

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD  
ON TUESDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2008 AT  
7.30 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).  
Councillors D Andrews, R N Copping, J Mayes,  
J Warren, M Wood and C Woodward (substitute  
for Councillor R Gilbert)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M G Carver, N P Clark, A P Jackson  
and M J Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Mike Collier	- Acting Director of Internal Services
Lorna Georgiou	- Performance and Policy Co-ordinator
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of  
Councillors R Beeching, R Gilbert and G Lawrence. It was  
noted that Councillor C Woodward was in attendance as a  
substitute for Councillor R Gilbert.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTIONMINUTES

Arising from the Minutes of the meeting on 26 August 2008 the Programme Director of Change explained the reasons for the revised estimate on 'Promoting Prosperity' which had included a previous underspend and expenditure on Hartham Pool and the Rhodes Art Centre. In addition, the Scrutiny Officer explained the colour coding of existing and proposed leaflets for recycling which were aligned with the colour of recycling bins.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26 August 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PATHFINDER - UPDATE AND THE WAY FORWARD

At the August meeting of the Committee, Members had produced an initial scoping document for shared services. They had decided to invite the Leader of the Council to the next meeting to give an update on Pathfinder and the expected way forward for shared services.

The Leader of the Council explained that the County Council and District Councils in Hertfordshire had decided to pursue the Pathfinder route rather than seeking unitary status under government re-organisation proposals. Authorities in Hertfordshire had often worked together in the past and felt it would help improve the lives of residents by joining together to provide services. This work had presented a number of problems because of the size and complexity of the area. A number of authorities had pursued other alternatives and the Leader did not wish East Herts to appear to be doing this. A number of areas for joining forces would be considered within the next two months and he hoped the Committee would await the outcomes of these discussions before looking at the remit of a Task and Finish Group. He suggested the Committee could be informed of progress and invite the Pathfinder Director to report to it.

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Members noted the Leader's comments but felt the Task and Finish Group could help the Pathfinder process by considering if shared services had been effective in the past and what lessons had been learned from previous experiences. The Committee agreed to postpone setting up the Task and Finish Group in order to await the outcome of forthcoming discussions on services which could be combined under Pathfinder.

RESOLVED - that the setting up of a Task and Finish Group on Shared Services be postponed until the New Year and the scoping document then be revised to cover the effectiveness of shared services and lessons learned from the process, in the light of comments from the Leader of the Council on Pathfinder and the Leaders' County Group meeting in December 2008.

REPORT WRITING AND PLAIN ENGLISH

At the July meeting of the Committee, Members had agreed a scoping document on producing high quality reports and using plain English.

The Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services submitted a report giving details of guidance for Officers on report writing. The overall objective was to ensure that the reports were well structured, had clear objectives and were clearly written for their target audiences. The Council was developing training for Officers on report writing.

Members noted the report and decided to proceed with setting up a Task and Finish Group on report writing and plain English as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) a Task and Finish Group be established, under the previously agreed scoping parameters, to review:

- (1) the guidelines for producing Committee

ACTION

reports with a view to ensuring the framework now in place helps deliver clear and concise documents; and

- (2) corporate guidelines and best practice for securing the use of plain English in all Council publications; and

(B) membership of the Task and Finish Group consist of Councillor J Mayes as Chairman with five Members to be nominated by the Group Leaders with a target to conclude its business and submit recommendations within the next three months to the Committee.

#### REPORT FROM THE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

A Task and Finish Group had been set up to consider the Council's use of performance indicators (PIs) and identify a suite of priority indicators for future monitoring. Members considered the Group's report and a list of PIs circulated at the meeting showing which ones would be considered by each Scrutiny Committee.

It was reported that it was proposed that Leisure PIs would be considered by the Community Scrutiny Committee and Planning PIs by the Environment Scrutiny Committee but that this would require changes to the Council's Constitution.

The Committee decided to commend the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group to the Executive, thanked the Group and noted proposals for Leisure and Planning PIs.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that the Committee:

- (A) agrees the recommendations within the report of the Performance Indicators Task and Finish Group and commends the report to the Executive;
- (B) thanks the Group for its excellent work; and
- (C) notes that Leisure Performance Indicators will be added to the list and be considered by Community Scrutiny Committee from the start of the new leisure contract in January 2009 and Planning Performance Indicators will be moved to Environment Scrutiny Committee subject to appropriate amendments being agreed under the review of the Council's Constitution.

COUNCIL'S BUDGET AND INTEGRATED SERVICE  
PLANNING PROCESS - 2009/10 TO 2012/13

A report was submitted by the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support giving an update regarding the 2009/10 to 2012/13 Integrated Service and Financial Planning (ISP) process.

Members had considered overall targets for savings over the next three years which would allow further investment for priority areas identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). A fees and charges strategy had also been agreed.

The Council's Acting Director of Internal Services had determined appropriate efficiency savings targets and options for delivery of these were being identified by Directors and Heads of Service.

The Council's MTFP was considered and it was explained that this was constantly evolving and would be updated by Officers. The Executive Member for Resources and

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Internal Support explained that the budget would be considered in more detail at the January Committee as many factors were not yet definite e.g. pay award, rate of inflation, interest rate on investments.

The Committee decided to recommend that the Executive give the Acting Director of Internal Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support delegated power to determine these matters for the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED - that the (1) Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers the Acting Director of Internal Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support should be given delegated authority to determine appropriate pay and price increases and interest rate assumptions for preparation of the Council's 2009/10 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan; and

(2) the budget be considered further in January.

RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION  
'IMPROVING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY' ARISING FROM  
THE WHITE PAPER 'COMMUNITIES IN CONTROL'

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on responses to the Department of Communities and Local Government consultation on 'Improving Local Accountability'.

It was reported that the White Paper "Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power" had set out policies which aimed to pass power into the hands of local communities, building on work still in progress from the 2006 White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities". Further consultation papers were planned.

The focus of the first consultation paper was on enabling local people to participate in decisions which affected their day to day lives; to hold to account those who exercise

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power in their locality; and to facilitate the work of those democratically elected to represent their communities.

The Committee discussed the answers to questions in Appendix B9 of the report now submitted and decided to suggest additions, amendments or alternative responses as follows:

Question 1

*We support this recommendation as there needs to be a clear scrutiny mechanism to obtain information to examine evidence towards our own LSP targets.*

*We suggest the addition of British Waterways as an example of another agency to be included on the Annex B list and ask whether there might be a mechanism by which local transport companies (not just TfL) and the utility companies could also come under the umbrella of 'agencies required to co-operate'*

Question 2

*No amendment.*

Question 3

*The establishment of joint overview and scrutiny committees could be welcomed and seen, not only as a natural way forward under our Pathfinder arrangements and broader partnership working, but also as a way of minimising overlap/duplication. Joint overview and scrutiny committees would help to monitor and encourage the achievement of LAA targets. Individual authorities would have their own constitutional rules for selection of members onto scrutiny eg political makeup/ representation. Consideration should be given to the issue of how a joint committee would be constituted to ensure it (and its recommendations) would be acceptable to all parties.*

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*We would also urge that District Councils are fully and fairly represented on any joint scrutiny committee, in order to ensure democratic responsibility and accountability remains with the Councils.*

Question 4

*Yes, we are in favour.*

Question 5

*No amendment.*

Question 6

*We are in favour of area scrutiny committees if they are structured appropriately and really enable District Councils to be of use to County Councils in dealing with the scrutiny of major services. If proposals for joint scrutiny are sound and all parties are contributing constructively to that process, there would need to be clear terms of reference for each type of committee (joint and area) to ensure issues were handled in the most appropriate forum.*

Question 7

*Add the following sentence to draft response -*

*We believe a dedicated resource is also essential in District Councils.*

Question 8

*Appeals should be dealt with by the complaints system already in place in the Council. Scrutiny is not seen as the appropriate forum.*



ACTIONQuestion 9

*We are extremely concerned by this proposal. Officers are accountable to elected Members and should not be held directly accountable to the public. We also think such attendance is a poor use of the valuable time of Chief Executives. Furthermore this proposal undermines the role of elected Members.*

Question 10

*In principle we agree that local authorities with their strategic partners should agree a common scheme for responding to petitions. However, as supported by the LGA, we want to avoid any unnecessary and prescriptive bureaucratic changes which we feel would not be welcome by the public. We again feel the proposal undermines the role of elected Members and political accountability should remain with them and proposals to have Officers being held to account in this way is inappropriate.*

Question 11

*No. This should be left to elected Members.*

Question 12

*No.*

Question 13

*This is inappropriate to Local Government partly due to cost, complexity and security issues.*

The Committee expressed concern that the Government was undermining the role of elected Members in their attempts to involve the general public in local issues and in their community leadership role. Local Councillors are best placed to reflect their communities' views and are accountable to the community. Members asked that this

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be reflected in any response to the consultation.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed of the replies suggested by the Committee in response to the Government's consultation on "Improving Local Accountability" as discussed at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

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