

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD  
ON TUESDAY, 17 JANUARY 2006

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).  
Councillors H G S Banks, K Barnes, R N Copping,  
A D Dodd, G L Francis, Mrs M H Goldspink,  
Mrs S Newton, D Richards, G Scrivener,  
J D Thornton, N Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors T Milner and P A Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Philip Thomas	- Interim Executive Director
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Mary Orton	- Director of Policy and Performance
Jackie Sayers	- Scrutiny Officer
Georgina Stanton	- Director of Organisational Development

564 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of  
Councillors Mrs D L E Hollebon, G McAndrew and D M  
Mayes.

565 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded the Committee that it would be  
examining policies relating to the Council's priorities during  
the next year. It would be looking at whether or not  
policies enabled work to be done to support the Council's  
priorities. The Committee would consider if policies

needed to be adjusted or new policies introduced. He expressed concern that the Committee had not been given the opportunity to scrutinise new arrangements for bus passes for the elderly.

### RESOLVED ITEMS

### ACTION

#### 566 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 567 CORPORATE PRIORITY - "CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN COUNCIL BUSINESS"

The Executive Member for Public Engagement and the Director of Organisational Development gave a presentation on creating opportunities for improving access to services and public involvement in Council business.

A document on the public engagement strategy of East Herts Council had been circulated.

The Director of Organisational Development outlined steps which had been taken to improve access to Council services and public engagement with the Council including face to face contact, online and telephone communication. The work on raising public awareness of the East of England Plan was seen as a good example of engaging residents in the work of the Council. In addition a number of consultation methods had been used for seeking views on the budget from the public. Further work was needed on Community Voice meetings and attracting new Councillors.

A Member asked that Ward Councillors be consulted on topics for Community Voice. Members asked that more be done to raise the profile of Ward Councillors eg articles in Link Magazine, up to date posters.

ACTION

With regard to Community Voice a Member felt the Council should be more willing to receive dissenting comments at these. Another Member felt that these catered for the towns but were not very effective at including villages.

Members felt the public needed to feel their attendance at Community Voice meetings would make a difference and that there was a budget available to address the issues they raised at them.

Members agreed that they would like to add the topic of Community Voice to the work programme for the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee next year together with continuing to scrutinise budgets.

In addition, Members discussed the need to give people more information about the work of Councillors and the time commitment needed in order to attract them to the work.

The Committee discussed the public engagement strategy which had been circulated. One Member asked that clear instructions be included on all consultation documents including a postal address as this had been overlooked recently. Open days allowing Members to see the work of the Council Officers were seen as very helpful. Members also requested an up to date paper copy of the telephone directory and sight of the Team East Herts folder. The Committee was informed that training on presentation and written communication would be available to Members as well as officers.

Some concern was expressed that a Councillor helpline would interfere with Ward Councillors' direct contact with residents. However, they were assured the helpline would seek to enhance their role not detract from it.

The Committee agreed that policies relating to this priority did not need changing but certain items relating to it should be added to the Committee's work programme as discussed.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that (A) the Executive be informed that the Committee considers the policies relating to the priority to create opportunities for improving access to services and public involvement in Council business to be working well and the Committee welcomed the continuous improvement shown, and

DOD

(B) scrutiny of Community Voice and the Council's budget be included in the Committee's work programme for 2006/07.

DPP

568 CASTLE HALL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Executive Member for Community Development submitted a report on work that had been undertaken over the past months to improve facilities, entertainment and marketing at Castle Hall. The Director of Policy and Performance explained that the Audit Commission Inspection of leisure services in 2005 had found that Castle Hall was underused and had a confused public image. It had recommended the Council take timely and effective decisions to determine the future direction of the hall. A joint officer and Member panel had been established to decide on an improvement plan.

Improvements were being undertaken to the fabric of the building and the content of the programme. A comprehensive marketing programme had been developed to boost audiences including a new website.

The working group considered Castle Hall should be established as an arts venue and focal point for a local audience and a wider area.

Improvements to facilities would include rake seating, film projection equipment, display boards and online booking.

The range of events would be improved to include a Saturday Children's Film Club. An arts outreach

ACTION

programme would also be established to work with schools and local or regional groups. A relaunch of the hall was planned for April 2006. Long term improvements would be considered for the bar, kitchen and River Room.

Members raised concerns about where existing users of the hall who did not fit in with the proposed uses would go and suggested the Corn Exchange could provide an alternative venue. They hoped the hall would not seek to compete with the revamped Rhodes Centre in Bishop's Stortford and were assured that this would not be the case. It might be possible for the venues to take advantage of staging the same productions. A Member suggested tickets for three shows for the price of two could be offered initially to promote the use of the hall and that there should be a process for limiting the advance time in which tickets could be booked.

Members discussed possibilities for extending the building and providing car parking nearby. They suggested improvements in front of the building such as planting and paving, modern decor, moving the toilets to provide an exhibition area for local arts societies, an exhibition area in the foyer and providing improved café, restaurant and kitchen facilities.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Committee notes the improvements and marketing plans for Castle Hall and had the following comments to add:

DPP

- (a) the use of the Corn Exchange by some existing users of Castle Hall should be investigated;
- (b) outline planning permission should be sought for an extension/car parking for Castle Hall;
- (c) improvements should be made to planting, paving and barriers at the front of Castle Hall; and

ACTION

- (d) a display of paintings for sale should be maintained in the foyer.

569 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2005/06

The Director of Policy and Performance submitted a report on the work programme for the Committee for 2005/06.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that Hertfordshire County Council was dealing with bus passes for the elderly on behalf of all the districts in its area. Members expressed a wish to scrutinise concessionary fares, dial-a-ride and travel and transport as part of the Committee's future work programme. They also wished to discuss leisure provision. They wanted to start looking at budgets early in the process during 2006/07.

A Member raised the use of energy saving measures for heating Council properties and it was suggested this topic be raised through the Energy Efficiency Scrutiny Panel.

Another Member wished to look at the allocation of litter bins and it was suggested that this could be included in the meeting dealing with the priority to preserve the unique mix of rural and urban communities ensuring economic opportunities are generated for the benefit of all in March 2006.

Members wished to scrutinise the work of the Local Strategic Partnership but decided to defer this as a report on this issue was planned for a full Council meeting.

The Director of Policy and Performance reported that the report from the Long Term Leisure Strategy Group would be postponed until March 2006.

RESOLVED - that the work programme be approved with (A) the addition of:

DPP

ACTION

- (a) transport (2006/07)
  - (b) leisure provision (2006/07)
  - (c) early input during discussions of budget (2006/07)
  - (d) Local Strategic Partnership (date to be advised); and
- (B) the postponement of the report of the Long Term Leisure Strategy Group until March 2006.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.