

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
WAYTEMORE ROOM, BISHOP'S
STORTFORD ON TUESDAY, 5 APRIL
2005 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D L E Hollebon (Chairman).
Councillors P R Ballam, S A Bull, A D Dodd,
R Gilbert, D E Mayes, Mrs S Newton, L R Pinnell,
J P Warren.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors H G S Banks, T Milner, R L Parker.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Rachel Stopard	- Executive Director (Head of Paid Service)
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Tracy Ferguson	- Head of Environmental Health
Alison Fox	- Community Planning and Partnership Manager
Neal Hodgson	- Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)
Jane O'Brien	- Empty Homes Officer
Ceridwen Pettit	- Head of Performance

709 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors
J Hedley, G McAndrew, J O Ranger and D Richards.

710 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman commented that this would be the
Committee's last meeting of the Municipal Year. She
thanked Members and Officers for their support during the

year.

711 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S A Bull declared a personal interest in Minute 714 - Best Value Review of Health and Living Support in that his wife helped with the meals on wheels service, he was a member of CAB (Citizens' Advice Bureaux) Management Committee and he was Chairman of the Primary Care Trust.

Councillor P R Ballam declared a personal interest in Minute 714 - Best Value Review of Health and Living Support in that she was a Member of the CAB Management Committee.

Councillor L R Pinnell declared a personal interest in Minute 714 - Best Value Review of Health and Living Support in that he was a Member of the CAB Management Committee.

Councillor A D Dodd declared a personal interest in Minute 714 - Best Value Review of Health and Living Support, as it related to County Transport, in that he was a Member of the County Council.

Councillor J P Warren declared a personal interest in Minute 714 - Best Value Review of Health and Living Support in that his wife was Chairman of the CAB Management Committee.

RESOLVED ITEMS

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712 MINUTES

It was noted that Councillor A D Dodd had been present at the meeting on 8 March 2005, and that the Minutes should be amended accordingly.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2005, as amended, be confirmed as a

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correct record and signed by the Chairman.

713 EMPTY HOMES (PRESENTATION BY JANE O'BRIEN)

Jane O'Brien, Empty Homes Officer, gave a short presentation outlining the empty homes situation within East Herts. It was noted that Best Value Performance Indicator 64, required the Council to return a number of empty properties into occupation, in view of the social and economic implications of a property remaining empty, including crime, appearance and the devaluation of neighbouring properties.

The target for 2004/05 was 11 and for 2005/06 was 12.

It was noted that based on internal information, there were more than 640 private homes empty for more than six months.

Achievements to date, in terms of networking and information gathering from a variety of sources both internally and externally, were detailed.

Based on information received, the Empty Homes Officer (who worked part-time), confirmed that there were 100 empty properties on the database. She had written to 72 home owners and 35 responses had been received. Many of the reasons a home remained empty included, lack of funding to refurbish, or that the owner was in care or in a home.

The Empty Homes Officer explained the various schemes being developed to provide incentives to housing associations and private owners to bring the properties back into use. The Council also had the power to enforce a property back into use via:

- Compulsory Purchase
- Enforced sale

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- Empty Dwelling Management Orders (to be introduced from October 2005)

The Empty Homes Officer explained what publicity and action was being programmed including using the Link Magazine and publicising “Empty Homes week of Action” in October 2005.

Clarification was sought and provided on the difference between a Compulsory Purchase Order and an Enforced Sale.

In relation to homes above shops, it was noted that access might be a problem.

In terms of a pattern as to why many of the properties remained empty, many were because the owners were in care.

Members commented on some of the properties in their wards and were encouraged to report these to the Empty Homes Officer so that these could be cross-checked/ included on her database.

The Executive Director explained that as a result of the report on the Best Value Review of Environmental Stewardship, the Council would encourage the use of its enforcement powers where there were complaints about breaches of visual amenity.

A Member suggested that Parish and Town Councils be involved in the process of identifying empty properties.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked the Officer for her informative presentation.

RESOLVED - that the current position on Empty Homes in East Herts be noted.

ACTION714 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HEALTH AND LIVING SUPPORT

The Executive Director (Head of Paid Services) introduced the key findings of the Final Review of Health and Living Support.

The scope of the review looked at:

- The Meals on Wheels Service;
- the effectiveness of referral and information sharing in relation to the elderly and vulnerable;
- Health Promotion (including Leisure and Fitness); and
- Transport.

It was noted that Sheltered/Supported Housing had been excluded from the review as it was felt that there were other more appropriate forums to investigate this.

The services had been reviewed with due regard to the principles of Best Value in terms of challenge, consultation, comparison and competition.

Meals on Wheels

Councillor T Milner (Executive Member) outlined the Meals on Wheels Service. It was noted that the service was discretionary and that there was no obligation on East Herts Council to provide this service as the duty remained with Hertfordshire County Council's Adult Care Services.

It was noted that there were 515 meals on wheels provided to clients in East Herts and that the cost of producing and delivering meals varied considerably due to different suppliers/providers. The Head of Performance advised that the cost of the meal as detailed in the report, should

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be amended in that the true cost was £2.26; the customer paid £1.80 and East Herts paid a subsidy of 46p.

Extensive consultation had been undertaken with key stakeholders and what had become clear, was the fact that current provision was unsustainable; there was a need to introduce eligibility criteria; there should be a mix of volunteers and paid workers; and there was a need to standardise meals at no extra cost to the Council.

Key recommendations were set out in the report and action plan, now submitted.

Members expressed concern that the customers had not been consulted. However, Officers and Executive Members were satisfied that the recommendations detailed could only improve the service.

The issue of volunteers and paid workers was considered and the difficulties that this might create.

Assurances were given that the food, once cooked, would not be left in freezers or fridges for extensive periods and that a strict method of stock rotation would be implemented.

The eligibility criteria was explained further following concern about clients “slipping through the net” and the need to respond quickly to provide the service when necessary.

A Member sought clarification on the subsidy aspect in relation to a function which should be provided by Hertfordshire County Council. The historical decision to help provide this service was explained.

Information Sharing

The Head of Performance explained the scope of the review which was to:

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- establish what was required to ensure the effectiveness of referral systems and procedures for vulnerable people;
- identify the main services which brought East Herts Council services into contact with the elderly and those who were vulnerable;
- identify how information was being shared and how other service providers were being alerted when the elderly/vulnerable were in trouble; and
- to decide actions for improvements.

Key findings revealed that the current practice was “patchy”; there were obstacles regarding the definition on an “older person” and geographical issues; there was a need to share information between agencies and partners and to communicate this effectively; and, that forums existed to develop this further.

Concern was expressed that the more agencies and partners, the greater the opportunity for people to “get lost in the system”. Assurances were given by the Head of Performance.

Key recommendations were set out in the report and action plan, now submitted.

Health Promotion

The Head of Performance explained that the review of health promotion looked at the health and general well-being of the elderly and vulnerable and building on partnership working, eg, via the Local Strategic Partnership. It also looked at leisure and fitness concessions to older people and GP Referral schemes.

Concern was expressed at the number of young people smoking and Members sought clarification on what could

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be done. The provision of free “patches” to wean smokers off nicotine by some GP practices was discussed.

Key recommendations were contained in the report now submitted, but in the main, these included more cohesive and “joined up” working between the Primary Care Trusts, Healthy Lifestyles Group and East Herts Council. It also included a need for clear and consistent information on living a healthy lifestyle.

Transport

The Community Planning and Partnership Manager advised that the review team sought to identify what value the Council obtained from its contribution to transport in East Herts and how value for money could be maximised.

The scope of the review looked at:

- Public Transport
- Subsidised bus routes
- Bus Passes
- Community Transport

It was noted that the Council spent between £140,000 - £180,000 on subsidising bus routes;
£200,000 on Bus Passes;
£45,000 on Dial a Ride; and

that there were few alternative Community Transport Schemes.

The key findings and recommendations were set out in the report, now submitted.

A Member commented on people with mobility problems and the limitations of using Dial-A-Ride by outpatients. It

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was explained that alternative provision was available for out patients.

The Chairman commented on the poor service and infrequency of the buses 308/9 and the 510. She suggested that much needed to be done to improve on this route.

The Committee supported the Final Report and agreed to refer its comments to the Executive.

RESOLVED - that the Final Report and Improvement Plan of the Best Value Review of Health and Living Support be supported, and Members' comments as now detailed, be referred to the Executive.

APP

715 FORWARD PLAN: MARCH 2005 AND 2005/06

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) submitted a report detailing the business to be determined by the Performance Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.