

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE  
WAYTEMORE ROOM, COUNCIL  
OFFICES, BISHOP'S STORTFORD ON  
TUESDAY, 4 JANUARY 2005 AT  
4.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor M G Carver (Leader/Chairman).  
Councillors M R Alexander, N Burdett, D Clark,  
A P Jackson, T Milner, R L Parker, N C Poulton.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors A L Burlton, G L Francis, R L Gilbert,  
Mrs D L E Hollebton, D Richards, M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Simon Drinkwater	- Assistant Director (Law and Control)
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Bernard Perry	- Assistant Director (Human Resources)
Ceridwen Pettit	- Head of Performance
Georgina Stanton	- Assistant Director (Communications and Customer Services)
David Thorogood	- Environmental Co-ordinator, Policy and Performance
David Tweedie	- Assistant Director (Financial Services)

479 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor H G S Banks.

480 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Executive passed a resolution pursuant to Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public during consideration of the business referred to in Minute 486 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act.

481 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader stated that it was important to note as a Council, the recent events in the Far East and the Tsunami which had affected so many lives. He suggested that the Council should send its condolences and offer its support in any way possible. He stressed that the number of people who had died was in excess of the people living in East Herts. He commented that the Chairman of the Council would be sending out a notice in due course.

The Executive Director commented on a suggestion that, as a note of respect, 3 minutes silence be observed on Wednesday 5 January 2005 at 12 noon. A request had been submitted from staff to initiate a collection.

The Leader commented that further announcements which would address the issue of collections would be made at the next meeting of Council on 26 January 2005. In the meantime, it was noted that three minutes silence would be observed on 5 January 2005 at 12 noon.

482 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor N Burdett declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 483 – Housing Options Service, in that she was a member of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

**RECOMMENDED ITEMS****ACTION****483 HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE**

The Executive Member for Community submitted a report detailing the progress made to establish a new Housing Options Service. The Executive Member advised that the Council had a range of statutory obligations relating to housing services which were currently delivered via a contractual arrangement with Stort Valley and Riversmead Housing Associations. The contracts would terminate on 31 March 2005.

The background to the decision to develop a new Housing Options Service was outlined.

The proposed staffing structure for the in-house Housing Options Service as detailed, including areas of responsibility, in an appendix to the report, now submitted.

It was noted that in reviewing the allocations policy, there was a need to ensure that local people were given priority. As such, it was suggested that additional points be awarded in terms of a "local connection".

The Executive Member commented that in response to the tendering process, five tenders had been received and evaluated by a cross-service professional team. It was recommended that the lease on Hillcrest and Thele Hostels be awarded to Paradigm Housing Group Limited. Details of this award were set out in a separate report (Minute 486 refers).

The Executive Member explained that housing advice would be delivered through both the new in house housing options service and through the Citizens Advice Bureau.

ACTION

**In terms of the provision of temporary accommodation for homeless families, a contract had been negotiated with Frays Housing Association for up to 20 units of private sector accommodation. The details of the scheme were set out in the report now submitted.**

**The outcome of negotiations with Papworth Housing Trust in relation to the provision of the Piper Alarm Service was detailed in the report which recommended that the terms be incorporated into a three year Service Level Agreement between Papworth and the Council.**

**A Member sought clarification on the issue of the alarms, particularly in relation to those living on benefits and whether these would be means tested. The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) confirmed that the next Capital Strategy Group meeting would consider the issue of means tested relief which would be reported to the Executive.**

**It was acknowledged that the aim of the service review was to provide the new services within the total existing resources available, and a cost comparison between the old and new service was detailed in an appendix to the report now submitted. Growth items would be given further consideration by Members as part of the budget setting process for 2005/06. It was also noted that a capital receipt would be generated from the sale of Bridgefoot house.**

**The Executive supported the recommendations as now detailed.**

**RECOMMENDED – that (A) the staffing structure for the in-house Housing Options Service be approved;**

ACTION

- (B) the minor amendments to the Council's allocations policy, as detailed in the report now submitted, be agreed;**
- (C) a 10-year lease and management contract for Hillcrest and Thele House hostels be awarded to Paradigm Housing Group Ltd, to commence on 1 April 2005;**
- (D) a Service Level Agreement for the operation of the Piper Lifeline Alarm service be negotiated with Papworth Housing Trust, on the terms set out in the report now submitted, to be reviewed after three years;**
- (E) the proposed fees and charges, as now detailed, for the Piper Alarm Service be approved;**
- (F) the progress on negotiating joint-working between the Council and the Citizens Advice Bureaux be noted;**
- (G) the progress on establishing a private sector leasing scheme in association with Frays Housing Association be noted; and**
- (H) proposals for re-investment in housing services of the financial savings and capital receipt resulting from the establishment of these new service arrangements be considered as part of the corporate growth and savings process.**

**484 HERTS TOGETHER COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

The Leader of the Council referred to report on draft actions plans proposed by Hertfordshire County Council on a "Herts Together Community Strategy", a county-wide local strategic partnership. The strategy was designed to complement and add value to the 10 districts' community strategies. As such, East Herts

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**Council needed to ensure that the strategy complemented and did not conflict with its own corporate priorities.**

**The County wide Community Strategy had five main themes:-**

- **Community safety**
- **Environment**
- **Health**
- **Economic Prosperity**
- **Children and young people**

**The public consultation exercise expired at the end of January 2005.**

**The Leader explained the financial benefits which could arise to the Council as a result of the County wide Action Plan which would form the basis for the development of a Public Service Agreement between the County Council and central government . As such, this Public Service Agreement could provide a significant funding stream to assist the Council, working with the County, to achieve the priorities of East Herts Community Strategy.**

**The Leader commented that a lot of work had already gone into the development of the action plan. However, the Executive felt that the Action Plan did not highlight key targets which could be strengthened. An Executive Member commented that the document should have provided the Council with an opportunity to create strategic objectives but as such the document was “woolly”. It was suggested that the plan lacked larger strategic concepts and ideas, and essentially, there was a lack of “bigger ideas”, eg youth activities in the whole**

ACTION

of the Hertfordshire area. It was noted that much of the activities contained in the action plan had already been addressed by East Herts Council.

A Member expressed concern that “bigger issues” such as planning schools closer to the community had been ignored in the action plan.

The position in relation to opening schools for use by the community was explained, together with issues concerning security.

It was the Executive’s view that the Action Plan was not sufficiently robust and strategic, and as such, its ability to deliver corporate projects was questioned.

Executive Members were requested to forward their comments to the Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) as soon as possible for subsequent submission by the Assistant Director to Herts Together, Local Strategic Partnership Board.

**RECOMMENDED** – that the views of East Herts Council as now detailed, be submitted to the Herts Together Local Strategic Partnership Board as part of its consultation on the County-wide Community Strategy.

APP

#### 485 **GREEN WASTE EXPANSION – VEHICLE PROCUREMENT**

The Executive Member for the Environment submitted a report seeking approval for the procurement of three kerbside collection recycling vehicles.

As a member of the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership (HWP), the Council was committed to the achievement of joint recycling targets. It was noted that the HWP had been successful in a bid for £5m capital funding to develop and expand the recycling service. The bid in terms of East Herts Council’s share of £250,000 would allow the Council to expand its green waste service to

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22,000 households. Following a further assessment of provision and costs options for recycling expansion, the Department for Food and Rural Environment Affairs (DEFRA) had approved the procurement of three kerbside collection vehicles rather than the two originally approved Refuse Collection Vehicles.

DEFRA had advised that funding could be at risk if the Council was unable to procure vehicles by 31 March 2005. It was therefore necessary to go out to tender for the acquisition of the kerbside collection vehicles as quickly as possible.

It was noted that “expressions of interest” from potential suppliers had been sought and would be evaluated in due course.

Assurances were given that there would be a further report to the Executive on how and where the vehicles would be deployed.

The Executive supported the recommendation as now submitted.

**RECOMMENDED** – that approval be given to commence the immediate procurement of Kerbside Collection vehicles to permit the roll out of the Council’s recycling programme for 2005/06, and the Council’s Capital Programme be amended accordingly.

ACS

**486 HILLCREST AND THELE HOSTELS TENDER  
EVALUATION**

The Executive Member for Community submitted a report which detailed the evaluation of the tenders received for the lease and management of Hillcrest and Thele hostels. This followed the Council’s decision to approve a new strategy for the delivery of its statutory obligations in respect of the homeless, including a decision to decommission Bridgefoot hostel in



ACTION**Buntingford .**

Five tenders had been received and a cost evaluation exercise had been conducted based on a formula recommended by the Council's internal audit section to apportion 70% to the price element and 30% on quality. The service quality element was further refined and quality scores were awarded according to specific criteria which were then added to the price score to give an overall figure. On this basis, it was recommended that the contract be awarded to Paradigm Housing Group.

It was acknowledged that the Council would have to enter into a 10 year property leasing agreement with the successful tenderer in respect of the two properties, as well as a concurrent management agreement regarding the management of the properties (which would include 100% nomination rights to the Council).

The Executive Member commented that Paradigm Housing Group had yet to complete the assessment for the "Supporting People" accreditation, which could result in Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) withholding grant funding. This failure to complete the accreditation process was however, considered a small risk as the HCC Supporting People Team had scored the Housing Group positively and were happy to work with them.

The Executive supported the recommendation as now detailed.

**RECOMMENDED** – that a 10 year lease and management contract for Hillcrest and Thele Hostels be awarded to Paradigm Housing Group conditional on the Group complying with all "Supporting People" requirements and achieving "Supporting People" accreditation before 31 March 2005.

**APP**

ACTIONRESOLVED ITEMS487 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 9 November 2004 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

488 BEST VALUE REVIEW – ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report detailing the results of the Best Value Review of Environmental Stewardship. It was noted that the scope of the review had been divided into four sub groups which had been formed to consider:

- East Herts' historic, rural and “new build” environment.
- Working with other agencies to encourage and facilitate the use of environmentally friendly forms of transport.
- Land and habitat management (including the Green Bubble effect).
- Considering how residential areas look and “feel”.

Two elements of the scope relating to communications/ information and encouraging / promoting good environmental performance / practice through the concept of sustainable development were considered to be overarching to the themes.

The review had been undertaken in the context of the principles of best value in terms of consultation, comparison, challenge and competition having regard to various studies and reports published by the Audit Commission (It's a Small World: Local Government's Role as Steward of the Environment); the 2002 MORI (The Rising Prominence of Liveability); a study commissioned

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by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in January 2004; and, other local development and Planning Policy Statements.

Other non-Governmental, special interest and voluntary groups had been contacted during the process of the review. The Council had also utilised information already in its possession before undertaking a more specific consultation via a Stakeholder Workshop and/or a Stakeholder Survey.

The Executive Member detailed the full consultation process undertaken with the responses detailed in the report now submitted, together with an action plan which would lead to improvements as necessary. The Executive Member commented that, where improvements in the action plan could not be undertaken within existing resources, further reports would be made as part of the Council's budget process, identifying growth and efficiency savings.

The Executive Member clarified the position in relation to capital, revenue and special revenue items (ie one-off revenue items).

Further clarification was sought on the issue of weed spraying in urban and rural areas and areas of responsibility in relation to the District Council and those of the County Council. References were also made on the effects of non-spraying and the need to physically remove more established weed growth.

The Executive Director (Returning Officer) undertook to review the contract in the context of street cleaning and the removal of weeds.

The issue of sustainability was also considered specifically in relation to new build and the planning processes.

Members referred to the Districts' trees and their perceived lack of maintenance. The Executive Director explained that a survey was currently underway to identify those trees which

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were dead, dying and hazardous. It was suggested that the issue of trees on highways land should be referred to the Highways Partnership for a further report.

The Executive supported the Executive Member's recommendations on this matter.

RESOLVED – that (A) the action plan attached as Appendix 'M6' of the report now submitted be approved, subject to there being adequate budgetary provision; ED(RO)

(B) the issue of trees on highway land be referred to the District Manager of the Highways Partnership. ED(RO)

#### 489 COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION FUND

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report on the projected outturn balance on the Collection Fund which, following a review, indicated that the balance would be nominal and that no contribution should be made from the Fund towards Council Tax levels in 2005/06.

As at 31 March 2004, there was a debit balance on the fund of approximately £127,000.

The Executive supported the recommendation as now submitted.

RESOLVED – that no contribution be made from the Council Tax Collection Fund towards Council Tax Levels in 2005/06.

#### 490 CHANGES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT

The Leader of the Council submitted a report seeking agreement to add posts to the establishment and to advise of other internal changes to the officer structure. The three divisions affected by a proposal to increase the

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establishment included:

- Communications and Customer Services (IT Section)
- Law and Control
- Policy and Performance

In respect of Communications and Customer Services, an increase of two posts was proposed, in order to cope with an additional increase in desktop PC support from 260 machines in 2002 to 350 machines today. In addition, there had been an increase in workload covering file servers, printers, switches, telephones and other technical installations and partnerships.

In respect of Law and Control Division – an additional member of staff was needed to work on the local land and property gazetteer for one year.

In respect of Policy and Performance – that permanent contracts be offered to staff involved on the AGRE project for the last four years, given their implied rights and the offer of security as recognition of the contribution they have made to developing the AGRE project and contributing to Council priorities. It was acknowledged that should AGRE funding cease, this would represent growth of £73,000 to the Council.

The Executive supported the recommendations as now submitted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the additions to the establishment as highlighted in the report now submitted, be approved;

(B) prior to the completion of the office structure changes highlighted in the report being implemented, the Head of Paid Service consult with the recognised trades union and individual officers;

ED (HPS)

ACTION

(C) growth in the IT and Legal Divisions to be financed from efficiency savings/reductions within the IT budget be noted, and

(D) it be noted that growth in the establishment as recommended in the AGRE project could lead to additional cost to the Council, should external funding cease.

491 FORWARD PLAN – FEBRUARY 2005

The Executive Member for Corporate Facilities submitted a report seeking approval for the publication of the Forward Plan for the period February – May 2005.

The Executive agreed that the Forward Plan, as now detailed, should be approved.

RESOLVED – that the Forward Plan for February– May 2005, as set out at Appendix ‘A’ to these Minutes, be approved for publication. ALC

The meeting closed at 5.25 pm