

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2014, AT 7.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman).
Councillors D Abbott, W Ashley, P Ballam,
E Bedford, E Buckmaster, S Bull,
Mrs D Hollebon, J Jones, P Moore, M Pope,
C Rowley, R Sharma, N Symonds,
K Warnell, G Williamson, J Wing, M Wood
and J Wyllie.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Jackson, P Phillips, P Ruffles
and S Rutland-Barsby.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Manager of Housing Services
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Emma Freeman	- Head of People and Property Services
Chris Gibson	- Manager of Corporate Risk
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Henry Lewis	- Head of Customer Services and Business Improvement

Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Marianne McWhinnie	- Engagement and Partnerships Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services
Ceri Pettit	- Corporate Planning and Performance Manager
Paul Pullin	- Manager of Economic Development
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
Kevin Steptoe	- Head of Planning and Building Control Services
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

540 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs D Hollebon and seconded by Councillor G Williamson that Councillor D Andrews be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

RESOLVED – that Councillor D Andrews be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

541 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Beeching, Mrs D Hone, G Jones, J Mayes, T Page, J Ranger, C Woodward and B Wrangles.

542 MINUTES – 14 JANUARY 2014

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

543 RESULTS OF THE 2013 RESIDENTS' SURVEY

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report updating Scrutiny Members regarding the results of the 2013 Residents' Survey. The Engagement and Partnerships Officer gave a presentation that summarised the results of the 2013 Residents' Survey that had been carried out by Opinion Research Services (ORS).

Members were reminded that similar surveys had been conducted in 2009 and 2011. The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees was provided with a very detailed breakdown of the survey results in the report now submitted.

The Engagement and Partnerships Officer highlighted the levels of satisfaction across a number of the key functions of the Authority. Members were provided with a grid analysis summarising the key and low priority issues as

well as areas where improvements were most and least required.

In respect of what would encourage residents to access Council services online, 49% of respondents stated that they needed to be sure that online enquiries would be dealt with as quickly as if contact was made via another method and 29% stated that enquiries should be dealt with more quickly than if contact was made via another method.

27% of respondents commented that they would access Council services online if more information was available on the website whilst 21% said that online assistance and help would encourage them to access services online.

The Engagement and Partnerships Officer concluded that the 2013 Residents' Survey core questions had been transferred to the new LGA recommended format and several new questions had been added. Members were advised that LGA benchmarking with other local authorities who continued to conduct a Residents' Survey with the newly formatted questions would be undertaken when the relevant content became available.

Councillor N Symonds expressed concerns that the survey covered many areas such as education, potholes, roads and pavements, none of which were areas that were the responsibility of East Herts Council. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that the open ended nature of the questions was based on the LGA model, which ensured that Local Authorities were using the same format to facilitate easy comparisons between the survey results.

Members were reminded that the public frequently did not distinguish which Authorities were responsible for which services. The current format of the survey provided a balanced picture of what the public felt were the most important services being provided by the Authorities that covered the East Herts area.

In response to a request from Councillor Symonds, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services undertook to write to the Chief Executive of Hertfordshire County Council to feedback the survey results that related to the functions that were the responsibility of the County Council.

The Leader explained that passing on relevant data to key partners such as Hertfordshire Constabulary and the County Council was an important part of the role of East Herts Council and the Authority was under an obligation to share this information as appropriate.

The Chairman stated that the survey results had not differed greatly from previous surveys although residents appeared to be concerned in respect of drunk and rowdy behaviour as well as drug related activity in some town centres. The Head of Community Safety and Health Services explained that there had in fact been an overall reduction in the numbers of residents that were concerned about drunk and rowdy behaviour.

In response to a query from Councillor G Williamson, the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees was provided with an outline of the how the focus groups would be set up.

Councillor Mrs D Hollebon commented on whether the focus groups should be supported by Members. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that there was no reason why there could not be a focus group that specifically involved Members. Members supported this suggestion.

RESOLVED – that (A) the setting up of structured focus groups, including one of Members, to be targeted on the areas identified by the public as “most important and most need improving”, be supported;

(B) a targeted focus on “quick wins” providing

opportunities for “you asked for we delivered”, be supported; and

(C) feedback from the 2013 Residents Survey being used for the developing Strategic Plan for 2015/16 and the sharing of survey results with key partners, be supported.

544 2014/15 SERVICE PLANS

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on Service Plans for 2014/15. The Service Plans were produced every year by Heads of Service and set out the key activity that would be taking place to deliver the services provided by the Authority. The Service Plans did not include day to day activity and the plans reflected the information in the Consolidated Budget Report. Members were advised that updates would be provided to the relevant individual Scrutiny Committees every six months.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees was invited to scrutinise the Service Plans and to make recommendations to the Executive.

Councillor N Symonds expressed concern that the options for disabled access to the stage and back stage areas of Hertford Theatre had not already been established and implemented.

The Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services stated that the refurbishment works had only addressed the front of house. Officers would now examine a number of options for back stage access at the theatre. Members were advised that comparisons had been made to the Rhodes Arts Complex regarding disabled access and it was clear that the two venues were very different. Councillor M Wood stated that he was pleased that an independent options appraisal would be undertaken regarding future governance arrangements for Hertford Theatre.

In response to a query from Councillor G Williamson regarding flood alleviation, the Head of Community Safety and Health Services stated that a team of two Officers gave advice to the Authority and other agencies in terms of where resources should be invested regarding surface water management.

In response to a query from Councillor K Warnell, the Economic Development Manager stated that support for the 25 – 49 age group who were out of work had been included in the Service Plans as government funding for this age group had been cut. Previous initiatives had focussed on the younger unemployed, but this older age group did include a significant number of long-term unemployed who might benefit from additional support.

Councillor J Wyllie referred to the revised management plan for Waytemore Castle as well as the nearby open space linked to proposed housing development. The Head of Environmental Services advised that Officers were already in consultation with Bishop's Stortford Town Council and would continue to work closely with them in respect of a Management Plan for the Waytemore Castle and the nearby Red, White and Blue open space.

Councillor S Bull commented on why there did not appear to be any reference in this Service Plan regarding the maintenance of Ward Freman Pool. The Head of Environmental Services advised that general maintenance of the pools was funded and carried out by SLM as the Leisure Contractor so this did not appear in the Council's Service Plan or the Capital Programme. The Council was responsible for replacement of major plant and the Capital programme for did include an item for the replacement of air conditioning at that site.

In response to a comment from Councillor M Wood regarding '3G' all weather football pitch provision at Grange Paddocks, the Head of Environmental Services explained that Officers had prepared a business case for both Hartham and Grange Paddocks and it showed there

would be a longer payback period for the Grange Paddocks site. The '3G' provision would be installed first at Hartham and could be extended to Grange Paddocks at a future date if it proved feasible.

Councillor M Pope commented on the feasibility of trade waste recycling via a new commingled collection system. The Head of Environmental Services stated that the feasibility study would examine whether it was possible to extend the current collection regime to businesses if there was capacity in terms of vehicles and refuse crews.

Officers must ensure that the commercial viability of the service was secure as the Authority could not make a loss that would risk damaging this area of Council business. Officers were aware that commercial clients were more interested in the glass and paper recycling as opposed to plastics or organic waste. Members were also advised that the SPARC service may be expanded to include communal properties.

Members were provided with an update in respect of the cross border targeting of fly tipping and joint prosecutions. Members were also updated in respect of deliverable savings regarding the business case for rationalising and improving the print solutions delivered across partner Authorities.

The joint meeting resolved to recommend that the Executive approve the Service Plan activity for 2014/15.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees considers that the Service Plan activity for 2014/15, as now submitted, be approved.

545 2013/14 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR ESTIMATES AND FUTURE TARGETS

The Leader submitted a report on performance indicators that the Council was required to monitor and publish

annually in the Annual Report. The report advised Members of estimated performance for 2013/14 and the targets for the next three years.

Members were advised that the future targets were reflected in the Consolidated Budget Report and the final performance outturns would be reported to Members in May 2014. Members were also advised that there were seven indicators where benchmarking data was available. When Officers were looking at the latest data available from the LGA, five indicators were estimated to be performing better than the district average, one in line with the district average and the other below average.

Councillor N Symonds commented on the lower satisfaction rating amongst the customers who used Grange Paddocks leisure centre. Officers advised that, in terms of customer satisfaction, drawing comparisons between the leisure centres was difficult due to the different types of service on offer at each location. It was also noted that, although lower than before, the current figure still fell within the 'Good' banding. A detailed explanation of the scores would be provided outside the meeting.

Councillor M Pope commented on the delivery figures for affordable housing and asked whether this included reuse of redundant garage sites. The Leader stated that these were areas for discussion with housing association colleagues. The Manager of Housing Services referred to significant housing developments on larger sites in Buntingford plus the applications at Bishop's Stortford North, all of which should contribute to an increase in affordable housing units in the coming years.

In response to comments from Councillors K Warnell and J Wing regarding the percentage of planning applications decisions delegated to Officers compared to those made by Committee, the Head of Planning and Building Control stated that it was the major and significant planning applications that were reported to Members due to the

public interest in such applications.

Members were advised that having more planning applications decided by Members was a less efficient process than decisions delegated to Officers. The Head of Planning and Building Control stated that changing the delegation arrangements could result in a significant increase in the number of applications determined by the Development Management Committee.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees resolved that the Executive be informed that the future targets for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 should be approved. The Chairman thanked the Heads of Service for attending to answer Members' questions.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the future targets for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 should be approved.

546 CAR PARK PAY AND DISPLAY CHARGING POLICY

The Executive Member for Economic Development submitted a report to present policy proposals for off-street pay and display charges in 2014/15 and 2015/16, for consideration by Members when making recommendations to the Executive.

The Executive Member for Economic Development advised that the Parking and Transport Strategy focussed on promoting commerce and ensuring the availability of parking. Members were advised that there was now an increased focus on what residents wanted to use car parks for. The car parks were increasingly being used for evening activities.

Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for the proposed new structure for pay and display charge tariffs. Members were advised that there would be capital costs of implementing the new charging regime. Essential Reference Paper 'C' contained a summary of

the financial implications of the proposed changes.

In response to a query from Councillor K Warnell, Members were advised that the new regime included free parking for a half an hour period, an all day charge that went through to the end of the charging period at 22:00 in the evening and a flat rate fee of just £1 after 16:00 hours. Councillor G Williamson referred to the identified £340,000 deficit should the new regime be approved. He commented on whether this shortfall would have to be funded by Council taxpayers.

The Executive Member for Economic Development referred Members to Essential Reference Paper 'F'. He stated that Council taxpayers would not be funding the proposals as there was currently an overall £610,000 revenue surplus in the car parking budget which contributed to the general fund for managing Council services.

Councillor J Wing stated that he was supportive of the proposed changes as they answered many of the key criticisms he had of the previous proposals put to scrutiny in respect of 30 minutes of free parking in the evening. He sought and was given clarification that the public would need to have a valid ticket displayed on their vehicles at all times including for the first free half hour.

Members enquired about the method by which parking would be monitored, asking about the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). Members were advised that ANPR might be one of many options for the future management of the Council's car parks and that the proposal would require the display of a valid pay and display ticket using the Council's current system of operation.

The Head of Information, Parking and Customer Services advised that a full review of the options for the future management of car parks, including ANPR, was being progressed and was part of the Parking Service Plan.

Changes to the current management system would require investment and Members would receive reports recommending the best operational system and a cost and benefit analysis of alternatives, to enable selection of the most appropriate system. Funding any investment would need to be considered against the Council's policy of the users of car parks paying for their use as opposed to the taxpayer at large.

The Executive Member for Economic Development responded to a query from Councillor J Wyllie in that he completely agreed that the Authority should publicise the fact that East Herts Council was funding the ticket rebate scheme run by Sainsburys in Jackson Square, Bishop's Stortford.

Councillor K Warnell commented that the Bishop's Stortford Car Parks were some distance from town centre shops and 30 minutes free parking was not sufficient time to walk to most shops, complete purchases then make it back to the car park.

In response to concerns from Councillor N Symonds in respect of a loss in car parking revenue and Council Tax increases, the Executive Member for Economic Development reminded Members that the strategic priorities fund would be utilised for the two year period to balance any shortfall of car parking revenue resulting from the proposed changes. Members were also reminded that there were no plans to increase Council Tax for the next 2 years.

Councillor M Pope referred to the operating hours of the residents' permit parking schemes. He commented on the costs of enforcement resulting from the proposed changes. The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services advised that the parking permit scheme hours could be revised by a Traffic Order Regulation (TRO), subject to funding approval, if it proved necessary and local residents agreed. He also advised that a moderate level of funding was available for evening

enforcement, which would be at a lesser scale than that normally conducted during daytime hours.

In response to a query from Councillor J Jones, the Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services advised that two Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) would be sufficient to promote the aim of enforcing compliance of evening parking across the District. Civil Enforcement would cover the three towns on a roster basis . It was also confirmed that some evening enforcement of trouble spots was undertaken currently.

The Leader stated that it was important to communicate with residents regarding the positive steps being taken by the Authority, such as funding the ticket rebate scheme overseen by Sainsburys in Jackson Square, Bishop's Stortford and had absorbed the recent VAT increases without passing any costs onto the public.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer Services commented that it was a complex and sometimes difficult paper. Members were asked to fully satisfy themselves that they understood the open ended nature of the risks as set out in the report and the potential range as set out at section 2.3.6 of the report now submitted.

Following a show of hands, the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees agreed by majority that the Executive be advised that the proposals for the parking pay and display charges policy should be supported as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that the proposals for the parking pay and display charges policy as detailed in the report submitted should be supported; and in particular:

- (A) the changes to pay and display charges detailed in paragraph 2.3 of the report submitted in Hertford, Ware and Bishop's Stortford be supported;

- (B) the introduction of evening charges in Ware, Hertford and Bishop’s Stortford be supported as detailed in paragraph in 2.4 of the report submitted;
- (C) the option to add limited resources to enable evening enforcement in order to maintain current daytime enforcement levels across the District, as detailed in section 2.5 of the report submitted, be supported;
- (D) the one-off costs to achieve the changes detailed in section 2.6 of the report submitted, be supported; and
- (E) the funding arrangements detailed in section 3.1 of the report submitted, be supported.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chairman
Date