

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON WEDNESDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2004
AT 7.30 PM

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors A P Jackson, T Milner, D A A Peek.

Councillor R Charles	- Bedfordshire County Council
Councillor M Flint	- Dacorum District Council
Mike Mosley	- Deputy Chief Executive of Eastern Regional Assembly

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director
Rachel Stopard	- Executive Director
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Caroline Kirkham	- Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Claire Potts	- Planning Officer
Paul Pullin	- Acting Head of Economic Development
David Thorogood	- Environmental Co-ordinator

316 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors H Penson and N Wilson.

317 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Randolph Charles of Bedfordshire County Council, Councillor Maureen Flint of Dacorum District Council and Mike Mosley, Deputy Chief Executive of the Eastern Regional Assembly. They were visiting as part of the Regional Assembly Scrutiny Review Panel which was looking into arrangements for the scrutiny process in local authorities in the region.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION318 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2004 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

319 LONGER TERM ASPECTS OF ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Presentations were made by the Acting Head of Economic Development, Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator and Planning Officer on the longer term aspects of economic strategy for the District. These included economic development, lifelong learning and the employment land study.

These policies added to work on the Council's priorities to preserve the unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensure economic opportunities are generated for the benefit of all, reduce fear of crime, improve standards of neighbourhood management, and support the most vulnerable.

Economic development was linked to community strategy, service plans, skills, business competitiveness and social inclusion. Various East Herts projects and activities helped

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to encourage growth in the rural economy, partnerships with town centre management boards, and tourism. Partners included Town Councils and colleges. More contact with businesses was needed and a more co-ordinated delivery through town partnerships.

The Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator explained how her work supported economic development by encouraging people in the workplace to upgrade their skills, eg in English and mathematics. She had also worked to increase venues and opportunities for vocational training particularly in Bishop's Stortford. Art workshops and computer courses had been provided for older residents, and she had worked with minority groups and in relatively deprived areas eg Sele and Havers. Work was continuing to promote family learning where parents with school children were encouraged to improve their own skills, as well as those of their children.

The Planning Officer reported on a survey of employment land. This gave details of land available and needed for expected future growth, and information would feed from this into the emerging Local Plan.

Members considered the three aspects of economic development and were pleased to see how the separate strands were now coming together. They agreed they would like to see the present work continue and be extended. They thought the need for and location of any additional business parks needed to be carefully considered, more attention needed to be given to employment land in rural areas and development of offices needed to be carefully monitored.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Committee wishes to see the existing work on economic development continue and be extended.

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ACTION320 SCRUTINY ROLE AND MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Councillor Ranger, Chairman of the Committee explained that agendas for both the Council's Scrutiny Committees were becoming increasingly overloaded, and it had been suggested that panels could be set up to deal with some topics. These panels could also provide an opportunity for greater involvement by non-executive members as concern had been expressed by some that they were not closely enough involved in Council business.

He suggested these panels could be a third part of investigations into how the scrutiny process was working in local government. The first was that already referred to in his announcements when he welcomed visitors from the Eastern Region. In addition, Councillor Terence Milner and Lorraine Blackburn, Committee Secretary had been undertaking a benchmarking exercise of 'excellent' authorities with regard to their scrutiny procedures.

Councillor Milner reported that initial findings suggested that the scrutiny process was helped by the publication of an annual report by Councils, training of members, particularly in questioning techniques and allowing the public to suggest topics for scrutiny.

The reports from the Eastern Region and Councillor Milner were expected to be completed by January 2005.

Members considered whether panels should be set up for specific topics or covering service areas eg environment or finance. Most members thought specific topics would be preferable and the panels should be set up for a trial period. They thought staff below senior management level would be suitable to attend. Councillor Randolph Charles emphasised the value of staff dedicated to supporting the scrutiny process and how useful this had been in Bedfordshire.

The Committee proposed that, as a pilot arrangement, three panels be set up to look at:-

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three panels be set up to look at:-

- Budget 2005/06
- Regional Spatial Strategy
- Energy Efficiency.

A further panel on longer term Council priorities would also be considered.

RESOLVED - that a report be submitted to Council suggesting that:

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- (A) scrutiny review panels be set up comprising of about 8 members from all political parties to consider specific topics and make a final report to the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee; and
- (B) pilot panels be set up to consider the Council's budget, Regional Spatial Strategy 14 and Energy Efficiency and meet at least twice before the end of the civic year.

321 ENERGY EFFICIENCY

A report was submitted by the Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) dealing with some areas where Members had considered energy could be used more efficiently as part of the Council's own operations. These included access and curtain walling at The Causeway offices, lighting, open plan offices, and alternative fuel for Council vehicles.

Members considered the report and decided that they would like to be kept informed of progress on the Hertfordshire Renewable Energy Study. The Committee also requested that a panel be set up to consider a strategy and action plan for energy efficiency (as detailed

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in Minute 320) and asked for further reports on some aspects of the topic.

RESOLVED - that (A) a panel to review energy efficiency be set up as outlined in Minute 320; and

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(B) Members be kept informed of progress on the Hertfordshire Renewable Energy Study.

APP

322 FORWARD PLAN FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee Chairman submitted a Forward Plan for the work of the Committee. Certain items would be removed if the Council agreed to the setting up of Scrutiny Review Panels in accordance with Minute 320. A report on licensing would be submitted after the consultation period finished.

RESOLVED - that the Forward Plan for Policy Development Scrutiny Committee, as set out in Appendix 'A' of the report submitted be approved as amended.

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm.

Chairman
Date