were very good at supporting people in the grant application process including this Council, Hertfordshire County Council and the Community Voluntary Service.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services said that the option was always available for Members to revisit the criteria if they thought it was necessary. Councillor J Mayes stated that she would be “unhappy” to reduce the leniency in terms of the assessment criteria.

Councillor P Moore referred to the help Officers provided to an art group which she had helped set up in relation to setting up a bank account and establishing a constitution.

Councillor M Wood referred to the New Homes Bonus paid to Town Councils and asked whether this had made a difference to the funding available for community groups. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services said that he had not had any information from any of the Town Clerks since his advice to them some months ago to outline how they planned to use their New Homes Bonus. Councillor K Warnell commented that the New Homes Bonus had provided Bishop’s Stortford Town Council with funding for the development of two Neighbourhood Plans.

Councillor M Wood stated that it was important for Members to receive a mid-year report on grants as well as the Annual Review. The Scrutiny Officer explained that if the report was just for information, then this could be provided via the Members’ Information Bulletin. This was supported. Officers explained that detailed information on grants was already available on the Council’s website.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress made in allocating grants in accordance with agreed policies be noted;

(B) the Annual Review coincide with the grant giving cycle; and

(C) a six monthly update report be provided and included in the Members' Information Bulletin and that this be specifically drawn to the attention of Members of Community Scrutiny Committee.

61 HOUSING REGISTER POLICY – REVIEW

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report reviewing the Housing Register and Allocations policy adopted by the Council in 2013. The Manager, Housing Services, provided a summary of the report, and a detailed analysis of the effect of village priority procedure and the salary threshold for qualification on the Housing Register. It was noted that the report was not being submitted to the Executive on 1 July 2014.

In response to a query from Councillor P Moore the Manager, Housing Services explained the background and calculation of affordable and social rents. She also explained how housing benefit might be factored into the process.

In response to a query from Councillor S Bull concerning priority to serviceman or ex-servicemen affected by trauma, the Manager, Housing Services explained that such individuals were given additional preference including their bereaved families. There were three such individuals on the East Herts' register.

Councillor K Warnell expressed concern at the salary threshold level (of £48,000). The Manager, Housing Services explained that this figure was one of the lowest, citing examples of income bars used by other neighbouring authorities and Registered Social Housing Providers (for inclusion on the housing register). She explained how the assessment criteria was applied.

The Manager, Housing Services provided an explanation in response to a query from Councillor M Wood, regarding

fluctuations in the number of households registered on the housing register following a recent re-registration process.

The Committee received the report.

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

(B) the Executive be advised that no policy changes in respect of “village priority procedures” or “salary threshold” are needed at this time.

62 2013/14, 2012/13 AND 2011/12 SERVICE PLANS – END OF YEAR MONITORING REPORT

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted an exception report which provided a summary of the Council’s achievements against its priorities for 2013/14 including service plan actions which were outstanding and the five actions outstanding from 2012/13 and 2011/12. It was noted that of the 31 actions in the 2013/14 Service Plan, 90% were on target, 2 had had their completion date revised and one had been suspended. An update was provided in relation to the 2012/13 Service Plan.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services referred to the working draft overview of some achievements by Corporate Priority up to 31 March 2014 adding that more case studies would be added as things evolved.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED –that the progress made against the Council’s priorities and the status of the outstanding actions detailed against 2013/14, 2012/13 and 2011/12 Service Plan Actions, be received.

63 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY HEALTHCHECK – JANUARY 2014
– APRIL 2014 AND THE 2013/14 PERFORMANCE
INDICATOR OUTTURNS TO MARCH 2014 (INCLUDING
2013/14 OUTTURNS AND TARGETS)

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators for Community Scrutiny Committee in respect of the period January 2014 – April 2014 and the 2013/14 performance indicator outturns.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that this was a good outturn with most of the indicators showing “green”. He requested Members to provide feedback on the new “Dashboard” summary.

Councillor K Warnell stated that in relation to performance indicator (EHPI 64 – Vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished), he believed the target figure of 10 was low. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that the target needed to be considered in the context of the legal complexities involved in the process.

In response to a query from Councillor N Symonds regarding empty homes and the number of staff available to assist, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained that staffing had been an issue but that there had been a small increase in resources.

Councillor J Wyllie referred to the 65% customer satisfaction figure (EHPI 1a Percentage of customers satisfied with the service - all) in relation to SLM and leisure services provision. The Scrutiny Officer explained that SLM’s annual report had been given at the last meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee when the background to the Net Promoter Score (NPS); a new way of measuring customer satisfaction (loyalty) had been explained. Officers agreed to provide the Member with the supporting papers.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the performance for the period January 2014 to April 2014 and the 2013/14 performance indicator outturns be received.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chairman
Date