

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

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D Hollebon (Chairman).
Councillors R Beeching, S Bull, Mrs D Hone,
J Jones, J Mayes, P Moore, C Rowley,
N Symonds and M Wood.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M Alexander, P Ruffles and
S Rutland-Barsby.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services 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
Brian Simmonds	- Head of Community Safety and Health Services

77 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor N Symonds and seconded by
Councillor S Bull that Councillor P Moore be appointed as

Vice–Chairman for the 2013/14 Civic Year.

RESOLVED – that Councillor P Moore be appointed Vice–Chairman for the 2013/14 Civic Year.

78 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor C Woodward. It was noted that Councillor C Rowley was in attendance as substitute for Councillor C Woodward.

79 MINUTES – 12 MARCH 2013

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

80 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Members and Officers and welcomed Councillor J Jones to his first meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee.

81 DISCUSSION WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT ON ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN RESPECT OF ADDITIONALLY FUNDED PCSOS

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment initiated a discussion on the issues, challenges and opportunities in respect of additionally funded Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in East Herts.

He stated that the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner had not indicated any intention to not continue funding PCSOs. He commented that it would be prudent to examine the future of PCSOs in East Herts.

Members were reminded of the service level agreement whereby East Herts was funding 3 PCSOs at a cost of £28,625 each. Although PCSOs had no powers of arrest, they continued to undertake very valuable work across East Herts, particularly in Ware Trinity and Hertford Sele wards.

Members were advised that consideration had to be given to whether PCSOs should continue to be managed by the police and also whether PCSOs should be given the same powers as Special Constables.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment concluded that PCSOs were a highly visible and highly valued resource that was vital in intelligence gathering and reducing the fear of crime in East Herts.

Councillor S Bull stated that he would not be supportive of the connection between the police and PCSOs being lost. The continued attachment to the police gave PCSOs crucial support in the work they carried out in East Herts.

Councillor R Beeching stated that PCSOs were extremely important and had a very high profile in terms of reducing the fear of crime in East Herts. He expressed concerns that no reference had been made to PCSOs in the 2013 – 2018 Police and Crime Plan for Hertfordshire.

In response to a query from Councillor Beeching, the Head of Community Safety and Health Services advised that Special PCSOs operated in the same manner as Special Constables, i.e. working on a voluntary unpaid basis.

In response to a query from Councillor P Moore, Members were advised that when a PCSO progressed onto being a police officer, it was up to the local police commander as to whether the PCSO vacancy was filled. Any replacement would have to come from an existing PCSO being transferred in, as there were no new recruits being taken on by Hertfordshire Constabulary at this time.

Members were also advised that, where a dedicated schools' PCSO had been withdrawn, the workload was passed onto a Neighbourhood Team PCSO.

Councillor N Symonds stated that PCSOs in Bishop's Stortford Central ward were invaluable and worked very hard in a variety of highly valuable activities, such as preventing more serious problems escalating from what were relatively minor issues.

Members asked the Head of Community Safety and Health Services a number of detailed queries regarding East Herts PCSOs. The Committee was assured that a full and detailed written response to all of the queries would be sent to Members after the meeting.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment stated that the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner was very supportive of volunteers backing up the regular police. Members were reminded that PCSOs were not volunteers and were recruited to work on a full time basis within set hours.

Councillor J Mayes stated that it was imperative that Members were made aware of how many PCSOs were available in East Herts and also the range of organisations which were responsible for funding the East Herts PCSOs.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment thanked Members for their views and feedback. He stated that he would feedback to the Police and Crime Commissioner just how highly East Herts valued PCSOs and the Authority would continue to explore options for supporting PCSO provision. The Chairman thanked the Community Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Member for a very useful debate.

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of Community Scrutiny Committee be noted;

(B) the Head of Community Safety and Health Services formally write to Hertfordshire Constabulary to seek answers to a number of queries from Community Scrutiny Committee regarding PCSO provision in East Herts; and

(C) an update in respect of PCSOs be submitted to Community Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting.

82 WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report outlining the future work programme for the Community Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Officer referred to the work programme being considered early on the agenda in line with the new approach being adopted by all three Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee was invited to approve two Members to contribute to a working group to work with Officers in reviewing the performance indicators relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services reminded Members that all of the Scrutiny Committees had been challenged by the Executive to think more proactively in respect of what was included on the Scrutiny Work Programmes.

The Scrutiny Officer referred to a recent Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) briefing in respect of anti social behaviour and environmental crime. Members were advised that this might be the subject for a future task and finish group, as any changes to the law would require the Authority to fully review its policies relating to these matters.

The Chairman stated that the issue of farmers/general market provision would be initially considered by Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee as part of a

wider consideration on economic development, so she thought it best to not initiate a separate report to Community Scrutiny at this time.

Members had a lengthy discussion in respect of the invitation that had been extended to the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner to attend a meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor N Symonds strongly welcomed the inclusion of this visit on the work programme. This was supported and Members requested that an invite be extended to the Commissioner for the September 2013 meeting with the November 2013 meeting as a fall back option.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services urged Members not to be daunted by the number of items on the work programme. He further suggested that 3 dates could be suggested to the Commissioner with a degree of flexibility being introduced to the work programme to facilitate his visit. Members supported the necessary flexibility in respect of the work programme to accommodate this visit.

Members also agreed that Councillors J Mayes and N Symonds should join the working group to assist the Performance Team in examining whether the performance indicators for Community Scrutiny Committee remained useful and relevant.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the findings of the Performance Indicator working group would be reported to all three Scrutiny Committees in November 2013 and a final report would be submitted to a joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees in 2014.

Members received the report and supported the amendments now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the work programme as amended, be agreed, subject to further

amendments as necessary to facilitate the visit by the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner;

(B) three dates be offered as part of an invite to be extended to the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner, to include the September and November 2013 meetings of the Committee; and

(C) Councillors J Mayes and N Symonds join the working group to assist the Performance Team in examining whether the performance indicators for Community Scrutiny Committee were useful and relevant.

83 UPDATE ON COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAMME

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report that reviewed the grant allocations for the period 1/10/12 to 31/3/13. Members were advised of a number of minor changes in wording in respect of the recommendations.

The Engagement and Partnerships Officer (Grants) advised that community grants supported the aims of the Authority in respect of people, place and prosperity. Members were advised that, in respect of the Council's competitive grants programme, the total allocation for the 2012/13 financial year was £135,269, which had been distributed to 193 groups for a wide range of projects and services.

Members were advised that community grants were generally not awarded where an organisation intended to pass on a grant to another organisation. A strict adherence to this policy meant that, in future, certain applicants (e.g. service organisations) would be ineligible to apply for the new Small Community Grants, thereby unintentionally discouraging an important voluntary effort.

The Engagement and Partnerships Officer (Grants) also pointed out that, in practice, the Authority was more likely

to fund projects where the Council's grant completed or almost completed an applicant's fundraising target. Officers considered this approach was necessary to avoid grant money being tied up unused just waiting for projects that took a long time to complete due to the significant amount of money still to be raised.

Members were further advised that Officers considered that organisations should now be advised to apply later in their fundraising process.

In respect of a query from Councillor R Beeching, Members were advised that the total community capital budget for 2012/13 had been £198,600. Members were reminded that this figure included slippage from previous years' budgets.

Councillor S Bull referred to paragraph 2.19 of the report now submitted. He stated that some of the awards made to Councillors were for public meetings or events that could have been funded by Town or Parish Councils.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services summarised the kind of projects that the Community Grants Programme had been set up to support. A number of Members commented that they valued the Community Grants fund.

The Chairman stated that Members very much valued the work carried out by the Council's Officers responsible for community grants. The Committee received the report and supported the amended recommendations now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress being made by Officers when allocating grants according to agreed policies be noted;

(B) Community Scrutiny Committee agrees to the proposal that service organisations continue to be eligible to apply for a Christmas Party grant as long

as they, if reasonably possibly, apply in partnership with the beneficiary organisation;

(C) Community Scrutiny Committee confirms that grants continue to be awarded as a priority to capital projects that can be completed within the year; and

(D) Community Scrutiny Committee confirms that the Hertfordshire Community Foundation should present information on “dormant funds” in East Herts.

84 SERVICE PLAN MONITORING (OCTOBER 2012 – MARCH 2013)

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report that formed part of the Council’s performance management framework. The report summarised the Council’s achievements against its priorities for 2012/13 and also monitored the outstanding 20 service plan actions from 2011/12.

Members were referred to paragraph 2.1 of the report for an analysis of the 45 actions contained within the 2012/13 service plans. The Chief Executive stated that Essential Reference Paper ‘B’ gave Members an idea of what the service plan actions had delivered for East Herts residents. Essential Reference Paper ‘Ci’ contained information regarding which service plan actions were on target and also where completion dates had been revised.

The Chairman congratulated Officers on the performance in respect of the 2012/13 service plan actions. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the progress against the Council’s priorities and the status of the 2012/13 Service Plan actions and the 20 outstanding 2011/12 Service Plan actions be received.

85 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK
(JANUARY – MARCH 2013) AND PERFORMANCE
OUTTURNS

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indications relating to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period January to March 2013 and the performance outturns for 2012/13.

The Chief Executive apologised to Members for the missing data on page 85 in respect of East Herts Performance Indicator (EHPI) 181 – time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events. This was due to a data quality issue that had been picked up late in the 2012/13 civic year, which showed a mis-match in reporting periods. This had now been corrected.

In response to a query from Councillor M Wood in respect of EHPI 64, in respect of the 10 dwellings that had been brought back into use where 3 had been empty for more than 10 years, the Chief Executive undertook to provide a written response after the meeting in terms of whether these dwellings were privately owned or were owned by a Housing Association.

In respect of EHPI 154, Councillor R Beeching commended the estimated net additional provision of 440 homes in East Herts in 2013/14. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the performance in respect of key indicators relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period January to March 2013 be received; and

(B) performance outturns for 2012/13, as detailed in Essential Reference Paper ‘C’ of the report now submitted, be received.

86 HEALTH AND WELLBEING PANEL REPORT

Councillor N Symonds, as Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Panel, provided a verbal update in respect of the recent work of the Panel. The Minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Panel held on 4 February 2013 were also submitted for information. These were noted by the Committee.

Councillor Symonds advised that Jim McManus, Director of Public Health, Nicky Williams, GP for Hertford and a representative from East and North Herts NHS Trust had all attended the meeting on 4 February 2013. Members were advised that a special meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Panel was being arranged to determine the direction of the Panel for the 2013/14 Civic Year.

Councillor Symonds stated that she would be attending a meeting of the Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee in the next few days. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services advised that Jim McManus had been very complimentary in respect of the work of the Health and Wellbeing Panel in maintaining lines of communication in East Herts.

The Chairman thanked Councillor N Symonds for updating Members of Community Scrutiny Committee. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and
(B) the Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 4 February 2013, be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.04 pm

Chairman
Date