

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 20
FEBRUARY 2018, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Allen (Chairman)
Councillors M Casey, G Cutting, B Deering,
I Devonshire, H Drake, J Goodeve,
Mrs D Hollebon, P Moore, M Stevenson
and N Symonds.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Alder, K Crofton, G Jones and
P Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Barfoot	- Healthy Lifestyles Programme Officer
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Nathan Bookbinder	- Policy Officer
Isabel Brittain	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Fiona Corcoran	- Scrutiny Officer
Paul Dean	- Principal Planning Enforcement Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing

Jess Khanom	- and Health - Head of Operations
Ian Sharratt	- Environmental Manager
Helen Standen	- Director
Kevin Steptoe	- Head of Planning and Building Control Services
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Adele Taylor	- Director
Liz Watts	- Chief Executive
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

363 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Abbott and M Freeman.

364 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

365 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. The Chairman referred to the need to identify new topics for scrutiny and he looked forward to sharing some ideas with Members.

366 UPDATE FROM EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Councillor G Jones the Executive Member for Economic Development, gave a presentation summarising his portfolio which covered:

- Economic development (from the viewpoint of a business friendly Council, enabling entrepreneurs and business start -ups, supporting the rural economy, facilitating vibrant Town Centres; supporting the visitor economy and lobbying for the right supporting infrastructures;
- Parking, (in relation to car parks, Residents' Parking Z and Enforcement issues);
- Transport (sustainability, supporting the community and strategic consultation).

The Executive Member provided a summary of work in relation to projects which had been reported to the Executive between the period October 2015 and February 2018.

Councillor N Symonds referred to her concerns about Parking Enforcement and tickets issued to the elderly. The Executive Member acknowledged her concerns adding that tickets were issued if regulations had not been observed and of the possibility of appealing in genuine cases. He

referred to the abuses which did occur in relation to Blue Badge cases.

Councillor Mrs D Hollebon referred to single yellow lines in relation to dropped kerbs as this was a source of confusion to some. The Executive Member undertook to raise this matter with Hertfordshire County Council.

Councillor B Deering sought an update in relation to the progress of "Launch Pad" and Residents' Parking Zones. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained the initial support given to small business users of "Launch Pad" and that this would be reviewed in 12 months' time.

The Executive Member explained the problems caused by Residents' Parking Zones in terms of displacing parking problems and of the need to introduce a scheme of wide-ranging consultation before any other such schemes were considered. He referred to the possibility of using Section 106 monies to address issues caused by displaced parking caused by RPZs.

Councillor G Cutting referred to abuses of Blue Badge parking particularly in Bishop's Stortford. The Executive Member explained the difficulties in relation to taking action against such abuses which included the need to have the driver present.

Councillor M Stevenson sought and was provided with clarification on the issue of lobbying for the right infrastructure. The Executive Member cited fast Broadband in rural areas as an example. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy commented that

infrastructure had a direct link with the Council's District Plan and in making sure developers provided what was needed to support their proposals in terms of utilities.

Councillor H Drake was concerned about reviewing the users of "Launch Pad" positions' in 12 months' time adding that it was the first 18-24 months which were critical to new businesses in terms of their survival. She sought and was provided with clarification on Sunday parking and enforcement issues in relation to parking at Grange Paddocks in Bishop's Stortford. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained the situation would be reviewed in 12 months' time when there would be a further report to Members. If viewed as a success, additional funding would be sought for an extension of the "Launch Pad" programme.

Members thanked the Executive Member for his summary.

RESOLVED – that the presentation be received.

367 CORPORATE SERVICE PLANS 2018/19

The Executive Member for Finance and Support Services submitted a report setting out the Corporate Service Plans for the civic year 2018/19. It was noted that the Corporate Strategic Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20 was agreed by the former Corporate Business Scrutiny committee in February 2016. The Draft Service Plans were detailed within Essential Reference Paper "B" and Members' comments were sought for consideration by Council on 1 March 2018. The Policy Officer provided a summary of the report in terms of the main structure changes of the Service Plans, adding that the priorities aimed to support the Council's priorities.

The Committee Chairman highlighted a duplication of an action (on page 29/30), he sought and was provided with clarification on the issue of “employee engagement” and suggested that direct interviews with staff be organisation to gain feedback and in addition, to recording the number of page views.

Councillor Mrs Hollebbon sought clarification of the action regarding “extra care housing”. The Head of Housing and Health explain the principle around this incentive scheme and explained that Officers were exploring how this could be implemented in East Herts.

Councillor M Casey made reference to the absence of performance measures and project milestone targets. The Head of Planning and Building Control explained that the Council had targets in relation to planning application determinations (i.e. those for major and other applications) and agreed to include these.

Councillor N Symonds referred to parks and open spaces highlighting her concerns regarding Trinity Church Park in Bishop’s Stortford and the action not taken by the developer, to improve this. Officers agreed to investigate Members’ concerns. Councillor G Cutting echoed Members’ concerns and urged Officers to remind the developers of their obligations.

Councillor N Symonds congratulated the Head of Benefits and Revenues and her staff in the housing benefit and revenue teams in looking after vulnerable clients.

Councillor Mrs D Hollebbon referring to Licensing Policy and

food hygiene law, the Head of Housing and Health explained the "Scores on Doors" Policy and agreed to remove the word "broadly" in the performance measures column.

Members welcomed the decrease in the use of external staff for legal matters (which was only used when the necessary expertise was not available) and was pleased to learn that the Council was now generating income by providing legal support to other local authorities.

In response to a query by Councillor H Drake, the Head of Housing and Health explained that "E-Taxi" referred to an electronic vehicle. It was noted that the timescale for its introduction was anticipated to be November 2018.

The success of the "Forever Active" programme was welcomed and Members urged the need to extend such a programme with concessions to younger people aged between 18 – 30. Members noted that the "Active-in" programme was aimed at this demographic and Officers agreed to amend the service plan document to highlight this.

Councillor H Drake referred to the issue of sustainable transport initiatives and the need to change the people travel. She suggested the use of shuttle buses and car share schemes for those travelling to train stations. Officers advised that the Council had recruited an officer to work on sustainable transport at a local level.

Councillor B Deering welcomed a strategic approach to the planning role and the need to have a coherent approach especially with Hertfordshire County Council and

neighbouring authorities. He referred to the need to ensure sufficient ambition about Section 106 funding arrangements. Members were assured that Officers were working closely with other authorities to ensure a co-ordinated approach to long term planning and of the Council's involvement with the Hertfordshire Infrastructure Planning Partnership (HIPP) and the Sustainable Development Board.

Councillor I Devonshire expressed his concern on the issue of planning enforcement. The Head of Planning and Building Control explained that this issue, and the Council's successes were considered elsewhere on the agenda. He assured Members that the Council was in a better position to move forward on enforcement work.

The Committee Chairman asked how the issue of performance measures, which focussed on the number of sickness absence days related to the action "to deliver the Organisational Development(OD) Strategy 2015-10 and concerns referred to in the employee survey (2017). The Policy Officer agreed to review this and let Members know.

Members received the report and made the following recommendations to Council now detailed.

RESOLVED - that Council be advised that (A)
Members' recommend approval of the Corporate
Service Plans 2018/19 now detailed;

(B) Members' comments as now detailed be
forwarded and considered by Council on 1 March
2018.

368 DRAFT HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2018 – 2023

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing submitted a report updating the new strategy. The Healthy Lifestyles Programme Officer provided a summary of report and highlighted the key changes to the new strategy as detailed. The new strategy also included new public health concepts aimed at developing ways to tackle existing problems. Working as part of a “whole” system was cited as an example of helping in delivering results. In this context, the role of East Herts Social Prescribing Service was explained and how this interacted with a range of partners to help those in need.

Councillor Mrs Hollebon praised the role of the Council’s Social Prescribing Service and the Officer’s work in Bishop’s Stortford. She suggested that the service be expanded. Councillors P Moore and N Symonds echoed the positive comments on the service. Councillor Symonds also referred to the scheme “Girls Can” in Harlow and its success.

Councillor M Stevenson queried the possibility of having a specialist social prescribing service e.g. aimed at children or mental health. The Healthy Lifestyles Programme Officer explained that the current focus was on the frail and elderly. Councillor Mrs D Hollebon queried whether social prescribing could be developed within the “Forever Active” programme. She felt that Members needed to work with Officers on this issue and that it should include all age ranges.

The Committee Chairman, on behalf of Members thanked the Officers for their hard work in moving this initiative

forward.

The Committee asked that their comments as detailed, be taken on board by the Head of Housing and Health when the strategy is redrafted.

RESOLVED – that Members' comments as detailed be taken on board by the head of Housing and Health when the strategy is redrafted.

369 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT: UPDATE

The Director, Helen Standen submitted an update on the Action Plan in relation to the Council's Planning Enforcement Service. She provided a summary of the background and explained that only one case remained with LSR (Planning Consultants) with all cases either resolved fully or returned at the Council's request for follow up action to be taken. An update was provided in relation to Esbies.

Councillor K Crofton referred to an email he had received from Ardeley Parish Council and an enforcement issue regarding retrospective planning approval. He expressed his concern at the lack of communication on the matter. The Enforcement Officer explained that he had updated the Parish Council on the progress made. He conceded that communication could have been better.

Members debated at length, a request that they be forwarded a list of enforcement cases within their respective wards. The Head of the Planning and Building Control explained that the Council would need to take a cautious approach in this regard as some information was

data sensitive and may not be in the public area. As such releasing personal information could be a breach of current data protection legislation and GDPR legislation effective from 1 May 2018. He agreed to seek advice from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and would provide what information he could as and when that advice had been received.

The Committee noted the report and the approach to be taken.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress made be noted;

(B) the Head of Planning and Building Control seek advice from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on a request by Members, to be circulated with enforcement case information on a ward basis.

370 UPDATE REPORT FROM THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Councillor J Goodeve, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group submitted a report updating Members on the findings of the Grounds Maintenance (GM) Contract Task and Finish Group following consideration of the advice outlined by the industry consultant. The Task and Finish Chairman provided a summary of the report.

Councillor M Casey referred to the good work done by the current contractor John O'Connor and suggested that it was logical to extend the current contract given that the United Kingdom would be leaving the EU in March 2019. Members supported the viewpoint that the contract go out

to competitive tender, regardless of EU law and that price and quality was an important factor in the tendering process.

Councillor H Drake suggested that dog and waste bins be rationalised. This was supported. The issue of the contractor's increased costs and their pension contributions was discussed; the point was made that it was for the contractor to manage their viability in relation to pension contributions not the Councils.

The arrangement with Hertfordshire County Council regarding the maintenance of highway verges was discussed. The Leisure and Parks Development Manager explained what work the Council undertook on behalf of the County Council. The Head of Operations acknowledged the need for the verges across the District to be consistently cut to the same length, adding that it was a question of whether Members wanted to financially "top up" the arrangement to achieve this or to let this grow and allow the county to maintain the verges to their "safety standard".

Councillor H Drake stated that it was important to get the price and take advantage of technological advances. In response to query from Councillor M Casey regarding the cost of the tendering process, the Head of Operations undertook to write to Members.

Councillor B Deering referred to the "top up" arrangement and the need to inject £114,000 additional funds to achieve a consistent approach to grass verges. He commented that the additional funds needed to be reviewed in the context of how many metres of grass verges needed

cutting and in this case it would be “pennies”. The Committee Chairman thanked the Member for putting this into perspective.

Member thanked the Task and Finish Group for their role in the investigation process.

Members supported a proposal to procure a new contract and agreed that price and quality was important in the tendering process. Members also supported the rationalisation of litter and dog waste bins and felt that the County “top up” arrangements should continue to ensure consistency of verge cuts across the district. The arrangements referred to in paragraph 4 of the report were noted. It was also noted that further Task and Finish Group meetings would be arranged to consider ongoing advice and evidence.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Executive be advised that a proposal to procure a new contract for the provision of grounds maintenance service as part of the Competitive Procedure with negotiation as the preferred procurement approach be supported.

(B) Members’ views on the importance of price and quality on the tendering process be noted;

(C) the rationalisation of litter and dog waste bins be supported;

(D) the County “top up” arrangements continue to ensure consistency of verge cuts district wide;

(E) the arrangements referred to in paragraph 4 of

the report be noted;

(F) additional Task and Finish Group meetings be arranged to consider ongoing advice and evidence.

371 WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

The Chairman of Scrutiny Committee submitted a report setting out the Committee’s future work programme. The Scrutiny Officer provided a summary of the programme.

The Committee agreed the draft work programme as detailed.

RESOLVED – that the draft Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as now detailed, be approved.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm

Chairman
Date