

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
26 OCTOBER 2010, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Woodward (Chairman)
Councillors P R Ballam, S A Bull, K Darby,
A D Dodd, P Grethe, Mrs D Hone and
V Shaw.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews and P A Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Housing Strategy and Policy Officer
Dave Cooper	- Performance Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Lizzie Robertson	- Community Safety Co-ordinator
Brian Simmonds	- Head of Community Safety

340 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors L O Haysey, G E Lawrence and R L Parker. It was noted that Councillor S A Bull was substituting for Councillor G E Lawrence.

341 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2010, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

342 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members that, in the period up to the Hunsdon by-election on 11 November 2010, "purdah" rules applied. These rules existed to ensure that there was no risk of public funds being used and/or actions undertaken to support one particular political party or individual.

The Chairman reminded Members that he welcomed any feedback on the new approach to meetings of the Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman welcomed the guests from Hertfordshire Constabulary to the meeting.

343 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S A Bull declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 347, in that he was a board member of South Anglia Housing Association.

Councillor P Grethe declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 347, in that she was a board member of Riversmead Housing Association.

Councillors P R Ballam and S A Bull declared personal interests in the matter referred to at Minute 350 in relation to EHPI8.42 and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in that they were Members of the CAB Committee.

344 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL

Councillor D M Hone provided a summary of what had recently taken place from a Hertfordshire County Council Health Scrutiny perspective and in relation to topics and presentations covered at East Herts Health Engagement

Panel meetings on 22 June 2010 and 19 October 2010.

Councillor Hone stated that the slides from the presentation given by Richard Beazley and Nick Carver at the 19 October 2010 meeting of the Health Engagement Panel had been circulated via the Members Information Bulletin. She also stated that the Minutes of the most recent meeting of the Health Scrutiny Committee were on the website of Hertfordshire County Council.

Councillor Hone referred to concerns around the lack of an urgent care centre for Bishop's Stortford. She stressed that the general view was this was currently unaffordable. She stated that the opening hours of the Herts and Essex Community Hospital had been extended on weekends and weekday evenings.

Councillor Hone emphasised that more information was needed in relation to what treatment was available at the Herts and Essex Community Hospital. Patients needed more guidance as to where they should go for treatment for all types of accidents. She stated that finance was a major concern with an ageing population placing an increased demand on health services.

In response to concerns from Councillor A D Dodd around anxiety and uncertainty in respect of healthcare provision for Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth, Councillor Hone stressed that talks were ongoing with the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

She also stated that discussions were due to take place with the Leader and Councillor R L Parker in relation to healthcare provision. The MP for Hertford and Stortford had also not forgotten about the issue.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Minutes of the Health Engagement Panel meetings held on 22 June 2010 and 19 October 2010 be received; and

(B) the update of Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee be noted.

345 COMMUNITY SAFETY ACTION PLAN: PROGRESS ON
OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

The Head of Community Safety and Licensing submitted a report updating Members on the progress made by the Community Safety Partnership in respect of the delivery of the Community Safety Plan 2008 -11.

The Committee was provided with detailed information in respect of crime trends in East Herts. Members were reminded that East Herts remained a safe place to live, work and visit. This was borne out by the consistently low levels of crime in comparison with national trends and the neighbouring districts within Hertfordshire.

Members were referred to page 79 of the report now submitted for the East Herts Community Safety Action Plan for 2010/11. The Head of Community Safety and Licensing stressed that the allocation of resources would likely result in less funds being available to the Community Safety Partnership.

The Chairman stated that the perception of crime was often far higher than the actual levels of criminal activity. He emphasised the role of crime prevention panels in maintaining the low levels of crime in East Herts.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator, advised that there were two crime prevention panels in the District and both were very successful. She stated that funding was available for crime prevention measures that were identified by these panels.

Councillor A D Dodd stated that Hertfordshire Constabulary was to be congratulated on its performance. He expressed concerns in relation to funding cuts impacting on the provision of PCSOs in East Herts. He commented however, that the public seemed more willing to engage with Street Pastors than with the Police.

In response to a query from Councillor K Darby on how

the success of Street Pastors was being measured, the Community Safety Co-ordinator stated that she did receive information in respect of the performance of the Street Pastors.

Inspector Chris Hunt commented that a measure of success was the fact that Street Pastors were frequently being called upon to work later into the night due to the late night economy. The Head of Community Safety and Licensing stated that difficult choices might have to be made in relation to Street Pastors and PCSOs as funding was being put at risk due to the current economic climate.

Councillor P R Ballam commented that problems often arose due to the activities of one or a group of licensed premises. Inspector Hunt advised that the police were generally pleased with the results of Officers going out to diffuse situations with the late night economy.

He commented that the recent review of the Boars Head Premises Licence in Bishop's Stortford had been a positive outcome and a lot of work had gone into that application. He stated however, that the outcome of the review of the Hertford Sugar Hut Premises License had been a shame for all concerned.

In response to a comment from Councillor S A Bull in respect of noise disturbance until 3 am, Inspector Hunt stated that PCSOs typically only worked until midnight unless there was an urgent requirement for their support later than this.

The Head of Community Safety and Licensing stressed that joint funding of PCSOs and Taxi Marshalling required constant liaison to avoid a house of cards style collapse in support should one agency or authority withdraw support.

Inspector Hunt stated that a lot of work was ongoing in respect of diversionary activities, such as work with youth clubs to keep young people off the streets where they could be causing a disturbance to some residents.

He further advised that CCTV was increasingly being monitored as part of the constant battle against supplying alcohol to minors. He stressed that this was an offence and CCTV was often used to provide evidence. It was usually a requirement of the premises licence for the licensee to install CCTV which could then be reviewed by police after appropriate permission had been granted.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator emphasised that the action plans detailed in the report now submitted were updated every quarter and the Community Safety Partnership was performing well against its objectives.

In response to concerns raised by Councillors P R Ballam and C B Woodward in respect of poorly attended police locality meetings and poor publicity, Inspector Hunt stated that recent meetings had been planned well in advance, before the new police shift patterns had been finalised. He expressed his hope that this situation would improve. He stressed that if Members of the public were interested in the activities of the police, then they would attend the meetings.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the comments now detailed, in respect of progress made against the 2008 - 2011 Community Safety Action Plan, be noted.

346 DESIGNATED PUBLIC PLACE ORDERS (DPPOS)

The Head of Community Safety and Licensing gave a presentation in respect of Designated Public Places Orders (DPPOs) in East Herts. He stated that powers under the Criminal Justice and Police Act (2001) enabled local authorities to designate areas with restrictions on drinking alcohol in public.

Members were advised of the powers available to Officers under DPPOs. The public were not committing an offence just by drinking in such an area, but were in breach of the law if they failed to stop drinking when instructed to do so by an

Officer.

The Committee was made aware of the consultation that should take place before a DPPO was put in place. There were 4 DPPOs in East Herts; Priory Grounds in Ware, Parsonage Lane in Bishop's Stortford, Hertford Town Centre and Bishop's Stortford Town Centre. Sawbridgeworth Town Centre was also due to be designated a DPPO.

Members were introduced to Bishop's Stortford DPPO as an example of a town centre DPPO. The Head of Community Safety and Licensing presented an analysis of why DPPOs were necessary. He also provided an explanation as to whether DPPOs had been successful in East Herts.

The Committee was advised that the East Herts Community Safety Partnership had requested continued support for DPPO applications when there was sufficient evidence to support their need, as well as resources available to enforce them.

In response to a query from Councillor A D Dodd, the Committee was advised that Members would have input into the preparation of a DPPO, such as the one due be put in place in Sawbridgeworth.

The Committee noted the presentation.

RESOLVED – that the presentation be noted.

347 EAST HERTS HOUSING HOMELESSNESS AND HOMELESS PREVENTION ACTION PLAN: ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

The Executive Member for Housing and Health submitted a report that highlighted successful performance on the second year of the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan 2008-2013. Members were advised that the report also presented Members with a review of the Action Plan for their consideration.

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager advised that

Officers were having a busy year in terms of issuing debt advice and assisting residents who were experiencing debt problems. The Committee was advised that residents who sought assistance from debt advice workshops often had severe issues with debt.

Members were advised that housing associations often used mortgage repossession grants to buy a private property from a resident in debt and then leased that property back to them. A data sharing protocol for key information was being developed so that people experiencing debt problems could be identified earlier by Housing Associations, the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Local Authorities.

The Committee was advised that the Homeless Prevention Grant had been renewed for another year. Officers had expected this grant to end in 2010 but this was not now the case. The Grant was £30,000 and Officers had the freedom to utilise this funding as they saw fit. However, the size of this grant in the next financial year had not yet been published.

Councillor V Shaw sought and was given clarification as to the approach taken when dealing with hidden homeless households. The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager stated where a resident had been evicted and was in debt, they would not be allowed back onto the housing register until they had a payment plan in place for at least 6 months and their debt had reduced to £250.

Members were advised that for some who were in debt, the only way forward was to seek accommodation through housing associations or the private sector housing market.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the progress of the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy Action plan 2008-2013 be noted.

348 EQUALITIES: DELIVERING BETTER SERVICES FOR OUR CUSTOMERS - IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR COUNCIL SERVICE USERS

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report updating Members on the progress made since the original action plan had been presented to Community Scrutiny Committee on 27 October 2009.

The Director advised Members that the new Equalities Act 2010 collated what had become a fragmented situation in terms of legislation. He advised that this report identified any changes in obligation following the new Equality Act, which came into force on 1 October 2010.

Members were advised that there might be issues for the Authority under the new Act in terms of awareness raising, particularly when reviewing employment policies. The Director emphasised that Members would be kept informed as more detail about the implications of this Act became clearer.

The Director stated that equality impact assessments had already impacted on the functions of the Authority. He cited the example whereby refuse collectors adhered to special collection arrangements for residents who were less physically able. The Benefits service also offered special assistance to those who had difficulty reading and writing. Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for a more comprehensive list of modifications.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) progress made with the Equalities Impact Assessments by way of the Equalities Action Plan be noted;

(B) service modifications to better meet the needs of the District's diverse communities be noted; and

(C) the changes in obligation to the Council arising from the new Equality Act 2010, which came into force on 1 October 2010, be noted.

349 2010/11 SERVICES PLANS - SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND EXCEPTIONS REPORT

The Leader of the Council submitted an exception report of 2010/11 Service Plan Actions relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee which had been achieved and those requiring a revised completion date.

The Performance Officer advised that two actions had been completed and 6 actions had required revised completion dates. Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report now submitted, for information relating to these 8 actions.

Councillor P R Ballam expressed concerns relating to delays to improvements at Presdales Recreation Ground. The Director reported that contracts had been signed and works had commenced on 18 October 2010. He advised that completion was envisaged for January 2011.

Councillor A D Dodd commented on the predestination of North Street, Bishop's Stortford. He expressed concerns that changes to the phasing of the traffic lights could mean that vehicular traffic could take a considerable length of time to get through, if North Street was closed to traffic.

The Director advised that Mouchel PLC had been commissioned to conduct a traffic study for this area of the town.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the 2010/11 Service Plan actions be received; and

(B) the revised completion dates be noted.

350 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTH CHECK:
JUNE - AUGUST 2010

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted an exception report on the performance of the key indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period June 2010 to August 2010.

In response to a query from a Member in respect of National Indicator (NI) 181, the Director undertook to provide a written response relating to the time taken to process housing and council tax benefit claims and change events.

Councillor K Darby commented on why there was no target for East Herts Performance Indicator (EHPI) 8.12. The Director advised that EHPI 8.12 was a new indicator and there was no benchmark data for the purposes of comparing performance.

In response to a request for clarity around the wording in relation to EHPI 8.43 and the Meals on Wheels Service, the Director referred to an e-mail sent to the Head of Community and Cultural Services. The message had stated that a number of clients of Hertfordshire Community Meals had ended up with different meals to what had been requested.

Hertfordshire Community Meals had stressed there was no call for concern as a new software provider was being sought to ensure that the booking system could support the service that the organisation aspired to. The Director advised that this company was about to embark on a full scale operational review to ascertain how the service could be delivered in a more cost effective and efficient manner.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

351 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

The Chairman invited Members to review the work programme of Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Officer drew the Committee's attention to the Joint Scrutiny meetings in January and February 2011. She stated that these meetings were to scrutinise budget items for 2011/12 and also to consider service plans and estimates and future targets for 2011/12.

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

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chairman
Date