

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS ON  
TUESDAY, 20 MAY 2008 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).  
Councillors D Andrews, R Beeching,  
R N Copping, R Gilbert, J Hedley, G E Lawrence,  
J Mayes, J Warren, M Wood.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors N Clark, A P Jackson, P Ruffles,  
M J Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Tony Hall	- Interim Head of Business Support Services
Philip Hamberger	- Director of Internal Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Lois Prior	- Head of Strategic Direction (Communications and Performance)
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

15 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that some new Members and substitutes had been appointed to the Committee at the Annual meeting of the Council. He welcomed all those present.

He reminded Members of training in scrutiny which would be available in June or July and asked all Members to respond to the Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services on their availability.

### RESOLVED ITEMS

### ACTION

#### 16 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor J O Ranger proposed and Councillor R Gilbert seconded that Councillor M Wood be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED - that Councillor M Wood be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee.

#### 17 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 18 CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - QUARTERLY MONITORING (JANUARY - MARCH 2008)

A report was submitted on exceptions to finance, performance and risk monitoring for East Herts Council for the fourth quarter period for 2007/08.

It was reported that the Council collected a number of indicators to monitor performance. These formed part of the performance management system. The report included comments on exceptions from all Divisions in the Council.

Members noted that investment in the Customer Relations Management (CRM) system would help to improve the Council's reputation with the public.

In response to a question from a Member of the Committee, the Director of Neighbourhood Services

ACTION

explained that the amount received from fees for planning applications had fallen because of a smaller number of large applications.

The Chairman commented on the average number of days sick leave which appeared to be higher than that for the private sector. The Director of Internal Services explained this included long-term sick leave. Members suggested a Performance Indicator should be devised showing sick leave without long-term absence to give a more accurate picture.

It was reported that procedures had been introduced to monitor sick leave more closely. The Council's flexible working scheme allowed staff to use flexi leave in order to attend to domestic repairs, etc.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reported that the Council had been able to implement the requirements of new legislation on smoking without using the full amount of the grant for it. The surplus would be retained by the Council.

The Director of Internal Services reported that some underspent capital money for IT could be used for new working arrangements provisions.

Members asked that the PI on composted waste be adjusted to take account of seasonable differences.

Members decided to note the report subject to the comments to the Executive as detailed below.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted and the Executive be informed of the following comments by the Committee:

CE

- (A) the Performance Indicator relating to the collection of composted household waste should take account of seasonable differences;

ACTION

- (B) improvement of the Customer Relations Management (CRM) system would help to enhance the Council's reputation with the public;
- (C) the Performance Indicators Task and Finish Group should ensure a Performance Indicator (PI) is introduced measuring staff sick leave which excludes long term sick leave to give a more accurate picture of average absence because of sickness. CE

19 CPA IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Chief Executive submitted a report on the CPA Improvement Plan and sought agreement to the revised actions suggested.

Improvement planning meetings had been set up with the Audit Commission as East Herts had received a 'good' rating as a District Council. The improvement plan was evolving and would be constantly updated as new initiatives and next steps arose. All the CPA Improvement Plan actions had been achieved, were on target or had had targets revised.

Members also considered the list of targets which had been revised. They were informed that Level 3 of the Equality Standard could only be achieved by external accreditation. The Council had already achieved Level 2.

Members decided to note the progress on the CPA Improvement Plan.

RESOLVED - that the progress on the CPA Improvement Plan be noted.

ACTION20 2007/08 END OF YEAR SERVICE PLANNING REPORT

The Chief Executive submitted a report on revised completion dates for some actions from the 2007/08 Service Plans.

Details of the actions which had been completed were given in the report.

Members also considered the actions which had not been achieved. They noted that this was a small proportion of the total.

In response to a question from a Member of the Committee, the Director of Neighbourhood Services explained the Emergency Plan would be put on the website and hard copies would be available. Training would be given on it.

Members noted the completion date for 07-CP3 - Comply with e-Govt requirements by ascertaining the feasibility of providing licensing forms on-line should read 31 March 2010 not 2009.

The Leader of the Council reported that discussions were continuing on the provision of a new composting plant with Hertfordshire County Council. The Committee noted that the completion date for 07-CTS12 - Design and implement a programme to collect kitchen waste and card from the 34,000 properties on the existing scheme should be revised to the end of 2009 not 31 March 2009.

It was reported that the appointment of a new Head of People and Organisational Development would help progress on these actions. A Member Group would be reviewing IT projects and the IT management structure would be revised which would also help.

ACTION

Members decided to recommend that the Executive accept the revised completion dates subject to the comments made at the meeting.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Committee considers the revised completion dates should be agreed for actions from the 2007/08 Service Plans, as detailed in Appendix A8 of the report now submitted, subject to further revisions discussed at the meeting as indicated above.

CE

21 COUNCIL BUDGET AND INTEGRATED SERVICE PLANNING PROCESS 2009/10 TO 2012/13

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report on the process to be followed for setting the budget and developing service plans for 2009/10 and a timetable for the process.

A new approach was being taken to budget setting. Members would choose services where they wished to invest and those where more efficiency savings were required. The Council had to deliver Gershon savings and was also expected to find savings from Herts Pathfinder. Pathfinder was a scheme whereby Councils could achieve savings by combining functions. The Revenue Support Grant had been announced for 2009/10 and 2010/11 and a three year medium term financial plan had been drawn up for the Council. The Executive Member emphasised that it was important to reduce overheads and administration costs. A fees and charges policy would be considered to give more flexibility within a more strategic approach. In future, the costs of support services would be apportioned to each service to give a consolidated cost. Service Plans would be developed and considered during January and February to show a clear link between budget and service planning.

A revised table showing targets for saving was circulated at the meeting.

ACTION

Members discussed the proposal to consider the budget at the same time as the setting of the Council Tax and decided a separate meeting should be held at the beginning of February 2009 for the budget alone.

The Committee was informed that the Council had received additional money from investments and a grant recently and decided this should be appropriately reinvested.

The Committee also decided Members should confirm priority areas for investment, a fees and charges strategy should be agreed, the new approach to presenting the budget should be adopted and the integrated service planning timetable should be approved subject to the inclusion of a separate Council meeting to consider the budget.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Committee recommends that:

DIS

- (A) Members confirm priority areas for investment with each service being given an individual efficiency target;
- (B) net savings be appropriately re-invested in priority services;
- (C) Officers be asked to present a Fees and Charges Strategy to Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee and the Executive and that future increases in charges be implemented in line with that strategy;
- (D) the Round 1 and Round 2 estimates approach be discontinued and estimates for each service be presented as Employee costs and Supplies and Services costs; and

ACTION

- (E) the Integrated Service Planning timetable in Appendix A9 to the report now submitted be approved subject to the addition of an additional meeting of the Council in early February 2009 to agree the budget.

DIS

22 UPDATE ON REVIEW OF WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Director of Internal Services submitted a report giving Members an update on the progress of the review of working arrangements and outlining the proposed next steps.

Consultants had been engaged to identify and define attitudes to flexible working; range of work styles required; working group profiles; long term goals and targets for flexible working; possible space utilisation resulting from flexible working and best practice proposals and recommendations. They had identified how office space could be used more efficiently. Policies and protocols needed to be settled for homeworking.

A presence would be maintained in both main towns although the main administrative centre might be at Wallfields, Hertford.

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support explained that the consultant's work had revealed that about 50% of desks were unused at times. The deadline for finding an alternative site had been set at the end of May. The Executive would be considering a more detailed report but comments were sought on work so far on the project.

Members commented on the need to ensure the well being and job satisfaction of staff. The Director of Internal Services replied that staff would have the benefits of more flexible ways of working.

The Executive Member added that Electronic Document

ACTION

Management (EDM) was key to enabling staff to work at home and remotely as they would be able to access files from any location. In addition, staff would be contactable by telephone and email so more development of IT would be needed.

The Director of Internal Services explained a phased approach was needed and a timescale of two to three years was envisaged.

Councillor M Wood expressed concern about the effect of the changes on Bishop's Stortford and the difficulty of staff travelling to Hertford. He was assured that there would be a Council presence in Bishop's Stortford and flexible working methods would be available for staff.

Councillor N Clark questioned why the Committee was considering a different report to the one which would be submitted to the Executive and why the appointment of a Projects Manager for the work was not being discussed. It was explained that the report was intended as an update only for Members as they had previously requested it and had been produced earlier than the report for the Executive.

Members decided to note the progress made and make comments to the Executive as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that the progress of the review of working arrangements be noted and the Executive be informed that the Committee has the following comments on it:

DIS

- (A) the timetable depended on appropriate IT being in place to enable flexible/home working;
- (B) phased introduction of whatever changes were decided upon should be used; and

ACTION

- (C) it was expected that the changes would take place over a 2/3 year period. DIS

23 WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Chief Executive submitted a report inviting the Committee to review its work programme.

Members discussed the need to add the items detailed below and the appointment of a Chairman for the Performance Indicator Task and Finish Group from amongst the Members of the Committee.

The Chairman commented that the Committee might be considering more Petitions in future in line with new legislation.

RESOLVED - that the work programme for 2008/09 as attached in Appendix A11 to the report now submitted be approved subject to: CE

- (A) the addition of the following items to the meeting on 15 July 2008:

- Fees and Charges Strategy
- Date Sharing Protocol and Data Protection (at the discretion of the Chairman);

- (B) Councillor J Mayes being appointed Chairman of the Performance Indicators Task and Finish Group. CE

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.