

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF POLICY
DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON 10 FEBRUARY 2004 AT 7.30 PM

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor R Gilbert, A P Jackson,
M P A McMullen, M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Nowell	- Executive Director (Resources)
Miranda Steward	- Executive Director (Operations)
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Simon Chancellor	- Head of Accountancy
Shirley Clark	- Assistant Director (Direct and Contract Services)
Neal Hodgson	- Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Robin Ingleton	- Principal Accountant
David Tweedie	- Assistant Director (Financial Services)

619 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
Councillors D L E Hollebon, G McAndrew, H Penson and
N Wilson.

620 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting including a number of Councillors who were not Members of the Committee.

621 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared personal and prejudicial interests as follows:

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Minute</u>	<u>By virtue of:</u>
N Copping	624 (Capital) with regard to Affordable Housing	Sale of land for social housing
R Gilbert	624 (Capital) with regard to Rhodes Centre	Trustee of Rhodes Centre
Mrs M H Goldspink	624 (Capital) with regard to Rhodes Centre	Trustee of Rhodes Centre
M P A McMullen	625 (Estimates) with regard to Citizens Advice Bureau	Member of Hertford CAB Management Committee
D Richards	625 (Estimates) with regard to Hailey Day Centre)	Chairman of Hailey Day Centre
M Wood	625 (Estimates) with regard to Meals on Wheels	Chairman of Age Concern (Bishop's Stortford)

ACTIONRESOLVED ITEMS622 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that (A) the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2004 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, and

(B) all Members be informed that a copy of the complete report of the survey of staff on internal communications is available from the Assistant Director (Communications and Customer Services).

623 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003 AND PRUDENTIAL CODE

The Executive Member for Finance and Economy submitted a report seeking approval for proposed prudential indicators. These indicators were required by the Prudential Code introduced by the Local Government Act 2003 to ensure affordability, sustainability, good practice and transparency in local government finance.

The Chief Finance Officer of the Council was required to establish procedures to monitor progress against prudential indicators and report significant deviations. It was proposed that the indicators would be reported every six months to the Executive via Directors Board.

Members noted the indicators supplied in the appendices to the report before the Committee. These would have more relevance when figures for one year could be compared with those from another. They agreed to approve the indicators and monitoring arrangements.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that:

(A) the prudential indicators included within the report at Appendix 'A' to 'F' be approved; and

ACTION

- (B) the monitoring arrangements as detailed in paragraph 4.1.1 of the report before the Committee be approved.

624 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2003/04 (REVISED) TO 2006/07

The Executive Member for Finance and Economy presented a report on the Council's Capital Programme.

The Capital Programme had been amended in June to take account of slippage and rephasing. Further amendments had been approved in respect of social housing grant schemes. Works associated with the new depot at Buntingford and swimming pools had been approved previously.

A complete review of the programme had been undertaken. Lead officers had been invited to submit proposals for new schemes. The Capital Strategy Group had considered the programme in detail and assessed proposed new schemes against the Council's vision and corporate priorities.

The revised programme showed a reduction in expenditure of capital from that which had been expected because of a number of factors. These included lower demand for private sector renovation grants; delay in the Rhodes Centre Development; slippage on replacement car park machinery and Sele Farm Community Centre and savings on the telephone system and IT.

The Directors' Board had confirmed that schemes would be implemented within the timescales identified.

The Executive Member added that it would be possible to carry out further improvements to office accommodation at Wallfields as planned storage would not be needed. In addition, further funding of the Rhodes Centre should be possible. Work was proceeding on making the Council debt free so that it could enjoy the benefits of this status.

ACTION

Members could suggest capital projects which could be considered by the Capital Strategy Group and progress through the Council's capital planning system at any time during the year.

Members considered the summary of the Capital Programme and agreed a number of amendments. The Chairman explained that the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee would consider the capital programme again before the next budget setting process.

Councillors G Francis and H Goldspink asked that their abstention from this vote be recorded.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that (A) the draft programme for the period 2003/04 (revised) to 2006/07 be approved subject to the following suggestions:

- (i) the Executive be asked to investigate the provision of a new hostel for the homeless;
 - (ii) the Executive be asked to consider if it is necessary to investigate refurbishing toilets eg the old toilet block in the Bell Street Car Park at Sawbridgeworth to enhance the image of town centres particularly for tourists;
 - (iii) the provision of more lighting to footways in Parishes and Towns to help with alleviating residents' fear of crime be investigated.
- (B) Standing Orders be waived to extend the contract for Office Accommodation at Wallfields.

625 ALL DIVISIONS REVENUE ESTIMATES PROBABLE
2003/04: ESTIMATE 2004/05

The Executive Member for Finance and Economy presented a report in respect of items to be included in the authority's revenue estimates for 2004/05. These would be

ACTION

considered by the Council on 25 February 2004. The Council Tax would be set at a meeting of the Council on 3 March 2004.

Estimates had been reported in line with the Council's operational management arrangements. The costs of office accommodation and divisional establishments (including support services) had been recharged to service budgets. Members considered the summary of the estimates and decided to recommend the Executive to approve them and take note of a number of comments from the Committee.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) the probable revenue estimates for 2003/04 and the draft revenue estimates for 2004/05 be approved, and

(B) the Committee has the following comments on them:

- (i) additional employee costs were needed for playschemes to provide stronger leadership and to avoid violence against staff;
- (ii) cleaning at Ware market could be reduced if the number of stalls had fallen;
- (iii) the expenditure on Citizens Advice Bureaux should be shown as a single figure as the Bureaux now decide how the grant will be split between the different branches themselves.

626 FEES AND CHARGES 2004/05

The Executive Member for Finance and Economy submitted a report on fees and charges for the Council's services in 2004/05.

ACTION

As part of the budget strategy for 2004/05 officers had been asked to suggest fees and charges that would generate extra income of 5 %.

Members considered the proposed fees and charges and decided they should be approved subject to consideration being given to two amendments.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that the increases in fees and charges for 2004/05 as set out in Appendix 'J' of the report before the Committee be approved subject to the following being considered:

(A) charge for licences for stray dogs with an ID chip to stay the same to encourage owners to have dogs "chipped";

(B) charge for riding establishments to stay the same in view of increased costs to horse owners of the introduction of the equine passport.

627 GROWTH ITEMS 2004/05 FROM SERVICE PLANS (TABLE 7'S) AND EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

The Executive Member for Finance and Economy submitted a report providing details of growth items and efficiency savings within the budget for 2004/05.

The Council had adopted service planning and requests for growth items had been put forward as part of this process. The Council was also committed to producing ongoing efficiency savings within its base budget of 2% under current best value arrangements. Members considered the items where savings had been made and growth was proposed. They decided to recommend the Executive approve the proposals with an amendment concerning the moat at the Castle, Bishop's Stortford.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) the growth items included in the 2004/05 revenue estimates as set out in the report before the Committee be approved subject to the addition of the installation of a pump to ensure the moat at the Castle, Bishop's Stortford contains water once it has been desilted; and

(B) the proposed efficiency savings as outlined in Appendix 'K' of the report before the Committee be approved.

628 COUNCIL REVENUE ESTIMATES - PROBABLE 2003/04:
ESTIMATE 2004/05

The Executive Member for Finance and Economy presented a summary of probable estimates for 2003/04. He highlighted that the next stage of the budget would be for the Executive to consider comments from the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee and then for the estimates to be debated at Council on 25 February 2004. The formal setting of the Council Tax would be at the Council meeting on 3 March. The figures in the report before the Committee (Appendix M) would be used to decide the level of council tax needed.

Surveys of public opinion on the budget had been carried out including the use of the Council's magazine 'Link', the website and the Citizens' Panel. Priorities for savings and protecting expenditure had been identified.

Members considered the consultation results and estimates and decided to recommend them to the Executive for approval.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) representations received under Section 65 of the Local Government Act 1992 be considered formally by the Executive;

ACTION

(B) the adjustments to the General Fund Revenue Estimates for 2003/04 and 2004/05 be made; and

(C) the Estimates for 2004/05 be referred to Council as the level of council tax requirement for the following year.

629 DISABLED ACCESS AT POLLING STATIONS IN EAST HERTFORDSHIRE

The Council's Returning Officer for Elections reported that a review of polling stations in the East Hertfordshire District Council area had been carried out. One of the objectives of the review had been to check disabled access to polling stations and publicise this information for people with disabilities.

Legislation required that services including elections were "disabled friendly". "Wheelchair friendly" polling booths were supplied and temporary ramps were provided at some locations. Details of polling stations were submitted and Members raised various problems with stations in their area. They thought all Members of the Council should have an opportunity to comment on the report.

RESOLVED - that the report be circulated to all Members and they be asked to make any comments to the Head of Democratic Services.

630 FORWARD PLAN FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee Chairman submitted a forward plan for the work of the Committee and commented that an extra meeting might be needed in May to consider some of the items programmed for June.

The Committee supported this suggestion.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that the Forward Plan for the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee as set out in Appendix 'R' of the report submitted be approved subject to an extra meeting being held in May if necessary.

The meeting closed at 10.15 pm.

Chairman
Date