

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 20 APRIL
2005 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D E Mayes (Chairman).
Councillors M R Alexander, W Ashley, D R Atkins,
P R Ballam, H G S Banks, K A Barnes, S A Bull,
N Burdett, A L Burlton, E J Cain, M G Carver,
D Clark, R Conway, R N Copping, A F Dearman,
J Demonti, R Gilbert, Mrs M H Goldspink,
A M Graham, J Hedley, Mrs D L E Hollebon,
A P Jackson, G McAndrew, M P A McMullen,
T Milner, R L Parker, D A A Peek, L R Pinnell,
N C Poulton, J O Ranger, S Rutland-Barsby,
B W J Sapsford, J J Taylor, J D Thornton,
M J Tindale, A L Warman, J P Warren, N Wilson
and M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director (Returning Officer)
Rachel Stopard	- Executive Director (Head of Paid Service)
Amanda Brodie	- Solicitor
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lorraine Kirk	- Senior Communications Officer
David Tweedie	- Assistant Director (Financial Services)

ACTION725 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 23 March 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

726 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman invited Councillor S A Bull to make a statement in respect of Councillor P A Ruffles. Councillor S A Bull reported that he had visited Councillor P A Ruffles at the QE2 Hospital and had left him in good spirits.

The Chairman also advised that Councillor T K H Robertson had been taken ill recently.

The Chairman asked Councillor K A Barnes to show off his medal for completing the recent London Marathon. Council congratulated Councillor K A Barnes for his achievement and his efforts in raising funds for charity. He stated that he had now completed eleven marathons.

The Chairman referred to his recent dinner event at Castle Hall and thanked Members for their support on the evening. He stated that the evening had been a great success and hoped that Members would continue to support him in raising funds for smaller groups over the coming twelve months.

Finally, the Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and support at the recent sermon he gave.

727 MEMBERS' QUESTION

Councillor M Wood asked the Executive Member for Community if he agreed that the recent sale of long-term season car park tickets in Bishop's Stortford, was a fiasco and as a consequence, the image of this Council had been badly damaged?

ACTION

In reply, the Executive Member stated that if the image of this Council had been damaged by the recent sale of long-term season tickets, it was something that Members needed to put right by highlighting the positive action that had been taken to try to protect Bishop's Stortford during the redevelopment of the town.

He added that Members would recall that in preparation for the redevelopment and in answer to the call from the community for managed car movements within all the towns, the Council had made some changes to long and short-term car parks last year. Earlier this year, after years of lobbying from the traders of Bishop's Stortford, the park and ride scheme was opened. On a number of occasions, the Council was given every indication that the traders would support the park and ride scheme, but that support had not been as full as hoped.

Long-term town centre spaces had reduced by around 90 tickets, but had been replaced by 465 spaces at the park and ride. It was crucial to the life of the town that as many short-stay spaces as possible were available for shoppers to access the town, as without shoppers, the town would die. He had been told by some people, that they believed the negative messages about lack of parking for shoppers was taking a toll, and in many cases, keeping shoppers away when spaces were actually available.

Long-term season tickets were allocated in exactly the same way this year as in previous years. There was no need to change the system when we had every indication that the park and ride would be used by the business community and with the added benefit to users of pricing at almost one third the cost of town centre long-term parking.

Finally, he added that Councillor A P Jackson and he would be meeting members of the Chamber of Commerce later this year to discuss parking issues.

In reply to a supplementary question seeking an assurance

ACTION

that more thought would be given when issuing long-term season tickets in 2006, the Executive Member confirmed that following the meeting with the Chamber of Commerce, there would be an agreed way forward.

Councillor M Wood asked the Executive Member for Community if, given that the park and ride scheme in Bishop's Stortford had so far turned out to be extremely unpopular, he would advise if any new innovative ideas were being contemplated to reverse this situation?

In reply, the Executive Member for Community stated that in his mind, it was unfortunate that the operation of the park and ride scheme was not entirely in his own hands. As a Member of the Development Control Committee, Councillor M Wood had been responsible for setting the terms and conditions under which the scheme presently operated. Whilst he disagreed with the conditions, the Executive Member recognised that there was a democratic process, which he had to accept and abide by.

He understood that the owner of the site had submitted an application to vary the terms under which the scheme operated and to make it open to shoppers, as well as those who worked in the town. This is what the owner wanted from the start.

Therefore, the answer was that there were ideas being contemplated to reverse the current situation, but the decision on whether to support it, was in the hands of Councillor M Wood and his colleagues on the Development Control Committee. When, hopefully, changes were made to allow shoppers to use the park and ride scheme, the Council would also need to get the message out that parking for everyone was much cheaper than town centre parking, without the need to drive around the town looking for parking spaces and with a very frequent bus service included all for just £1.

In reply to a supplementary question suggesting that an introductory discount be offered to park and ride users as an

ACTION

incentive to town centre workers, the Executive Member stated that the current pricing structure offered sufficient incentive. The park and ride scheme cost £1 compared to £2.80 to park in the town centre.

Councillor M Wood asked the Executive Member for Community if he could advise how many of the Council's staff based at Bishop's Stortford had taken up the option of parking at Grange Paddocks?

In reply, the Executive Member for Community advised that whilst staff had been directed to free parking at the Grange Paddocks overflow car park, during the redevelopment of the town centre, there was no formal identification of their vehicles. Over 100 spaces were available during daytime weekday hours when the overflow car park was usually unused. He had been advised that up to 40 members of staff were using the car park, but at the time of his visit at 3.00 pm yesterday afternoon, there were only 28 vehicles parked, which may, of course, not all have been East Herts staff.

Councillor M Wood asked the Executive Member for Community if, given that the Homelessness function had been transferred back to this Council at the beginning of April, he could confirm that staffing to cover the Bishop's Stortford offices was adequate to cover all enquirers during the time that the Council's offices were open?

In reply, the Executive Member for Community reminded Members that Council had not just taken back in-house the Homelessness function, but also housing advice and the housing register. There was now a new team of 12 officers, known as the Housing Options Team, to reflect the inclusive nature of the housing functions being carried out. Any member of the team who could answer a query in a face-to-face meeting with an applicant, knew how to obtain the information immediately. The new Housing Options Team had invited all Members to visit them in their new home on the second floor of Wallfields last week and a number of Members took the opportunity to discuss their queries in full

ACTION

between 2 pm and 7pm on that day.

During his visit, the question of staffing the Causeway office had been raised. Whilst the Housing Options Team was based at Wallfields, there would usually be two officers working from the Causeway Offices. On the previous day, a substantial number of phone calls had been received by the Bishop's Stortford staff, whilst during the two hours of his visit there, few calls were received. It was believed that phone calls were being diverted to the Stortford based staff rather than to Wallfields and arrangements were set in hand for that to be remedied. This appeared to now be working well judging from the number of calls received yesterday.

The location of two officers at Bishop's Stortford was considered adequate, based on the experience of staff who had transferred from Housing Associations and were specialists in this field. With the Council's IT systems being compatible with Housing Association partners, as well as our own offices, there was no need for additional resources to be deployed at Bishop's Stortford.

The Executive Member believed that the new officers had settled in well to their task in the Housing Options Team. They appeared to be a dedicated and professional unit and would help to achieve a number of the Council's core corporate objectives, not least providing support to the most vulnerable members of the community.

Also, he believed that the staffing arrangements were adequate to cover all enquiries at Bishop's Stortford, but as with any new operation, it would be foolish to say that future changes would not be made to the working practices of the Team. If experience showed that changes needed to be made, then they would be.

In response to a supplementary question relating to staffing availability on a specific day, the Executive Member undertook to make enquiries if given the relevant details.

ACTION

Councillor L R Pinnell asked the Executive Member for Community if, following recent reports about the attitude towards motorists by one or two parking attendants in Bishop's Stortford, he agreed that the parking attendants were expected to help and advise motorists on parking issues rather than just observing, controlling and fining?

In reply, the Executive Member for Community asked Members who had an example of a parking attendant refusing to provide help and advice, to refer such circumstances to him.

He stated that a motorist who did not park on yellow lines, in disabled bays unless holding a blue disability sticker, or overstayed their time in a parking bay, had absolutely nothing to fear from a parking attendant. Arguing the point over whether a ticket should have been issued was as pointless as trying to get a referee to rescind a red card shown to a footballer. Once the information was entered on the system, the parking attendant had no authority or ability to wipe the slate clean. If the person receiving the ticket had proper grounds for challenging the issue of a ticket, then it must be done through the ticket office and if still aggrieved by the response, through the national parking adjudication service. A number of tickets had already been rescinded, and if a driver could prove that he was covered by one of the exceptions that were approved by Council, then the ticket would be rescinded.

The Executive Member knew that a number of people had found the parking attendants to be friendly and helpful. He was also aware that others had a different story. It was unfortunate that one side of the story was always reported whilst the other never was.

The Executive Member concluded by reiterating that he would be pleased to hear of any circumstances where help or advice had been requested and ignored or refused.

In response to a supplementary question concerning the

ACTION

actions of a parking attendant viewing a motorist putting the incorrect amount of money into a machine and then issuing a ticket, the Executive Member doubted that such a circumstance had occurred.

728 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council reported on the work of the Executive and presented the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 29 March 2005. He also gave an oral report on the recommendations of the Executive meeting held on 20 April 2005.

The Leader referred to the outputs from the PPG17 review, which he hoped would start to assist the Council further in determining the direction and level of provision required to meet the needs of constituents in sport and leisure.

Officers continued to work hard across the organisation in preparation for both the Public Inquiry of the Local Plan and the Examination In Public of the East of England Plan. Officers continued to work closely with colleagues at both County and other District authorities.

Work on the new Leisure contract was moving on at a pace for the changeover later this year. Progress was being made in all areas of action planning surrounding CPA, Audit, Best Value Reviews and the Executive was looking at the possibilities of the Authority applying for one of the strands of Beacon status in the forthcoming round.

The Council had engaged extensively through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in Herts Together, the Countywide LSP, where work was progressing on applying for a Local Area Agreement in partnership that, over time, could result in important funding streams.

ACTION

In respect of the oral report relating to the Executive meeting held on 20 April 2005, the Executive Member for Environment asked Council to accept an amendment to recommendation (B), in that the reference to the paragraph numbers 4.10 – 4.13 should in fact, read 4.13 – 4.14. Council approved this amendment.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 29 March 2005, be received, and the recommendations contained therein, be adopted, and

(B) the recommendations of the Executive meeting held on 20 April 2005, as amended, be adopted.

729 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES(A) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
– 30 MARCH 2005

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 30 March 2005, be received.

(B) PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
– 5 APRIL 2005

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5 April 2005 be received.

(C) STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 12 APRIL 2005

Council noted an error in the 7th paragraph of Minute 718 – Local Investigation of Standards Complaints, in that the 2nd occurrence of the word ‘Town’ should be replaced with the word ‘Parish’.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 12 April

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2005, be received, and the recommendations contained therein, be adopted.

The meeting closed at 8.02 pm

Chairman
Date

Nps\Council\Minutes 20 Apr 2005