

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON TUESDAY, 20 MARCH 2007 AT
7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).
Councillors H G S Banks, R N Copping,
A D Dodd, L O Haysey, J Mayes and D Richards.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Clark and R L Parker.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Contract Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Tracy Ferguson	- Head of Environmental Health
Jane O'Brien	- Empty Homes Officer
Jackie Sayers	- Scrutiny Officer
Ian Sharratt	- Environmental Manager
Trevor Watkins	- Waste Services Manager
Sheila Winterburn	- Environmental Health Manager

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Barnes	- Hertfordshire County Council
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658 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs M H Goldspink, Mrs D L E Hollebon and A P Jackson.

659 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor L O Haysey declared a personal interest in Minute 663 - Progress on development of a new Cultural Strategy 2007/12, by virtue of being a member of the Civic Society.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION660 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the addition of the following paragraph to Minute 529 - Growth and Efficiency Savings 2007/8 -

“The Chairman of the Audit Committee pointed out that a paper giving information on the current financial position and the impact of current spending decisions on future years which was provided to the Executive was not circulated to the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee, as in previous years, making it harder for Members to scrutinise the subject.”

661 EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

The Chief Executive submitted a report on a request by a Member, who was not a Policy Development Scrutiny Committee Member, to scrutinise the Empty Homes Strategy. The Committee was obliged by the Council's Constitution to decide whether to scrutinise the strategy.

ACTION

It was reported that the Committee had been given the opportunity to consider the draft strategy but the Chairman had chosen not to consider this as, it had been agreed previously, that the relevant meeting would be kept clear to consider the budget. Members had been advised it was available on the Members' Extranet if they wished to comment on it. No comments had been received. The strategy had been adopted by the Executive on 6 February 2007.

It was noted that the Constitution provided that a motion or amendment to rescind a decision made at a meeting within the last six months could not be moved unless the notice of motion was signed by at least 25 Members.

The Executive Member for Community Development stated that the Empty Homes Strategy would be reviewed regularly.

The Head of Environmental Health explained that there were clear stages in the process for the Empty Homes Strategy but working procedures would follow when cases arose. There were already protocols for enforcement action in general which would ensure cases were dealt with fairly. This included involving the relevant Ward Member.

Members expressed concern that they should be involved before properties were taken over by the Council. They wished to see a protocol of procedures which would be followed in implementing the strategy and if possible examples of cases dealt with.

The Committee agreed that the scrutiny of the Empty Homes Strategy should be included on the Forward Plan following May 2007.

RESOLVED - that the Empty Homes Strategy be included on the Forward Programme after May 2007.

CEO

ACTION662 RESPONSE TO HERTFORDSHIRE MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY CONSULTATION

The Head of Contract Services presented a report on the Hertfordshire Waste Partnerships Consultation regarding the review of the Hertfordshire Municipal Waste Management Strategy and a presentation was given on waste management.

The Hertfordshire Waste Partnership comprised ten District and Borough Councils and the County Council and set the strategy for waste management. It was noted that landfill space was running out rapidly. In order to address this Councils would need to encourage waste minimisation, recycle more and develop alternative waste treatment facilities to landfill. The Partnership was proposing a target of 50% of waste recycled by 2012. A Hertfordshire wide public consultation exercise had been launched and East Herts Officers and the Executive Member for Environmental Management had been involved in the development of a new strategy. It was recommended that the strategy be supported and the Executive Member had raised a number of points with the Partnership.

The Committee asked questions concerning treatment of waste (particularly Energy from Waste (EFW)), encouraging suppliers to use less packaging on goods and the need to be self sufficient in waste disposal which were answered by the Hertfordshire County Council representative.

The Committee agreed to recommend that East Herts Council support the Partnership's proposals and in particular efforts to reduce packaging. The Committee strongly supported the development of Energy from Waste facilities to deal with residual waste.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that in response to the consultation on the Hertfordshire Municipal Waste Management Strategy:

DCS/CE

ACTION

(A) Hertfordshire County Council be advised that East Herts Council:

- (i) generally supports the proposals detailed within the draft strategy;
- (ii) supports the proposed county-wide target to achieve 50% of household waste recycled by 2012;
- (iii) strongly supports the use of EFW as an appropriate means of handling residual waste; and

(B) the Executive Member be requested to write to the Partnership outlining East Herts Council's views as outlined in the report now submitted and expressed by the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee.

DCCS

663 PROGRESS ON DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW CULTURAL STRATEGY 2007/12

The Head of Housing and Community Planning submitted a report on progress on developing a new cultural strategy for 2007 to 2012 and seeking comments and guidance on the consultation.

The previous cultural strategy for 2002 to 2005 had been based on a number of themes and a review had shown most of its targets had been achieved. It had also helped to strengthen cultural partnerships and provide a framework for a period of cultural development including a number of successes which were detailed in the report.

The Head of Housing and Community Planning explained that the new cultural strategy would have four themes of art, leisure and children's play, sport and heritage. The final draft would be submitted to the Executive in July 2007.

ACTION

The partnership for the strategy would encourage involvement by a wide selection of organisations including voluntary groups.

A number of issues had emerged from consultation so far. These included the need to market events better and to develop a district-wide arts forum. Lottery funds would be available if a robust play strategy was developed. The leisure use of waterways could be developed. A policy to encourage formal and informal play provision for older children would be developed. Play areas and formal and informal open spaces could be developed in accordance with recognised best practice. More sports facilities funding and a community network were needed. There was a need to focus on the sports participation targets established by the Local Area Agreement. There was a strong volunteer culture in the heritage sector and the four museums had strong collections.

The Committee commented on the need to involve Members in the strategy at an early stage as many would have specialist knowledge and know of local organisations who would wish to be involved.

In noting the progress made in developing the new cultural strategy, the Committee agreed to receive a further report in three months.

RESOLVED - that (A) the progress on development of a new cultural strategy be noted;

(B) a further report on the strategy be submitted to the Committee in three months; and DCCS

(C) Members approach organisations not aware of the work on the strategy as part of the consultation or give the names of organisations to the Head of Housing and Community Planning. DCCS

ACTION664 PARKS AND OPEN SPACES STRATEGY AND GREEN FLAG AWARD ACCREDITATION

The Head of Contract Services submitted a draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for East Herts for consideration prior to public consultation.

The report also recommended sites for a future bid submission to achieve Green Flag Award Status.

There had been significant development of the Council's public open spaces over the last few years particularly Pishiobury Country Park and Southern Country Park.

The Council had made a commitment to support the Hertfordshire Local Area Agreement which would result in additional funds. One of the criteria for this would require Councils to increase the number of Green Flag Awards for parks and green spaces.

The report suggested Southern Country Park, which met LAA criteria for being in a catchment area of local areas of deprivation and had strong local support for development, should be the first site selected for submission for a Green Flag Award. The Committee noted the draft strategy and welcomed the improvement of parks which involvement in the Green Flag process could bring. It wanted to review the progress on Southern Country Park before deciding on other parks to be entered in the scheme.

RESOLVED - that (A) the initial draft of the East Herts Parks and Open Spaces Strategy be welcomed;

(B) the Executive be informed that the Committee supports the selection of Southern Country Park for submission for the Green Flag Award; and

ACTION

(C) a report on progress on Southern Country Parks be considered before other parks are selected for submission for the Green Flag award.

DCCS

665 REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report on the review of changes to the Constitution introduced in May 2006.

Further to the Committee's request at its meeting on 5 December 2006 a questionnaire had been sent to all Members and senior officers on the review.

The main changes made in May 2006 had been delegation of non-key decision making to individual Executive Members; allowing Ward Members to comment on petitions presented to Council meetings and provision for substitute Members to be appointed.

The results of the questionnaire showed that the non-key decision making process was considered sound and Members felt they were being consulted. There was some desire for more panel meetings.

In respect of Executive Members' portfolio areas generally there was a desire for more consultation. Members wanted petitions to be referred to Council in the first instance with an option to refer them to scrutiny. Regular updates on the progress of petitions had been suggested.

Questionnaire responses on substitutes were inconclusive. There was some support for a further relaxation of the rules to allow substitutions immediately prior to a meeting but concern had also been expressed that last minute substitutions could cause problems.

ACTION

The Committee discussed the need for panels to provide Members with expert knowledge in portfolio areas and briefing on current topics. This had not been developed sufficiently and the Committee agreed to inform the Executive that this role should be developed further. It also discussed substitute arrangements and petitions and believed a written response should be provided to those submitting petitions. It also believed that new arrangements for making the constitution available on the Council's website for Members needed to be modified to enable users to search the document by use of key words in the whole document.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that
(A) Executive Advisory Panels should be developed to provide additional updates and inform action for Panel Members on issues in the portfolio areas;

DCS/CE

(B) those presenting petitions should be sent a written response as soon as possible; and

(C) the Constitution on the website should be modified to allow a search by key words in the whole document.

666 ANNUAL REPORT 2006/07

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committees submitted an annual report on scrutiny for approval by the Committee. Members considered the report and agreed it should be submitted to the Council subject to two factual alterations.

RESOLVED - that the annual report be approved for submission to the Council meeting on 16 May 2007.

CE

ACTION

667 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2006/07/08

The Chief Executive submitted a report on the work programme for 2006/07/08 which was noted.

RESOLVED - that the Committee Work Programme as circulated at the meeting be noted with the addition of Empty Homes Strategy after May 2007.

CE

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm.

Chairman
Date