

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 4 MARCH
2008 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A L Burlton (Chairman).
Councillors M R Alexander, D Andrews,
W Ashley, P R Ballam, K A Barnes, R Beeching,
S A Bull, Mrs R Cheswright, D Clark, N Clark,
A F Dearman, J Demonti, R Gilbert, L O Haysey,
J Hedley, Mrs D L E Hollebon, Mrs D M Hone,
A P Jackson, G Lawrence, G McAndrew,
M P A McMullen, J Mayes, T Milner, R L Parker,
D A A Peek, N C Poulton, W Quince, R Radford,
J O Ranger, P A Ruffles, S Rutland-Barsby,
G D Scrivener, R I Taylor, M J Tindale,
A L Warman, J P Warren, N Wilson, M Wood,
C B Woodward, B Wrangles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Tony Hall	- Interim Head of Business Support Services
Philip Hamberger	- Director of Internal Services
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lorraine Kirk	- Senior Communications Officer
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Helen Style - Hertfordshire
Pathfinder Director

561 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 February 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

562 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members of the arrangements for his civic dinner and drew attention to the civic service on 20 April 2008, at 10.30 am, at Haileybury College. He asked Members to ensure that they notified him if they were coming.

563 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Councillor N C Poulton asked the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support, as he had been unable to attend the February Executive and last week's Council meeting, if he could clarify the Council's projected investment returns on investments at 5.3% and how he had reached this figure. Also, he asked if he could confirm that, in his opinion, the medium term financial plan was sustainable and that this opinion had been endorsed by the Executive and Officers.

In reply, the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support welcomed the opportunity to clarify the position. He stated that the projected investment return had been based on advice received from Sector, the Council's independent advisors. As an investment return of nearly 6% had been achieved in latter part of the current year, he believed that 5.3% represented a conservative estimate.

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The Executive Member referred to the medium term financial plan, in which investment returns of 5% in 2009/10 and 4.75% in 2010/11 had been projected. Again, these were conservative projections. In any event, if interest rates did fall during this period, there would not necessarily be a consequent impact on the Council's investment returns as much of these were on fixed term rates.

The Executive Member referred to the original report submitted to the Executive and the statement that the medium term financial plan was not sustainable. He conceded that, technically, this had been correct. However, this would be addressed in 2009/10 when £400k of savings would need to be identified. Currently, he did not know where these savings would be identified. However, the Executive and Officers would be working hard to achieve them in areas, such as Pathfinder. He believed that the Council had a good track record of achieving savings - indeed, £600k savings had already been identified in 2009/10.

Councillor D Clark referred to the motion passed on 20 February 2008, as amended by Councillor Ranger, which had affirmed that it was Council policy to have a sustainable medium term financial plan. She asked the Leader of the Council if he could explain why the Executive had brought forward an unsustainable medium term financial plan, contrary to Council policy.

The Leader referred the question to the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support. The Executive Member referred to the answer he had given to the previous question.

Councillor N Clark referred to Member allowances that had been set by an independent panel back in 2003 based on limited evidence and before the implications of the cabinet system were fully understood, which were now due for review. He asked the Leader of the Council if any arrangements had been made to reconvene the independent panel to review members' allowances and if so, when the

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review would be completed.

In reply, the Leader stated that the remuneration panel had in fact, been convened in 2001 and had met several times since, most recently to approve special responsibility allowances for leaders of minority groups. In 2003, the panel had agreed that allowances should be indexed with the Chief Officer settlement. In line with recent legislative requirements that such arrangements should be reviewed every four years, he stated that this would be undertaken shortly.

Councillor N Clark asked a supplementary question that, as the Leader received a special responsibility allowance higher than any district council leader in the South East of England, would the remuneration panel be asked to review the absolute level of allowances and not just the indexation.

In response, the Leader commented that the implication in the question was that the level of special responsibility allowances was too high. He referred to a recent national report on levels of allowances and to other public sector positions in the NHS and the Police, which did not have the same levels of accountability. He suggested that the remuneration panel may have been forward thinking in setting the levels that it did, as a number of other Authorities were now increasing their allowances at significant rates.

The Leader referred to various reports indicating the increase in the average number of hours worked by leaders, ranging from 52 hours per month in 1964 to 94.9 hours per month in 2006. He believed that the increasing time required to do the job had been matched by the increasing responsibilities exercised. He quoted a recent report which had suggested that a national framework on allowances could include parachute payments for leaders and elected mayors.

The Leader suggested that Councillor N Clark had inferred that the remuneration panel should be looking to reduce allowances and yet, as an independent panel, it was

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possible for it to recommend increasing them. He reminded Council of the membership of the panel and commented on its respected expertise.

Finally, the Leader questioned Councillor N Clark's platform of transparency on the basis that Councillor N Clark had excluded him from e-mails that had been circulated to other Members.

On a point of information, Councillor N Clark apologised for inadvertently omitting the Leader from a new distribution list he had set up and undertook to amend this. The Leader questioned the worth of this apology.

Councillor M Wood asked the Executive Member for Planning Policy and Transport if he was able to give reassurance to residents of Bishop's Stortford that the gridlock problems experienced at the new Jackson Square multi-storey on Saturday would not be repeated.

In the absence of the Executive Member for Planning Policy and Transport, the Executive Member for Community Safety and Protection stated that such an assurance could not be given.

The Executive Member stated that there appeared to be a number of problems relating to the capacity load network around the car park, the phasing of the traffic lights and the internal traffic flow within the car park. This latter problem was the only issue under the control of East Herts Council.

The Executive Member commented that a number of agencies including the County Council and the Jackson Square management team had been involved in discussions to resolve the problem. Funding had been committed to a modelling exercise and the possibility of an additional exit point onto Riverside was being looked at.

Finally, the Executive Member referred to the recruitment of a new Officer in the Parking service, whereby a significant element of their responsibilities would include being located

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at Jackson Square on a Saturday, assisting in dealing with local problems before they developed.

In response to a supplementary question, the Executive Member undertook to refer a request to include Bishop's Stortford Town Council in any discussions, to the Parking service.

564 PRESENTATION – PATHFINDER PROJECT

Helen Style, Pathfinder Director, gave a presentation to Council on the Pathfinder project.

She stated that the Hertfordshire bid was one of four successful bids throughout the country. Its purpose was to seek to provide innovative shared services and to experiment with how services could be provided. Pathfinder would seek to achieve 3.5% efficiency savings over the five year term of the project.

Helen Style advised that the project would seek to achieve savings in three areas:

- Shared back office functions, such as IT, finance, HR, etc;
- front of house customer service arrangements; and
- bespoke tailored projects, such as joint waste activities.

Helen Style undertook to keep Members informed of progress on the project and to provide a link to the Bid document.

In response to a question from Councillor J O Ranger, Helen Style commented that previous efficiencies achieved by the Council would not be eligible for inclusion as a contribution to the 3.5% target. However, discussions with the Government on how to attribute savings across the

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Authorities, were ongoing.

565 COUNCIL TAX 2008/09 – COUNTY COUNCIL AND
POLICE AUTHORITY ELEMENTS

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report advising that Hertfordshire County Council's and Hertfordshire Police Authority's precepts for 2008/09, as they affected East Hertfordshire District Council taxpayers, would total £70,574,023.68. This was made up of £62,653,650.04 for the County Council and £7,920,373.64 for the Police Authority, giving Band D equivalents of £1081.12 and £136.67 respectively.

RESOLVED - that the Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Police Authority's precepts be noted.

566 COUNCIL TAX 2008/09 – PARISHES

Council considered a report of the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support setting out Parish Council precepts for 2008/09 in the District. Council noted that there was a statutory requirement on a precepting authority to notify the District Council by 1 March of each year of its precept for the ensuing financial year. Further, Council noted that the total Parish spending in 2008/09 would be £3,391,441 compared to £3,267,788 in 2007/08.

RESOLVED – that the Parish Council precepts for 2008/09, as set out in the schedule now submitted, be noted.

567 COUNCIL TAX 2008/09 – FORMAL RESOLUTION

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report setting out the formal Resolution necessary to set the Council Tax for 2008/09 (Appendix 'A' to these Minutes). This was based on the precepts from Parish Councils, Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Police Authority, as well as the District Council

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budgets set at the Council meeting held on 20 February 2008 (Minute 548 refers).

Council approved the Council Tax Resolution as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that the Council Tax Resolution, as set out at Appendix 'A' to these Minutes, be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm

Chairman
Date

Nps\Council\Minutes 4 Mar 2008