

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON 21 JANUARY 2004 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).
Councillors D Clark, R N Copping, A D Dodd,
G Francis, Mrs M H Goldspink,
Mrs D L E Hollebon, G McAndrew, H Penson,
D Richards, T K H Robertson, A Schweizer,
J D Thornton, N Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors M G Carver and R Gilbert.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Nowell	- Executive Director (Resources)
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Alison Brown	- Communications Officer
Simon Drinkwater	- Assistant Director (Law and Control)
Lois Prior	- Head of Communications
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Georgina Stanton	- Assistant Director (Communications and Customer Services)
David Tweedie	- Assistant Director (Financial Services)

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

MORI Representative

Simon Atkinson

CPA Inspectors

Stewart MacAskill
Gary Stevens

564 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors K A Barnes and G Francis.

565 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman welcomed the Inspectors from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment who were in attendance and Simon Atkinson the MORI representative.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION566 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2003 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

567 DRAFT REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE (RPG)/
REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS) 14

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on the proposed Regional Planning Guidance (RPG)/Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) 14 which was being developed by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA). This would be used to guide land use planning policy in the region for the next 20 years.

The guidance/strategy would provide a framework for local authorities to produce more detailed development plans and local transport plans. It would inform other strategies such as those for economic development, education, health, rural development, housing and culture.

ACTION

A crucial guiding element of the draft RPG/RSS was central government's desire to see significant new housing development in the south east and east of England. This had been contained in the 'Sustainable Communities Plan' published in 2003.

The Stansted/M11 area contained a major economic growth focus at Stansted Airport and areas needing regeneration in Harlow and the Lea Valley area. The strategy was to strike a balance ensuring that growth and change delivered regeneration first before allowing more general growth and development in other areas. The government wanted 60% of new development to be on brownfield sites. It also sought to increase the proportion of affordable housing being provided.

Objectives for transport policy were also contained in the RPG/RSS.

The Leader of the Council attended the meeting to outline further the history and latest developments on the strategies. He asked for the comments of the Committee and full support in resisting unacceptable changes in the district. The Council would be consulted further on the strategy at a later date.

Members thought the original plans had included elements they could support and they had sought to accommodate requirements for affordable housing on brownfield sites. However, the latest proposals seemed to have departed from the original strategies and were not acceptable on sustainability grounds.

RESOLVED – that the Leader of the Council be requested to (A) convey the Committee's concerns about the RPG/RSS to the East of England Assembly; these being that the proposals did not provide sustainable development for the district as the natural environment would be seriously damaged by them and infrastructure including

Leader

ACTION

water, hospitals, education, roads and transport would be inadequate to support the number of houses being suggested in the latest proposals, and

(B) inform the Assembly that it would appear that new housing had become the driver of the strategy rather than the original intention of economic development as the driver with any infrastructure deficit made up first.

568 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Assistant Director (Communications and Customer Services) submitted a report on policy developments in internal communications during the past year and proposals for the year ahead.

A survey of staff opinion on communication and consultation mechanisms had been carried out in 2002. A number of concerns had been expressed by staff which resulted in recommended changes of approach to internal communications. A follow up survey had been conducted in December 2003. The results were presented to the meeting. They showed an encouraging number of areas where there had been improvements. Some issues needed further work as was to be expected.

An internal communications plan had been put in place to provide more regular information to staff; offer a more open exchange of information; strengthen communication between managers and colleagues and support corporate objectives of strengthening a less fragmented and more corporate style of working.

It was proposed that existing mechanisms for improving internal communications such as the intranet, newsletter, briefings, induction and workshops be continued.

In addition some new measures were suggested including a staff panel, as well as the existing Local Joint Panel; a staff suggestion scheme; a staff award scheme and

ACTION

actively seeking national awards and promotional publicity.

Members considered the results of the surveys, work carried out and proposals for the future. They were encouraged by the improvements and felt a longer gap could be left between surveys in the future as good progress was being made in boosting staff morale.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee notes the considerable improvements in several areas although further work is necessary in some and suggests another staff survey be carried out after two years from the last one and all involved in improvements in staff communications and morale be congratulated.

ACC

569 MEMBER/OFFICER PROTOCOL AND PROTOCOLS FOR THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on Member/ Officer Protocol and Protocols for the Statutory Officers (Head of Paid Service, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer) which had been referred to the Standards Committee and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee for consideration by Council on 17 December 2003.

Protocols governing these relationships were features of the Peer Review action plan, Local Code of Corporate Governance and model constitutions for local authorities issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Detailed protocols in appendices to the report were considered and Members suggested a number of amendments which should also be considered by the Standards Committee before approval by Council.

RESOLVED - that the Standards Committee and Council be informed that the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee has the following comments on

ACTION

the Member/Officer Protocol and Protocols for the Statutory Officers:

- (A) Page 28, paragraph E – “Use of local authority resources” be deleted;
- (B) Page 29, paragraph 13 - line 4 - delete “that of”;
- (C) Page 29, paragraph 13 - line 5 and Page 33, paragraph 24 - line 1 - add “as defined by the Local Government Act 1972 Section 100A” after “confidential” and “confidentiality”;
- (D) Page 31, paragraph 20 line 4 “Leaders fall to be considered as ordinary Members” should read “Leaders should be treated as ordinary Members”.

570 EAST HERTS CHARITABLE TRUST

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) submitted a report on a proposal to establish an East Herts Charitable Trust.

Members had expressed a strong interest in the suggestion at a previous meeting and asked for a written report.

The concept behind the proposal was the system of gift aid by which registered charities could claim tax back from the Inland Revenue on any donations made to them by a taxpayer. It was noted that many local charities and community groups would already be receiving the benefit of gift aid. However, there would be groups which were too small to register as a charity and claim gift aid .

The Hertfordshire Community Fund would administer the scheme; claiming the tax refund for local groups and passing it to them as additional money for their projects.

ACTION

The Hertfordshire Community Fund had offered its services for an initial fee of up to £2,000 for the first year (depending on donations) and to circulate a publicity leaflet free of charge.

It was reported that another scheme would involve donors giving money to a Trust Fund to support good causes in the community more generally. The legal implications of this scheme and Council Members acting as trustees were considered and Members decided not to proceed with it because of the legal complexities.

However, Members supported the establishment of East Herts Gift Aid under the umbrella of the Hertfordshire Community Fund to help small local groups in East Herts and thanked Councillor Thornton for his work on the scheme.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be requested to support the formation of East Herts Gift Aid to be administered by the Hertfordshire Community Fund as part of the Council's method of supporting local groups and provide up to £2,000 to meet administrative costs during the first year of operation of the scheme.

APP

571 FORWARD PLAN FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Committee submitted a report which reviewed the work of the Committee since June 2003. Several important strategies had been reviewed including East Herts Community Strategy, Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan and various strategies relating to housing. Presentations had been received on health services and Panels had been set up to examine youth issues and markets policy. The Committee had also been involved at an early stage of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

ACTION

A Forward Plan for the work of the Committee was submitted. The Chairman suggested Markets Policy be added in February/April and an additional meeting be programmed for July which might allow consideration of energy efficiency to be advanced from September.

The Committee supported these amendments.

RESOLVED - that the Forward Plan for the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee as set out in Appendix 'B' of the report submitted be approved subject to the following addition of amendments:

All

- Addition of Markets Policy - February/April 2004.
- Addition of an extra meeting of Committee in summer 2004
- Advance of Energy Efficiency from September to an earlier meeting if possible

The meeting closed at 10.00 pm.