

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
WAYTEMORE ROOM, COUNCIL
OFFICES, BISHOP'S STORTFORD ON
TUESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2006 AT
7.30 PM

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors G McAndrew, R L Parker.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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| Anne Fisher | - Chief Executive |
| Lorraine Blackburn | - Committee Secretary |
| Mary Orton | - Director of Policy and Performance |
| Ceridwen Pettit | - Head of Performance |
| Jackie Sayers | - Scrutiny Officer |

235 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
Councillors P R Ballam, A L Burlton and L R Pinnell.

236 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman commented that the Leisure and Cultural
Strategy report had been withdrawn as it related to an
issue which Policy Development Scrutiny Committee was
overseeing. A draft strategy would be submitted to a future
meeting of that Committee.

The Chairman commented that the Leader had already
signed off the Backward Annual Efficiency Statement.
Therefore, the report was not for discussion but for noting.
The Chairman questioned why the item had been included

ACTION

on the agenda, as it appeared to be more relevant to Audit Committee.

The Chairman further commented that in January 2007, the Committee would also be asked to receive a 2006/07 Backward Annual Efficiency Statement. Officers' advice was being sought on the most appropriate committee to consider the report and further information would be available at the November meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION237 MINUTES

It was noted that Councillor P R Ballam had submitted her apologies for the meeting on 11 July 2006 but these had not been recorded.

It was further noted that at Council on 19 July 2006 in respect of Minute 119 - Youth Issues (1) the Chairman, in response to a question from a Member, commented that a Strategy would be developed and reported to Members later in 2006.

In respect of Minute 119 – Youth Issues (1), the references to “Northgate End School” be amended to “Northgate School”.

RESOLVED – that subject to the typographical errors referred to at Council, the minutes of the meeting of Performance Scrutiny committee held on 11 July 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

238 THE EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Director of Policy and Performance submitted a report which set out the requirements under the national Equality Standard for Local Government and outlined East Herts' progress.

ACTION

The equality standard in relation to the National Best Value Performance Indicators BV2 and BV2a and their respective levels, was explained in the report now submitted. The report specifically focussed on BV2a (the Equalities Standard for Local Government).

The Council's work on equality was being co-ordinated by a Corporate Steering Group the "Valuing Diversity Action Group". Although the Council was currently achieving Level 2 of the standard it was hoped that by March 2008, Level 3 could be achieved. Further work would need to be developed from December 2006, to address disability and gender issues.

The Director of Policy and Performance explained the importance of developing diversity policies, with due regard to legislative requirements, the need to deliver services to the community generally and to new and emerging communities.

The imminent launch of a training programme for Members to raise awareness was referred to. A practical information pack had been developed and would be sent to Members shortly.

The Executive Member for Community Development referred to the extensive work which had been carried out to progress the diversity equality initiative which would help the Council achieve a better standard and thanked the Director for her efforts.

Members raised a number of issues:

- questions (j) to (r) in BV 2b were qualitative when the issue should be about "significant improvement";
- the difficulty in measuring "increasing confidence";
- the steps taken to reach out to new communities such as Polish and Portuguese nationals and hard to

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reach groups. Members requested a further report on work being done by the Council to engage with new residents from overseas, eg their entitlements, benefits and rights to services and help such as Council Tax and Housing.

- the need to provide training for new Members' following the District Council Elections in 2007 in relation to building and development control and raising a general awareness of cultural differences.

Members requested that future reports be submitted on an exception basis, to monitor the progress of the diversity initiatives.

Members supported the decision to implement staff recognition awards.

The Chief Executive commented that Members had given officers a strong steer in terms of its engagement policies and how the Council should include all its communities and groups in the District.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that (A) Performance Scrutiny Committee endorses the action set out in the report now submitted, to achieve Level 2 of the Equality Standard in 2006/07 and its aim to achieve Level 3 within three years;

DPP

(B) Officers' develop training for those new Members joining in 2007 especially those appointed to Development Control Committee, in order to provide guidance in relation to planning applications to raise awareness of culture differences and that similar guidance be provided for applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds;

DPP

ACTION

(C) Officers be requested to report on the work of the Local Strategic Partnership explaining how the Council and its partners engages with new residents from overseas; and DPP

(D) future reports be submitted to Performance Scrutiny Committee on an exception basis. DPP

239 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTERLY MONITORING (APRIL – JUNE 2006)

The Chief Executive submitted a report detailing the performance statistics for the period April – June 2006.

It was noted that of the 21 indicators (and sub parts):

71% (15) were on or above target,

14% (3) were 1-5% off target,

14% (3) were 6% or more off target.

The following indicators were 6% or more off target:

LPI2.9 – Average building regulations plan check turnaround time;

BV 82a (i) - % of household waste received; and

BV 12 – No. of working days lost due to sickness absence.

It was noted that Corporate Management Team had recently revised the target date of LPI2.9 to six days to take account of the section's excellent performance in dealing with the extensive number of applications received over the summer months.

ACTION

An increase in garden waste was a factor in relation to the performance of BV 82a(i).

In relation to BV 12, a number of staff on long term sickness continued to affect the performance figures. The Head of Performance undertook to provide Members with specific figures.

Members queried the level of delegated powers in relation to BV109c especially in relation to land being developed for housing purposes. Reference was made to the fact that advice by Town Councils was often ignored. The Chief Executive suggested that the Head of Development Control be invited to attend the next meeting so that Members' concerns could be addressed.

The Head of Performance commented that the format of the next quarterly report would be amended to include financial information and best practice.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Executive be informed that Performance Scrutiny Committee endorses the recommendation of Corporate Management Team (CMT) in relation to Local Performance Indicator LPI2.9 to revise the target to six days;

(B) the Head of Performance provide Members with specific figures in relation to BV12 (Staff on long term sickness); and

Head of
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(C) the Head of Development Control be invited to attend the next meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee to provide further information on LPI2.9 and in relation to Officers' Delegated Powers.

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ACTION240 LEISURE CONTRACT MONITORING – APRIL TO JUNE 2006

The Head of Leisure submitted a report on Aspire's performance between April to mid July 2006. The Chief Executive commented that the Executive had agreed to set up an Executive Sub Committee to look at the range of contract issues in relation to leisure services.

The Chief Executive explained Aspire and East Herts Council were engaged in a recovery plan aimed at improving Aspire's current financial situation and management performance.

The Chief Executive referred to the need to maintain a level of service in order to maintain attendance levels. It was noted that there had been a number of planned and unplanned reviews and visits to each facility each week by the Head of Leisure and the Interim Director with written feedback being provided on the new management arrangements. Overall, there had been a reduction in contract compliance with Grange Paddocks and Hartham seeing the largest decline in inputs achieved, but service delivery was beginning to improve. This was felt to be attributable to the two new senior managers.

Casual swimming attendances were showing a decline of 13%, (a nationwide trend). The reasons were explained in the report, now submitted. However, a full summer holiday programme had seen an increase of approximately 19% on the same period last year.

Overall, Aspire had incurred a loss in the first year significantly larger than originally thought. The Chief Executive commented that the Council was continuing to work with Aspire and was working through elements in the recovery plan. However, Aspire's financial position depended in part, on the co-operation of Enfield Leisure's Liquidators.

ACTION

In the main, there had been a reduction in attendances which would be reported at the next Performance Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Executive emphasised the Council's commitment to providing leisure services and referred to funding which had been agreed to improve the fabric of the buildings.

Members welcomed the approach to look at long term leisure performance and referred to the need to establish a balance between casual swimming and club swimming. Continuity of teaching was an issue of concern to those learning to swim.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be noted;

(B) Officers' prepare a further report regarding the balance of usage in the provision of casual swimming against the need to provide club swimming and lessons; and

DPP

(C) Officers' provide an update on the ability of the Council to ensure continuity of tuition to those learning to swim.

DPP

241 ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN LETTER 2005/06

The Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Governance submitted a report setting out the Ombudsman's findings for the period 2005/06.

The Chief Executive reported that 18 complaints had been received during the period. This was a continuing downward trend. The largest number of complaints involved planning matters and most complaints had been resolved locally. Three complaints were highlighted, the most important of which involved a Councillor with a prejudicial interest who had referred a planning application to committee. To address this problem, a Good Practice

ACTION

Procedure had been developed and circulated to all Members of Development Control Committee and via the Members' Information Bulletin. The Chairman of Development Control Committee and Head of Development Control had also reiterated to Committee Members the importance of conformity to the new procedure. The Chief Executive had responded to the Ombudsman outlining the action taken by the Council to address the complaint.

The Ombudsman concluded that he had received few complaints about East Herts with few findings of fault and generally received prompt replies. He considered the Council cooperative and willing to review its procedures where necessary.

Clarification was sought and provided in relation to the Standards Committee and the role of the Ombudsman.

Members questioned the rationale behind not being able to use their detailed knowledge / expertise in a particular field and of the need for Members to declare an interest. Members agreed that Officers should consult with Executive Members to see if the Council wished to respond formally.

It was noted that a report would be presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee in January 2007 on the Complaint Handling System. Members requested that the Head of Customer Relations and relevant Portfolio Holder be invited to attend that meeting.

RESOLVED – that (A) Officers should consult with Executive Members to see if the Council wished to respond formally; and

CE

(B) the Head of Customer Relations and Portfolio Holder be invited to attend the January meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee.

DPP

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242 BACKWARD ANNUAL EFFICIENCY STATEMENT (AES)
2005/06

The Director of Resources submitted a report concerning the 2005/06 Backward Annual Efficiency Statement. It was noted that the Statement had already been seen and signed off by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Chief Financial Officer.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

243 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive submitted a report detailing the work of the Performance Scrutiny Committee up to April 2007. The report was amended to include reports on the Housing Review Action Plan and the Corporate Health Check on 14 November 2006 and a report on the Complaint Handling System on 16 January 2007.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

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| Chairman | |
| Date | |