

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON TUESDAY 15 MARCH 2005

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).
Councillors K A Barnes, R N Copping,
A D Dodd, D E Mayes, D Richards,
T K H Robertson, N Wilson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Will O'Neill	- Head of Housing & Community Planning
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Sally Smallwood	- Housing Development Officer

659 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
Councillors Mrs M H Goldspink and Mrs D L E Hollebbon.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

660 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held
on 10 February 2005 be confirmed as a correct
record and signed by the Chairman.

661 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman circulated a draft Annual Report to the
Committee and asked for Members' comments to be
relayed to the Committee Secretary. The report would be

ADL

included on the agenda of the next meeting.

662 BUDGET SCRUTINY PANEL MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Panel held on 6 December 2004 and 3rd February 2005 be received and the Panel's wish to continue the scrutiny of the budget next year be noted.

ADL

663 REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY SCRUTINY PANEL MINUTES

RESOLVED - that (A) the Minutes of the meetings of the Regional Spatial Strategy Scrutiny Panel held on 13 December 2004, 25 January 2005 and 3 March 2005 be received; and

(B) the Members and officers concerned be thanked for their work on the response to the strategy.

664 CONSULTATION ON THE REVISED REGIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY FOR THE EAST OF ENGLAND 2005 - 2010 AND HOUSING INVESTMENT IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND 2006 - 2008

A report was submitted by the Executive Member for Community on the Council's response to the Revised Housing Strategy for the East of England and Housing Investment in the region.

The strategy had been produced by a Regional Housing Board which had consulted with stakeholders, the Regional Housing Forum and the Regional Sustainable Community Panel. The region was divided into sub-regions of which East Herts was part of the London commuter belt sub-region.

A consultation document had also been published to develop the methodology for the allocation of resources at

a regional level. The documents highlighted the need for more affordable homes, improvement and maintenance of the condition of the existing stock, efficiency and effectiveness in commissioning housing, improving the quality of design, increasing choice for the customers and ensuring sustainability.

On the issue of sustainability, Members noted that the documents were closely aligned to the East of England Plan, which included greater housing growth than East Herts Council consider sustainable. Their comments would be relayed to the East Herts Housing Group and the Executive. They considered the response suggested by Officers and made a number of comments and amendments to it.

In addition, they noted references in the documents to changes to the planning system to ensure more affordable housing for keyworkers and young families in rural areas; powers to preserve the green belt; the need to provide infrastructure and jobs before housing and modern methods of construction. They discussed the possibility of a visit to a good example of a high-density site. The needs of travellers and the elderly were also considered.

Members were informed that Councillor R L Parker, the Executive Member for Community preferred option 1 of stage 2 because the Council no longer owned any housing stock. However, the Committee agreed to differ from this after discussions, because it felt more opportunities for funding were left open by option 2.

RESOLVED - that the East Herts Housing Group and the Executive be informed of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee's comments, as now detailed, on the Revised Regional Strategy 2005 – 2010 and Housing Investment in the East of England 2006-08 for the submission to the Regional Housing Group.

Revised Regional Strategy

- it broadly welcomes the aspirations of the new Sustainable Communities: Homes for All proposals, subject to the Council's formal response to the East of England Plan, but reserves the right to consider more fully and submit a separate response on specific proposals contained in that publication;
- it welcomes the aspirations to achieve 40% affordable housing where housing stress warrants higher provision (para 7.1.1.7);
- it supports the greater integration of housing and planning policy, as reflected in the Council's own structure that brings housing and planning together within the Policy and Performance Division (7.1.1.15);
- it requests that the regional board considers a higher percentage of investment for local housing need and homelessness at the expense of the percentage given to growth – but otherwise supports the weighting given to themes in paragraph 7.1.1.20;
- it welcomes the statement made in paragraph 8.4.1.1 that endorses the importance of local strategies linked in to local community strategies and local strategic partnerships;
- it endorses the vision presented at 12.1.1.2 'to ensure everyone can live in a decent home at a price they can afford in locations that are sustainable';
- it reserves comment on the reference at 12.2.1.3 to the challenge of providing 478,000 new homes required by the draft East of England Plan for the Council's formal response to that plan;

Housing Investment in the East Of England

- it welcomes the increase in indicative allocation from £330m in 2004/06 to £445m in 2006/08;
- it broadly supports the methodology and the three-stage approach to regional allocations, and in particular supports the development of a supply chain management approach;
- in relation to the invitation to submit views on specific issues (as set out from page 6 to 11 of the report before the Committee), the following views be expressed:
 - a 5% portion of the Single Regional Housing Pot (SRHP) should be allocated to special issues and projects should be – regeneration and excellence and innovation in design quality and sustainability;
 - (page 7) the Committee believes allocation should be made on the basis of need and the evidence of deliverability as identified through the supply chain management process irrespective of debt status;
 - despite the views of the Executive Member for Community, within stage two, option 2 is preferred over option one as it would seem to allow a greater flexibility in tackling a range of needs and delivery options (page 8);
 - (page 8) the Committee supports funds being made available to local authorities for purposes other than the decent homes target, e.g. initiatives designed to enable better access to and use of the private sector, prevention of homelessness, use of empty homes;
- whether or not the new funding arrangements can or should start in 2006/07 is to some extent a matter of capacity of the regional housing board. The new

arrangements should start in 2006 if possible;

- (page11) the three main indicators should be – need, deliverability and value for money; and
- it suggests the regional housing board would be best placed to make strategic judgemental allocation decisions, so long as it developed sufficient capacity to respond positively to local needs and opportunities.

665 FORWARD PLAN FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee Chairman submitted a Forward Plan for the work of the Committee. He explained that the next meeting needed to be re-arranged as it was too close to the election.

The Committee supported the proposed Forward Plan and change of date.

RESOLVED - that (A) the Forward Plan for Policy Development Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the Appendix to the Report now submitted, be approved; and

(B) the date of the next meeting of the Committee be changed from 3 May to 31 May 2005.

The meeting closed at 9:30pm