

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 10
JANUARY 2007 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A L Burlton (Chairman).
Councillors M R Alexander, W Ashley,
P R Ballam, H G S Banks, K A Barnes, S A Bull,
N Burdett, M G Carver, D Clark, R Conway,
R N Copping, A F Dearman, J Demonti,
A D Dodd, G L Francis, R Gilbert, A M Graham,
J Hedley, Mrs D L E Hollebon, Mrs D M Hone,
A P Jackson, G McAndrew, M P A McMullen,
J Mayes, T Milner, Mrs S Newton, R L Parker,
D A A Peek, L R Pinnell, J O Ranger, D Richards,
P A Ruffles, S Rutland-Barsby, G D Scrivener,
J J Taylor, J D Thornton, M J Tindale,
A L Warman, J P Warren, M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lorraine Kirk	- Senior Communications Officer
Mary Orton	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Dave Tweedie	- Director of Resources

ACTION484 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 8 November 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

485 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked all contributors who had sent in designs for the corporate Christmas cards. This had been the first time a competition had been held and the response had been pleasing. He gave particular thanks to the two competition winners who were present to receive a framed copy of their design. The Chairman stated that over 700 copies of the cards had been sent to partners and colleagues within the District and beyond.

The winner of the 13 to 19 age group was Robert Brannan, 18 from Amwell View School, Stanstead Abbots. The winner of the 5 to 12 age group was Emily Bauer, 7 from Hollybush Primary School, Hertford. The Chairman invited both winners to collect their framed copies and to say a few words on what inspired their designs. Council Members showed their appreciation to the winners.

In respect of the agenda, the Chairman advised Members that he had agreed to accept an item of urgent business relating to the Council's response to the discussion document, 'Investing in Your Health'. Copies had been placed around the table and the matter would be dealt with as agenda item 10.

The Chairman advised Members of the forthcoming charity quiz evening being organised for parish councils by Councillor J Mayes and invited Members to support the event.

Finally, the Chairman referred to his civic reception on 17 March 2007. Invitations would be sent out shortly and he asked Members to respond as soon as possible.

ACTION486 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors A P Jackson, L R Pinnell and J P Warren declared personal and prejudicial interests in the matter referred to at Minute 490 – Investing in your Health, as their wives were all National Health Service employees. They left the chamber prior to consideration of this matter.

Councillor S A Bull declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 490 – Investing in your Health, as he was a voluntary driver for the Ambulance Service.

487 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Councillor P A Ruffles asked the Executive Member for Environmental Management, as the holder of the portfolio responsible for parking on East Herts' streets, at what point he expected to have sufficient confidence in the professional judgement of East Herts parking attendants to be able to move from a policy of zero tolerance to one where a little more flexibility was possible.

In response, the Executive Member for Environmental Management expressed his confidence in the work of the parking attendants. He believed they operated in accordance with the enforcement policies and guidelines approved by the Council, which were clear and easy to understand and were available to view on the Council's website.

The Executive Member quoted specifically from paragraph 1.1.40 of the policy, which covered appropriate observation periods for certain contraventions as a matter of local discretion. He reminded Members of the need for enforcement to be consistent in order to avoid challenges.

Finally, the Executive Member referred to the robust appeals mechanism at a local level and via the National Parking Adjudication Service.

ACTION

Councillor L R Pinnell asked the Executive Member for Environmental Management when, given his understanding that Wilson Bowden Developments had handed over a sum of money to this Council for signage of the new multi-storey car park in Bishop's Stortford, signs were due to be erected in and around the town in order that visitors could find their way to the new multi-storey. The first part of the car park had opened in mid December with no official signage of any sort. There was still no official signage, apart from some rather inadequate yellow AA signs and, recently attached, an untidy banner across the car park entrance.

In response, the Executive Member for Environmental Management suggested that residents of Bishop's Stortford had noticed the erection of the new multi-storey car park as the occupancy rate of 41% in the first two weeks after its opening had confirmed.

The Executive Member refuted the suggestion that signage was inadequate and stated that three electronic signs would be erected in April 2007, which would provide real time information on occupancy.

Finally, the Executive Member referred to the delivery of a quality facility on schedule, which had been open in time for Christmas shoppers and, when completed, would provide over 700 short-stay spaces. He expressed regret that some Members were being negative and not supporting the development of the town.

Councillor L R Pinnell asked the Executive Member for Environmental Management Why the signs directing vehicles to the Bishop's Stortford park and ride had been removed, as this could only exacerbate the already difficult parking situation in Bishop's Stortford.

In response, the Executive Member referred to the enforcement activity that had been carried out recently in removing flyposting materials and clutter from verges. This had been carried out in partnership with Hertfordshire

ACTION

Highways and joint policies and procedures were being developed.

In respect of the park and ride facility, this had always been intended as a temporary measure to offset the loss of parking spaces during the construction of Jackson Square multi-storey car park. He confirmed that the park and ride facility would cease to operate on 9 March 2007.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of support from businesses in the town, there was no business case for it to continue.

The Executive Member referred to the 75% occupancy rate of car parks in Bishop's Stortford, which he believed exposed the myth of a lack of car parking spaces in the town. He urged all Members to be more positive in promoting the town centre.

Councillor L R Pinnell asked the Executive Member for Regions and Partnerships whether the Administration had decided against sponsored roundabouts but would rather not say so at this stage, as it was leaving it to the new Council after May to make a final decision. This was the fourth time he had made enquiries about sponsored roundabouts and thirteen months since he brought the matter up in December 2005. This seemed to be an excessive amount of time to take such a decision. Bishop's Stortford Town Centre Management had also been requesting sponsored roundabouts for a number of years.

In response, the Executive Member referred to the Leader's answer given to the same question at the previous meeting. The position had not changed and detailed work was ongoing in drafting a new highways agreement. The Executive would be receiving a report on this matter when these operational issues had been resolved.

488 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council reported on the work of the Executive and presented the Minutes of the Executive

ACTION

meetings held on 16 November and 19 December 2006.

The Leader referred to the Government's recent decision to ignore the Inspector's findings on the Harlow North element of the East of England Plan. He reminded Members of the vigorous consultation undertaken by the Council in seeking residents' views, which had rejected the original proposals for additional housing in the Harlow North area. The response of residents in the East Herts area had been the largest in the region.

The Leader believed that this had demonstrated the strength of feeling and yet, the Minister's announcement had ignored the democratic process. He reiterated the importance of the next round of consultation and urged Members to maintain the fight against the Plan's proposals for unsustainable growth in East Herts.

He suggested that the recent announcement had demonstrated the Government's contempt for local residents' views. He stated that the Executive Member for Regions and Partnerships would be leading the Council's campaign and invited Members, residents and the local press to support this.

In response, the Leaders of the Liberal Democrat and Independent Groups supported the Leader's comments in respect of the Government's recent announcement on the East of England Plan.

In respect of Minute 447 – Divisional Establishments Round 1 Revenue Estimates, the Leader of the Council, in response to a question from Councillor A M Graham, stated that figures relating to swimming pools would be contained within the budget papers being submitted to the next Policy Development Scrutiny Committee on 23 January 2007.

In response to a question from Councillor A M Graham relating to the Council's TUPE obligations, the Leader undertook to provide a written response.

ACTION

In respect of Minute 438 – Advertising and Implementation of Traffic Regulation Order for Increase in Car Park Charges, Councillor K A Barnes expressed his opposition to the proposed increases in Bishop’s Stortford on the basis that these would, in his view, have a detrimental impact on the vitality of the town centre compared to other shopping centres.

In response, the Executive Member for Environmental Management refuted this suggestion and referred to the transport costs of visiting other shopping centres.

In response to a question from Councillor M J Tindale on reviewing the policy of an annual 5% increase on car park charges, the Leader reminded Members of the rationale for the policy and commented that this was always under review when the budget strategy for each year was formulated.

In respect of Minute 449 – Increase in Empty Property Charge and Calculation of Council Tax Base 2007/08, Council agreed to amend recommendation (A) as follows:

Delete ‘empty properties’ and replace with ‘second homes’

In response to a question from Councillor M J Tindale, the Leader clarified the position in respect of justifiable exemptions.

RESOLVED – that (A) in respect of Minute 449 – Increase in Empty Property Charge and Calculation of Council Tax Base 2007/08, recommendation (A) be amended as follows:

Delete ‘empty properties’ and replace with ‘second homes’

(B) the Minutes of the Executive meetings held on 16 November and 19 December 2006, be received, and the recommendations contained therein, be

ACTION

adopted.

(Note – Councillors K A Barnes, G L Francis, A M Graham, L R Pinnell and M Wood asked that their dissent from the decision in respect of recommendation (B) at Minute 447 Divisional Establishments Round 1 Revenue Estimates, be recorded.)

489 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES(A) HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 7
NOVEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 7 November 2006, be received.

(B) PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
14 NOVEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 November 2006, be received.

(C) STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 15 NOVEMBER 2006

Council noted a typographical error in the list of Members present in that ‘Mrs J Taylor’ should have read ‘Mr J Taylor’.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 15 November 2006, be received.

(D) JOINT MEETING OF PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 NOVEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the joint Performance Scrutiny Committee and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting

ACTION

held on 15 November 2006, be received.

(E) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 22
NOVEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 22 November 2006, be received.

(F) AUDIT COMMITTEE – 27 NOVEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 27 November 2006, be received.

(G) POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 5 DECEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5 December 2006, be received.

(H) LICENSING COMMITTEE – 13 DECEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 13 December 2006, be received.

(I) HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 14
DECEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 14 December 2006, be received and the recommendation contained therein, be adopted.

ACTION

(J) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 20
DECEMBER 2006

Council noted that in respect of Minute 463 – Declarations of Interest, the reason for Councillor Scrivener's declaration had been wrongly recorded and would be corrected at the next Development Control Committee meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 20 December 2006, be received.

490 INVESTING IN YOUR HEALTH: THE NEXT STEPS –
RESPONSE

The Executive Member for Public Engagement submitted a report seeking Council's approval to a response to the questionnaire from the Primary Care Trust regarding Investing In Your Health: The Next Steps. The Chairman had agreed to accept this item onto the agenda as an urgent matter in order to enable a response to be submitted before the deadline of 15 January 2007.

The Council had received a discussion paper from the Primary Care Trust as detailed at Appendix 'A' of the report now submitted. This explained what had happened since the publication of 'Investing in Your Health', most notably the change in financial circumstances.

The discussion paper included a questionnaire for responding, and the Executive Member referred Members to a proposed response at Appendix 'B' of the report now submitted. This had been developed following a Member/Officer workshop on 4 January 2007. Members' comments had been included in the proposed response to the questionnaire.

The Executive Member urged all Members to submit an individual response.

ACTION

Councillor G L Francis expressed surprise that the response had identified access to care as being more important than clinical quality. In response, the Executive Member commented that the response represented the democratic view of those Members present at the workshop. He reiterated that Members could submit an individual response.

Councillor Mrs S Newton referred to the consultation process, the changing strategy and the budget pressures within the health service. She supported the Executive Member in urging Members to submit an individual response.

In response to various comments, the Executive Member undertook to correct the typographical errors within the proposed response.

Councillor J P Warren referred to the absence of any health scrutiny arrangements at present and suggested that an opportunity had been missed to consider the consultation more fully. The Executive Member responded by referring to the new arrangements at county level, where the Leader had sought to maximise the District's representation.

In response to concerns expressed by Councillors A D Dodd and M Wood relating to the impact on the eastern side of the District, the Executive Member shared these concerns and reminded Members that this was only a discussion paper and that the full consultation process would begin later in the year.

Councillor P R Ballam suggested that the issue might be worthy of consideration at Community Voice. The Executive Member agreed to take this suggestion on board.

Council approved the proposed response as now detailed, subject to the typographical errors highlighted.

RESOLVED – that the response detailed at Appendix 'R' of the report now submitted, be approved for

ACTION

'B' of the report now submitted, be approved for submission to the Primary Care Trust, subject to the typographical errors being corrected.

The meeting closed at 8.39 pm

Chairman
Date

Nps\Council\Minutes 10 Jan 2007