

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON MONDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2006

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).
Councillors H G S Banks, R N Copping,
A D Dodd, Mrs D L E Hollebon, D Richards,
G D Scrivener.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors D Clark, A P Jackson, M J Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Corporate Governance
Jackie Sayers	- Scrutiny Officer
Jeff Self	- Interim Head of Human Resources
David Tweedie	- Director of Resources

578 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors K A Barnes, Mrs M H Goldspink, G McAndrew, D E Mayes, Mrs S Newton and N Wilson.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

579 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ACTION580 REPORT FROM BUDGET SCRUTINY PANEL

The minutes of the Budget Scrutiny Panel held on 2 February 2006 were circulated and the Chairman attended to explain the comments of the Panel on the budget.

Members of the Committee considered these and believed that charges for copies of development control decisions should be increased in line with similar charges. The Committee felt that play areas for children with special needs in private homes and home efficiency grants for hard to treat houses should be considered as part of a review of capital grants. The Committee agreed that improvements to public conveniences should be considered to help promote tourism in the district.

In addition, on car parking, the support for options 1, 2, 4 and 5 of the options concerning car parking as shown in the appendix of the report submitted to the Committee was noted.

The Committee was against introducing a separate band for charging in car parks for the first half hour of use but supported the review of charging for on-street parking. The Committee did not support differences in charging for different towns. It hoped the Executive's attention would be drawn to problems of irresponsible parking in Bishop's Stortford on Sundays.

The Committee felt officers should continue to negotiate an agreement on concessionary fares which would suit East Herts.

It hoped the government would recognise the additional expense imposed on local authorities by changes in licensing legislation.

It noted and supported the proposed increase in charges for meals on wheels.

ACTION

One Member asked if it would be possible to use local contractors for grass cutting. It was noted the amount allowed for grass cutting would be reviewed.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee (A) notes the report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel and has the following comments:

- (i) *Capital programme 2005/06 (Revised) to 2007/08*

The Committee accepted the Panel's comments that the capital programme 2005/06 - 2007/08, as proposed be agreed;

- (ii) *Fees and charges 2006/07*

The Committee accepted the Panel's comments that the fees and charges for 2006/07, as proposed be supported subject to charges for copies of development control decisions being increased to £11;

- (iii) *Growth 2006/07 and Efficiency Savings 2006/07*

The Committee noted the Panel's comments but would consider capital grants at a future meeting and the Committee supported the officers in their negotiations on concessionary fares in obtaining an agreement suitable for East Herts;

- (iv) *All divisions revenues estimates probable 2005/06: estimate 2006/07*

The Committee considered the proposed estimates should be supported; and

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(B) had the following additional comments on the budget:

- (i) the proposed increase in meals on wheels be supported; and
- (ii) additional expenditure on grass cuttings should be reviewed.

581 CORPORATE PRIORITY - IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ORGANISATION

The Committee had been examining policies relating to the Council's priorities. It was looking at whether or not policies enabled work to be done to support the Council's priorities. The Committee was considering whether policies needed to be adjusted or new policies needed to be introduced.

Officers attended to give presentations on financial resources, corporate governance and human resources relating to the corporate priority to improve the health and sustainability of the organisation.

The Director of Resources explained that Members had an opportunity every year to examine the financial health and sustainability of the organisation when they considered the capital and revenue estimates in order to decide the Council Tax. The Budget Scrutiny Panel and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee provided an additional means for Members to examine these estimates in detail. Increases in Council Tax were often the result of policies imposed by central government as had been explained at Community Voice meetings. Members thought the public should be informed of these at Community Voice meetings when a suitable opportunity arose.

The Director of Corporate Governance gave a presentation on corporate governance which was how the Council managed its activities for the people of the District. The

ACTION

concept of “corporate governance” had arisen as a result of failures in the private and public sector. A framework had been set up as a result of investigations into these failures. There were five main aspects involved. These were community focus, service delivery arrangements, structures and processes, risk management and internal control and standards of conduct. The Council had its own local code of corporate governance and action plan for the code. Compliance with corporate governance was demonstrated through accountability, effectiveness, integrity, openness and inclusivity and being up to date.

Scrutiny arrangements would be reviewed as part of corporate governance. The Scrutiny Officer invited Members to consider how they might wish to contribute to the review of the constitution. Members would be offered training in the scrutiny function. The Committee thought it needed a chance to look at matters in greater depth at scrutiny meetings.

Members expressed concern at matters which had been raised under standards of conduct. There was a feeling that the system had been misused to consider trivial complaints and continue arguments between individuals inappropriately. Changes were proposed for dealing with complaints concerning standards of conduct and some changes were expected concerning guidelines for declarations of interest which was sometimes felt to be too restrictive.

The Interim Head of Human Resources gave a presentation on how he had attempted to ensure that Human Resources (HR) in East Herts contributed to achieving all the Council’s priorities, including the priority of improving the health and sustainability of the organisation.

He had been reviewing HR policies to make sure they were up to date and easier to use. He had made it clear that the primary responsibility of HR was to support managers. He had been developing an in-house, competency based management training programme. Performance related

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pay had been proposed and the annual appraisal system was being reviewed so that it was possible to score employees accurately on their achievement of competencies. The Interim Head of HR questioned the suitability of performance related pay in local government. He thought it would be better to encourage staff to achieve promotions and qualifications through training and development.

Members felt that a structured performance appraisal scheme was essential. The Committee believed that Members involved in the HR Sub-Committee should have training particularly if they were expected to deal with appeals.

The Committee noted the useful role of trade unions in representing staff.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that
(A) a number of HR policies were in need of review and updating to ensure managers were supported in managing staff;

(B) Members involved in HR matters needed specialised training for the work; and

(C) the review of the constitution regarding corporate governance and scrutiny was supported.

582 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2005/2006/2007

The Director of Policy and Performance submitted a report on the work programme for the Committee which was supported.

RESOLVED - that the work programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 10.10 pm.