

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 21
SEPTEMBER 2005 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A L Burlton (in the Chair).
Councillors M R Alexander, W Ashley,
D R Atkins, P R Ballam, H G S Banks,
K A Barnes, S A Bull, N Burdett, M G Carver,
D Clark, J Demonti, G L Francis, R Gilbert,
A M Graham, Mrs D L E Hollebon, Mrs D M Hone,
A P Jackson, G McAndrew, T Milner,
Mrs S Newton, D A A Peek, H Penson,
L R Pinnell, N C Poulton, J O Ranger,
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:

Rachel Stopard	- Executive Director
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Corporate Governance
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lois Prior	- Head of Communications
David Tweedie	- Director of Resources

ACTION329 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 27 July 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

330 PETITION

The Vice-Chairman reported that a petition comprising 160 signatures had been submitted as follows:

'We, the undersigned, wish to underline our demand that our community is given priority in the fight against Anti Social Behaviour. We demand that the Sele estate is given a street warden to help target street crime, vandalism, litter and anti social behavior. We call on East Herts District Council to provide the resources needed to make our community a safer place.'

Mrs H Durbin (Hertford Town Councillor), who had submitted the petition, was in attendance to present the petition. She stated that the petition had arisen following the recent parliamentary election campaign, during which a number of local residents of all political persuasions on the Sele estate, had expressed concern with levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. She referred to the role of the existing Police Community Safety Officers and stated that the role of a street warden would be much wider. She defined their possible duties as including:

- patrols to prevent anti-social behaviour;
- providing reassurance to local residents and in particular, more vulnerable people, such as the elderly and the disabled;
- reporting problems such as graffiti, litter, etc;

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- involvement in schools to prevent young people from getting involved in anti-social behaviour; and
- generally, helping to foster greater community spirit.

Mrs Durbin concluded by referring to the benefits that a visible presence would bring to the community in general.

In response, Councillor N Burdett, the Executive Member for Community Safety, began by stating the Council's commitment to community safety issues by referring to the expenditure designated for supporting Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). She stated that the East Herts Crime and Disorder Partnership had discussed the deployment of PCSOs and had concluded that one should be dedicated to the Hertford Sele ward area.

The Executive Member referred to national policy and the Government's phasing out of funding for street wardens. In respect of PCSOs, she agreed that they provided a visible presence and should increase public confidence in the fight against crime and disorder.

The Executive Member concluded by referring to the Council's wider contribution to partnership working, which included initiatives such as CCTV, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, summer activities for young people and film work with Sele estate residents. These showed the Council's commitment to improving people's quality of life.

331 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council reported on the work of the Executive and presented the Minutes of the Executive meetings held on 16 August and 13 September 2005.

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He stated that officers had been working hard on a number of Government consultation documents, some of which required a response by deadlines that were less than the statutory consultation period. Some of these had the potential of damaging East Herts on a long term basis, reducing further the principles of local democracy and attempting to reduce the level of service to the local community. The Council would be challenging the Government robustly on these issues at all possible levels.

The Leader referred to the forthcoming Local Plan Inquiry and invited all Members to attend and observe the process first hand.

The Leader also referred to the Council's submissions on the first elements of the Examination in Public for the East of England Plan, which would be sent to the Inspector shortly. The spectre of the expansion of Stansted Airport was looming again and the Council was working closely with neighbouring authorities to develop policies jointly and to ensure that local communities were kept advised.

The Leader issued a personal thanks to all staff and Members who had been involved in the huge amount of work required to implement the new Licensing Act processes. He suggested that the Home Secretary and his Cabinet colleagues should get out into the community and see for themselves the concern, fear and costly administrative mayhem they had created.

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The Leader referred to the Council's work in unravelling the new requirements of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), which was mandatory on all authorities. Once again, the rules had been changed, making it impossible for the public to compare the previous system with the new one. This was another kicking for local government and a deliberate attack on well run Conservative authorities, who now controlled the most number of authorities in the country. However, in spite of this, the Council would continue to improve both the quality and costs of its services and deliver the best of Conservative local government.

In response, the Leader of the Opposition reminded the Leader that the Liberal Democrat presence was continuing to grow in local government and was now the second largest group in the Eastern Region, in terms of the number of councillors.

In respect of Minute 235 – Byelaws at St Michael's Mead, Councillor M Wood sought clarification on the consultation that would be carried out on the draft byelaws and suggested that a friendly advertisement be placed in the local newspaper. He also suggested that, given the content of the letters pages in the local Observer, some residents were not happy with some of the proposed byelaws.

In reply, the Executive Member for Environmental Management stated that consultation would be undertaken via the Council's website, the local newspapers and local Members.

The Leader stated that some residents had welcomed the draft byelaws.

Councillor McAndrew, on a point of information, stated that the consultation period ended on 29 October 2005.

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In respect of Minute 236 – Public Convenience Provision and Maintenance, Councillor J O Ranger recalled a previous decision that had been taken in respect of the use of solar panels in one of the public conveniences and asked if this would be implemented.

In reply, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance stated that this had not been forgotten and would be considered in due course.

In respect of Minute 294 – Local Authority Expenditure 2006/07, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance reported that the Budget Scrutiny Panel, at its meeting held on 14 September 2005, had endorsed the Executive's recommendations in this matter.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meetings held on 16 August and 13 September 2005, be received, and the recommendations contained therein, be adopted.

332 PORTFOLIO REPORT – COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Executive Member for Community Safety gave an update on work within her portfolio area. She highlighted two particular areas – licensing and crime and disorder.

In respect of licensing, she echoed the comments of the Leader in describing its impact and the administrative burden placed on the Council. She expressed her gratitude to Licensing Sub-Committee Members and officers in Legal Services, Democratic Services, Environmental Health, Development Control, Community Protection and Customer Services for their efforts in dealing with the huge workload. She provided a breakdown of the number of applications processed.

She stated that positive feedback had been received from the external agencies involved in the licensing hearings and that the Council had achieved the right balance that ensured

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all relevant parties had their say. In respect of those premises where applications had not been received, reminders had been sent and officers would also be undertaking visits to ensure that the deadline of 24 November 2005 was met.

In respect of crime and disorder, the Executive Member referred to the CCTV programme and the expansion of the scheme in Bishop's Stortford and Ware. Planning applications for the columns had been submitted and officers were investigating potential secondary usages, such as monitoring street cleansing. However, the success of the programme would be determined to a large extent, on outstanding revenue funding from the Town Councils. Confirmation was still awaited on this.

The Executive Member concluded by referring to the funding for 4 Police Community Safety Officers. Their visible presence on the streets would provide reassurance to East Herts residents.

333 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

(A) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 20 JULY 2005

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 20 July 2005, be received.

(B) LICENSING COMMITTEE – 28 JULY 2005

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 28 July 2005, be received.

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(C) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
– 17 AUGUST 2005

In respect of Minute 258 – Application E/04/0495/A, Councillor G L Francis stated that the applicant had not received a visit from officers yet.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 17 August 2005, be received.

(D) POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 6 SEPTEMBER 2005

The Committee Chairman invited all Members to attend a briefing on the Periodic Electoral Review Consultation on 5 October 2005.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6 September 2005, be received.

(E) JOINT POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 12 SEPTEMBER 2005

In respect of Minute 285 – East Herts Residents Survey, Councillor A M Graham suggested that the reference to research being undertaken in other areas needed elaboration. The Vice-Chairman advised that confirmation or otherwise of the Minutes was a matter for the next joint meeting.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Joint Policy Development Scrutiny Committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 September 2005, be received.

ACTION334 RESTRUCTURING THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Leader of the Council submitted a report advising Council of a proposed review of the Executive Director Management Structure and arrangements for the interim period, following the resignation of the Executive Director (Head of Paid Service).

Council noted that the Executive Director would finish her service with the authority on 30 October 2005. This imminent vacancy provided an opportunity for the Council to revisit its management arrangements. It would not be prudent to seek to replace the current postholder with a similar role without taking stock of the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements. Therefore, it was proposed that the Leader would undertake consultation with Members and senior staff about the right structure to lead the organisation, in partnership with Members, ensuring the significant progress achieved over the last three years was maintained.

The Leader stated that the options for consultation would include maintaining the existing structure as well as returning to a Chief Executive model. The consultation would take place over the coming weeks with a report on final proposals being submitted to Council on 26 October 2005. It was noted that the process would mean that, including recruitment time, the authority would have a vacancy in a critical management position for at least six months. Therefore, it was proposed that interim arrangements be put in place to cover the post from 31 October 2005 to 30 April 2006.

Current options for covering the post on this basis were being investigated. It was proposed that the Leader would make a decision based on advice from Human Resources and in consultation with the Chairman of Human Resources Sub-Committee and the Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor M Wood referred to the fact that that eight weeks

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had now passed since the Executive Director had given notice of her resignation and whether a meeting of Council should have been convened sooner. Also, he sought clarification on the process for appointing an interim manager.

In response, the Leader stated that notice had been given just before the traditional holiday period. A consultant had been engaged to research options and a number of interim managers would be available. The process of selection would involve interviews.

Councillor A M Graham sought clarification on how Members would be consulted. In response, the Leader stated that he would be happy to meet political groups collectively, or Members on an individual basis.

Council approved the recommendations as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) consultation on the management structure at Executive Director level be undertaken by the Leader of the Council as a matter of urgency; and

(B) a decision on interim arrangements to cover the responsibilities of the Executive Director (Head of Paid Service), be made by the Leader, in consultation with the Chairman of the Human Resources Sub-Committee and the Leader of the Opposition.

335 APPOINTMENT OF A MEMBER TO A COMMITTEE

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted a report seeking authority to appoint a Member to a vacancy on the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee.

Council noted that there was a vacant seat on the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee. The Conservative Group to whom the seat had been allocated, had given notice that it wished to appoint Councillor G D Scrivener to this seat.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, Councillor G D Scrivener be appointed to fill the vacant seat on the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee.

DCG

336 MOTION – PARKING ENFORCEMENT

Councillor M J Tindale moved, and Councillor G McAndrew seconded, a motion as follows:

‘This Council should look at ways to reduce the cost of parking enforcement before seeking to raise additional revenue through further parking charges.’

Introducing his motion, Councillor M J Tindale referred to the potential shortfall in revenue income and the Council’s statutory duty to balance its books. This had arisen following the Council’s decision to postpone the introduction of resident parking schemes in response to residents’ concerns. The postponement showed that the Council did listen to its residents.

Councillor M J Tindale suggested that existing charges for car parks in East Herts represented good value. He stated that the Council had adopted a principle that these charges paid for enforcement. Therefore, charges could increase or decrease depending on the level of enforcement. He suggested that the levels of enforcement should be reviewed before consideration was given to raising additional revenue through parking charges.

The Executive Member for Environmental Management stated that, as a general principle, the Executive had always looked to reduce costs before proposing increases in charges. This was a duty placed on all Members to achieve value for money. He assured Councillor M J Tindale that a cost conscious Conservative Council would continue to monitor expenditure on all services. Finally, he concluded by stating the principle that any shortfall should be met by the motorist.

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The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance referred to the moral decision taken by Council to implement Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) at a time when parking chaos had ensued on the streets of East Herts. The Council had adopted a consistent line that parking enforcement would be self-financing within five years and would not be a call on the Council Tax. DPE was about traffic management, in which the Council had to be flexible in meeting the concerns of residents, traders, etc. If there was a need to rebalance the equation without affecting the quality of the service adversely, then the Council would look at overheads within contractual obligations.

He concluded by stating that the introduction of resident parking zones would impact on enforcement, which the Council would need to consider.

A number of Members spoke in favour of the motion during the debate.

At the conclusion of the debate, after being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That this Council should look at ways to reduce the cost of parking enforcement before seeking to raise additional revenue through further parking charges.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Chairman
Date