

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON  
TUESDAY 18 MARCH 2014, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman).  
Councillors E Bedford, S Bull, G Jones,  
J Mayes, T Page, M Pope, J Ranger,  
G Williamson and J Wing.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Ruffles and S Rutland-Barsby.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Lorna Georgiou	- Communications Team Leader
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services
Neil Sloper	- Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

614 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor R Sharma. It was noted that Councillor S Bull was substituting for Councillor R Sharma.

615 MINUTES – 26 NOVEMBER 2013

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

616 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred to the recent death of former Councillor N Poulton. He stated that he was sure this sad news would be formally recognised at a future meeting of Council.

617 ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMMUNICATIONS AND REVISED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2014

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The Leader of the Council submitted a report which introduced the findings of the annual review of communications as well as the revised communication strategy and social media principles.

The Communications Team Leader drew Members' attention to a revised Essential Reference Paper 'B', which had been tabled at the meeting and sought Members' comments on the draft strategy. She summarised the content of the report, strategy, and its focus for 2014.

In response to a query from Councillor J Ranger regarding the direction of the arrow in relation to press enquiries, the Communications Team Leader acknowledged that this might appear as an anomaly and explained how this should be interpreted in terms of the timely delivery of information and content using a variety of media tools.

Councillor J Ranger referred to the number of parish magazines he received which, he stated, never contained any information from the Council. The Communications Team Leader advised that information was regularly emailed to Parish Clerks. She asked that, if Members

had other contacts responsible for publishing the magazines, to forward that information to her. This was supported.

Councillor Ranger expressed concern about the appearance of Link Magazine, and its possible perception by some, that it looked like 'junk mail'. The Communications Team Leader stated that following a residents' survey, reader figures for Link Magazine were very good.

The Chairman suggested that the Communications Team prepare an item for the Members' Information Bulletin regarding contacts for Parish Magazines.

The Communications Team Leader provided an update in relation to responsibilities for webcasting and its features. The Chairman referred to some of its functions, citing instances where these had appeared not to work properly. The Director of Finance and Support Services provided an update in terms of the webcasting provision, which had been the subject of a report to scrutiny in November 2013.

In response to a query from Councillor G Jones regarding the Communications Strategy and its functional responsibility, the Communications Team Leader provided an explanation regarding what the strategy hoped to achieve. The Director of Finance and Support Services explained the roles of Democratic Services in terms on inputting information via ModGov and the role of the Communications Team in disseminating that information.

In response to a query from Councillor T Page regarding the draft strategy, the Director of Finance and Support Services explained how the strategy complemented the Council's Corporate Strategic Plan. She stated that Members had an opportunity of scrutinising the strategy every year.

The Communications Team Leader explained how social media, and the use of video, was being used more widely as a communications tool.

In response to a query from Councillor M Pope regarding the staff awards, the Director of Finance and Support Services stated that Corporate Management Team (CMT) had taken a decision to cancel the award ceremony in 2013/14, adding that staff were provided with refreshments by Directors at all staff briefings as a way to say "Thank You" to as many staff as possible throughout the year.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received;

(B) the figures from the annual review of communications be noted; and

(C) any contacts responsible for publishing Parish Magazines be forwarded to the Communications Team.

618 WEB SITE ONE – YEAR ACTION PLAN: LESSONS LEARNED AND CLOSURE

The Head of Information, Parking and Customer Services submitted a report inviting Members to scrutinise the Council's website action plan. The report also presented new improvement actions embedded within the Information, Parking and Customer Services Service Plan.

In response to a query from Councillor T Page regarding identifying the location of an internet enquirer, the Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services explained the associated difficulties and gave examples when this would be possible if the customer needed to or chose to provide their address, i.e. requesting information, updates or certain council services.

In response to a query from Councillor J Ranger regarding the Public Sector Network (PSN) Security, the Director of Finance and Support Services explained that the Council was now PSN compliant. She explained what levels of data security existed and that Members would only receive data relevant to their role.

In response to a further query from Councillor J Ranger regarding DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) Police checks, the Chairman stated that the Council did not have direct responsibility for the elderly or vulnerable, so only a limited number of staff had to have this level of check.

Councillor J Wing stated that the new design website was more user friendly. The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services stated that it had been given RNIB approval at Level 1 and that the Authority was working towards achieving the higher Level 2.

The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services referred to the use of video media to promote the Council and said that a project filming Councillors show casing their wards was underway. He also outlined the need to ensure that the website did not become too 'noisy' and cluttered making it difficult for the public to navigate.

In response to a query from Councillor M Pope regarding "paperless" agendas, the Director of Finance and Support Services stated that this was already available via the ModGov app. Members supported the suggestion that they receive further information on this via the Members' Information Bulletin.

Members debated the use of the Extranet. The Chairman suggested that it would be advantageous to have training on this once the new extranet was available. This was supported.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Council’s achievements under the Website Action Plan be noted;

(B) the actions detailed within the Service Plan be noted;

(C) the ModGov app and how this can be used by Members be circulated via the Members’ Information Bulletin; and

(D) training on the updated Extranet be arranged for Members.

619 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK – OCTOBER 2013 TO JANUARY 2014

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The Director of Finance and Support Services submitted an exception report on finance and performance monitoring for the period October 2013 to January 2014.

The Director of Finance and Support Services provided a summary in terms of performance and where targets had not been met. It was noted that, in relation to EHPI 2.2 (Waste: missed collections per 100,000 collections of household waste), this had been reported as over target at 57.28 for January 2014 but was 30.42 for February 2014 and so was now back within target. It was noted that the matter had already been reviewed by Environment Scrutiny Committee, who were satisfied that the performance figures fell within those expected for such a significant change to the service. The Director of Finance and Support Services provided updates in relation to other performance targets.

In response to a query from Councillor J Mayes regarding EHPI 12a (No. of short term sickness absence days per FTE staff in post) and EHPI 12c (Total number of sickness absence days per FTE staff in Post), the Director of Finance and Support Services summarised the factors which affected these targets.

Councillor S Bull referred to the fact that there seemed to be a number of discarded plastic recycling boxes around. The Director of Finance and Support Service stated that she would ask the Head of Service to write to the Member regarding the advice for reuse or disposal of these boxes.

Councillor J Wing commented on the reduction in the anticipated investment and car parking incomes. The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that car park income depended on usage. She assured the Member that the Council would do all it could to ensure that the car parks remained accessible, although noted that one had closed for a short time for refurbishment. In response to his query concerning investment income, the Director of Finance and Support Services stated that a number of assumptions had been made last year which had resulted in a positive variance of £500,000. This was now being used to offset the current negative variance generated by lower than predicted interest rates. She assured the Member that every effort was being made to secure the best rates of interest in relation to the Council's investments but this does depend on the rates available within the market.

In response to a query from Councillor T Page regarding the management of cash assets, the Director of Finance and Support Services outlined the role of the Council's Investment Panel and Treasury Management Strategy and sources of independent advice upon which the Council relied.

Councillor T Page referred to Development Management income and the suggestion that 'larger fees' were being paid in Buntingford and Hertford. The Director of Finance and Support Services said that she would ask the Head of Service to provide a written response.

Councillor T Page raised the issue the movement in income levels for recycling income from other bodies. The Director of Finance and Support Services said that she would ask the Head of Service to provide a detailed

written response.

In response to a query by Councillor J Wing regarding car washing activities in Council owned car parks and the contracting arrangements for these, the Director of Finance and Support Services said that she would ask the Head of Service to provide a written response.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

## 620 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the Committee's future work programme for 2014/15.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that there would be an opportunity to add topics to the agenda via a workshop on Tuesday 25 March 2014. It was noted that the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services had asked for an update report on the Revenues and Benefits Shared Services following its amalgamation two years ago to be submitted to this Committee.

In response to a query from Councillor T Page regarding the LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) the Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that a report had been recently considered. She undertook to investigate the matter further within a remit of whether any investments had been made and what outcomes and benefits to East Herts residents might be seen.

Members approved the amended Work Programme.

RESOLVED – that the Work Programme, as now amended, be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm