

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
20 SEPTEMBER 2011, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor S Bull (Chairman).
Councillors E Buckmaster, T Herbert,
Mrs D Hone, J Mayes, P Moore, P Ruffles,
N Symonds and C Woodward.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors L Haysey and J Wing.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Housing Strategy and Policy 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

299 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of the Committee Chairman Councillor G McAndrew. Councillor S Bull chaired the meeting.

300 MINUTES

In response to a query from Councillor P Ruffles in respect of apprenticeships, the Director of Customer and Community Services undertook to report back on apprenticeships in East Herts and with the council's main contractors. Councillor C Woodward commented that he

would like a report to be submitted to Human Resources Committee on this matter.

Councillor Ruffles commented on whether Housing Associations had undertaken an occupation audit to establish whether there was under occupation of properties. Councillor S Bull explained that there was an agenda item on this matter.

In response to a query from Councillor Ruffles on the Micro Hydro Plan adjacent to Hertford Theatre, the Director advised that a report with an updated business case would be reported to the Executive in November.

Councillor Woodward sought an update as to whether a response had been received from SLM in relation to the quality of the pool at Grange Paddocks and disabled access. The Director undertook to follow this up and seek an answer for Members.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meetings held on 21 March 2011 and 14 June 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

301 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Bull declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 306 – Monitoring and Review of the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan 2008 - 2013 on the grounds that he was the Council's representative for South Anglia Housing Association.

302 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL

Councillor D Hone, Chairman of the Health Engagement Panel, provided a summary of the work of the Panel and the County Council Health Scrutiny Committee. She commented that the Committee had received a petition in respect of the Cheshunt Urgent Care Centre. The Committee had also requested regular updates in relation

to the closure of the Bushey Lane Centre.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the update be noted.

303 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL - MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman of the Health Engagement Panel submitted a report asking the Community Scrutiny Committee to approve an additional seat on the East Herts Health Engagement Panel.

Councillor D Hone explained that there had been occasions when the attendance from the Panel had been low due to attendance at other council and health related events. She emphasised that a good attendance was important when there were often external partners giving presentations.

RESOLVED – that (A) the developing workload and increasing importance of health and public health issues at District level be recognised; and

(B) the membership of the Health Engagement Panel be increased from 5 to 6 Members.

304 COMMUNITY SAFETY: REPORT ON PROGRESS TOWARDS OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS ON THE THREE YEAR PLAN

The Head of Licensing and Community Safety submitted a report on the progress achieved against the East Herts Community Safety Partnership 3 year Community Safety Plan. The Committee was advised that the report summarised 3 years worth of work, which would be of particular interest to the new Members.

Members were advised of the background to the Community Safety Action Plan, as well as the priorities of the Community Safety Partnership. The Committee was referred to pages 50 and 51 of the report now submitted

for details of the most recent summarised crime figures for East Herts.

Members were advised that the opinions of the public had shaped the priorities of the Community Safety Partnership. The Committee was further advised that there had been a low response rate to the most recent on-line public consultation.

In response to a query from Councillor E Buckmaster, Members were advised key staff were accredited Officers with authoritative status to address anti-social behaviour. They are permitted to confiscate alcohol and to request the address of anyone committing anti-social behaviour, for example. Powers for individual officers varies depending on nature of job.

Councillor C Woodward queried whether there were plans to train any more Officers to carry out this work as staff changed. Members were advised that training was carried out by Hertfordshire Police in groups as it was not cost effective to train individuals. Potential Officers were vetted by the Police then given specific training in the appropriate use of the available powers. There were 29 Officers across the Council who were currently permitted to carry out such work.

Councillor P Ruffles sought and was given clarification on whether 71 anti-social behaviour contracts was a low figure. He also received a response in relation to the role of street pastors in East Herts. Councillor N Symonds and the Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support spoke positive of their experience of going out alongside the pastors for an evening.

Councillor Symonds commented on the frequent changes in police officers assigned to cover her ward. She stressed that this made it challenging for the police to be aware of the specific problems affecting the District. Officers undertook to provide feedback to Hertfordshire Constabulary.

Councillor S Bull appealed to Members to ensure they completed the Community Safety Questionnaire that had been circulated. He also urged the Committee to encourage the public to complete the questionnaire.

Councillor J Wing referred to ongoing problems of graffiti in Ware. Members were advised that graffiti was always removed from East Herts Council property and was also promptly removed from other premises with the owner's permission if graffiti was of a racist or offensive nature.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

305 COMMUNITY SAFETY REVIEW

The Head of Community Safety and Health Services submitted a report to inform the Committee of the East Herts District Council Community Safety Review.

Members were advised that a Task and Finish Group would be set up to review Community Safety in East Herts. Four Members had already volunteered for the Task and Finish Group and a further couple were being sought to join them. A further report would be submitted to the November 2011 meeting of the Committee and a final report would be submitted to Members in February 2012.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

306 MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE HOMELESS AND HOMELESS PREVENTION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2008 - 2013

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report that highlighted successful performance on the third year of the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan 2008 – 2013. The report also presented Members with a review of the Action Plan.

Members were advised that the situation regarding the East Herts homeless was continuously fluid and Officers were closely monitoring the situation. The Committee was advised that there were a number of significant changes to legislation that were likely to have an impact on homelessness and the ability of the Housing Options Service to access the private sector to prevent homelessness.

The Committee was advised that access to the private sector was becoming increasingly challenging and that this was the primary prevention tool for Housing Options. The Localism Bill would also provide the Council with increased powers to discharge its homeless duty by use of the private sector.

Members were advised that Housing Associations would shortly begin offering fixed term tenancies, with an option to review the situation at the end of the fixed term, rather than the current lifetime tenancies. Housing Associations were currently developing policies regarding eligibility. A proportion of tenancies would also be offered at up to 80% of the full market rent.

The Committee was advised that Officers were particularly aware of the changes to local housing allowance and were working with the Council's Benefits Service to identify those at risk of losing their accommodation where the reduction in housing allowance may make their current accommodation unaffordable. At particular risk were applicants under the age of 35

currently in one bedroom accommodation who would have their housing allowance reduced to a single room rate.

Officers were also concerned that this included males from broken relationships with access rights to children only being eligible for housing where there were single rooms with shared facilities.

Councillor N Symonds expressed concerns regarding Herts Young Homeless Group not offering the best help to a number of cases recently involving young people. Members were advised that Herts Young Homeless Group was primarily funded by Hertfordshire County Council and the Crouchfield Trust. East Herts Council did not currently provide funding to support housing assistance and where this had occurred, the amounts were small.

The Committee was advised that there were a number of positive stories relating to the work of Herts Young Homeless Group. Members were advised however, that this organisation was incredibly stretched in the current financial climate in terms of the number of young people being referred to them.

In response to a further query from Councillor Symonds, Members were advised that Officers were aware of problems in relation to private landlords being reluctant to accept tenants on housing benefit.

The Committee was also made aware of problems with Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) applicants and Housing Associations often being unwilling to take the risk of housing these applicants. Officers did attempt to secure places for MAPPA applicants in the private sector if the Housing Associations were unable to assist. Officers also had to consider such cases carefully from a community safety perspective.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

307 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK -
APRIL - JULY 2011

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted an exception report on performance indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period April to July 2011.

The Director apologised and corrected paragraph 3.0 in that the reference to the 2009/10 financial accounts should have been in relation to the 2010/11 accounts. He also apologised in that there had been some difficulties in presenting the Essential Reference Paper to Members in that some of the explanations had not been very helpful. He undertook to circulate an updated version later in the week.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

308 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered items for scrutiny during 2011/12 and additional items for inclusion within the Committee's Work Programme. These were set out in the report now submitted.

In response to a query from Councillor P Ruffles, the Director of Customer and Community Services undertook to identify the relevant Citizens Advice Service information from the internet and circulate this link to Members.

The Scrutiny Officer asked the Committee to accept an additional report on the agenda of their next meeting concerning community grants. This was agreed.

Councillor J Wing commented on the process where by grant funding was awarded. The Director stressed that Members had reviewed and approved these new processes last year.

The Scrutiny Officer referred to the speakers due to attend the next Health Engagement Panel, which would cover Accident and Emergency Services at QEII hospital and the work of Children Centres in the District and invited all Members to attend.

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support updated the Committee in respect of speakers from the Hertfordshire NHS Trust. Councillor L Haysey advised that Nick Carver and Richard Beasley would be giving a presentation to Council in December in relation to developments within the Hertfordshire NHS Trust.

Councillor Ruffles commented on whether the Committee could scrutinise the good work of the East Herts Museums and also in relation to the arts. Councillor Haysey acknowledged the good work that had been done which would be continued. She highlighted the need to ensure Members were kept informed as to what was happening across the District.

Members approved the Committee’s Work Programme as now submitted, with the addition of a report in respect of Community Grants to be submitted to the November 2011 meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED – that the work programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman
Date