

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 10
DECEMBER 2008 AT 7.30 PM

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Mike Collier	- Acting Director of Internal Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lorraine Kirk	- Senior Communications Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services

George A Robertson - Director of Customer
and Community
Services

453 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed the Honorary Aldermen to the meeting.

Members and Officers observed a minute's silence in memory of Mike Welburn, Conservation Officer, who had recently passed away.

The Chairman advised of the various events she had attended since the previous meeting. In particular, she highlighted the Lord Lieutenant's visit, the "Wear it Pink" day and the afternoon tea she had hosted for the five Town Mayors. Councillors P R Ballam, K Darby and R I Taylor each thanked the Chairman for her invitation.

The Chairman announced that Sid Moss had designed the winning entry for her Christmas card competition. She invited him to receive an award featuring the winning design and Members showed their appreciation.

The Chairman reminded Members that the Civic Service would be held on 11 January 2009. She also invited Members and Officers to join her for light refreshments after the meeting.

Finally, she also advised of the arrangements for light refreshments that would be offered to staff on 11 and 12 December 2008 and invited Members to join her.

ACTION454 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 1 October 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendment of Minute 308 – Members' Questions, 8th paragraph, by the replacement of the words "from the Council's website" by "of the advertisement on the web" after the words "print out".

455 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor N Clark declared a personal interest in the matters referred to at Minute 433 - Local Development Framework Executive Panel Minutes, in that they contained references to the Stop Harlow North Campaign, of which he was the Secretary.

456 PETITION – HARTHAM SKATE PARK

A petition comprising 200 signatures had been submitted by the East Herts Youth Council requesting the installation of lighting at the Hartham skate park. Alex Knight was in attendance to present the petition on behalf of the Youth Council.

He stated that the petition had arisen because of inadequate lighting. He believed that better lighting would help prevent accidents. Mr Knight commented that the skate park provided an opportunity for young people to take part in healthy and physical activities. However, in the winter months, this opportunity was limited.

He referred to the adjacent children's play area which was lit, although was unlikely to be used in darkness because of the age range it catered for. He suggested that as a cost saving measure, these lights could be moved to the skate park.

Finally, he suggested that improved lighting would also reduce the level of crime in the area.

ACTION

On behalf of the Executive Member for Community Development, Leisure and Culture, the Leader of the Council thanked the petitioner and expressed his admiration for the efforts of the young people involved. He undertook to ask the Executive Member to investigate the issues raised.

Councillor P A Ruffles, speaking as a local Ward Member, welcomed the petition.

457 PRESENTATION – ‘SLM EVERYONE ACTIVE’

Duncan Jefford and Craig Mulhall, Sports and Leisure Management (SLM) gave a presentation looking forward to their operation of the new leisure contract from January 2009. They provided information on SLM's history and detailed the sites they managed elsewhere. SLM's key strengths were highlighted and they referred to their strategic approach towards increasing participation. Finally, they referred to planned capital improvements at Grange Paddocks and Hartham.

After dealing with Members' questions, the Chairman thanked them for their presentation.

458 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Councillor R Gilbert asked the Leader of the Council if he was pleased with the progress being made by the Bishop's Stortford 2020 Group and whether he could advise when the Executive was scheduled to receive an update report.

In reply, the Leader confirmed that he was pleased with the progress being made. He apologised to Members for an oversight in not reporting progress earlier and undertook to provide an update at the next Executive meeting.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader referred to the vast collation of data from a number of sources as being the greatest challenge. He acknowledged that the Group had not been able to do as much as he

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would have liked, but nevertheless, paid tribute to the dedicated people on the Group for their commitment.

Councillor D Clark asked the Leader of the Council if he still supported the motion passed by Council in September 2007, that:

“This Council believes that scrutiny is an essential element of the Council's decision-making process, providing openness and transparency and leading to better outcomes.”

In response, the Leader confirmed his belief that scrutiny was an essential element and referred to its many achievements, such as in helping to shape recycling services, the development of the Public Health Strategy, monitoring the performance of Registered Social Landlords, the procurement of leisure services and in tackling climate change issues. He believed there was more work for scrutiny to do in helping to shape inform the Council's policies.

Councillor D Clark referred to the scheduled business for the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20 January 2009 and asked a supplementary question about whether the time available for scrutiny was too tight.

In response, the Leader referred to some Members always looking to find fault in processes and individuals rather than offering anything constructive. He expressed his faith and confidence in the ability and judgement of the Chairman of Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor M Wood asked the Executive Member for Environment and Conservation if he cared to comment on a recent article in the Bishop's Stortford Observer on the latest recycling figures, in which it congratulated Uttlesford on its success in its latest recycling figures, but at the same time said East Herts was rubbish.

ACTION

In reply, the Executive Member referred to the steady improvement of the Council's recycling performance in recent years. He advised that it was anticipated that the recycling rate for this year would be 36%. He reminded Council that the 2012 target was 50%.

In response to a supplementary question, the Executive Member accepted that public goodwill could be lost if the Authority did not do more. He believed that the Council was moving as quickly as possible and advised that a report on the implementation of the next phase would be submitted to the executive on 6 January 2009. He also reminded Members of the additional service provided by the pilot on-street recycling points.

Councillor M Wood asked the Leader of the Council if he would welcome the idea of a new Local Authorities Leaders Board, which would have joint responsibility with the Regional Development Agency.

In reply, the Leader stated that he would, although he had some concerns over the extent to which District Councils would be represented. He referred to the need for local decisions to be made by local councillors.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader undertook to use his best endeavours to ensure that District Councils were treated equally to Counties and Unitaries.

459 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council reported on the work of the Executive and presented the Minutes of the Executive meetings held on 14 October and 25 November 2008.

The Leader referred to the recent fire at Hillmead School, Bishop's Stortford. He praised the efforts of the staff at the school and advised that a pantomime for the students had been arranged.

ACTION

The Leader also referred to the effects of the economic situation in general and the work of the Council in helping people in difficult times. An Officer group had been established and proactive efforts were being made to raise awareness of Small Business Relief. He reminded Members of the development of the credit union and referred to discussions with Registered Social Landlords on the rent guarantee scheme and empty dwellings.

He commented on his attendance at the Climate Change task and finish group and the interesting work being undertaken there. Finally, he commented on the Use of Resources score and the increased financial standing of the Council. He thanked Officers for their efforts.

In response, Councillor M Wood, on behalf of his Group, expressed his thanks to all those involved in dealing with the fire at Hillmead School. He believed that the credit crunch would have an impact on vulnerable people and welcomed the ideas on empty dwellings.

Councillor K A Barnes, on behalf of his Group, also expressed his thanks to all those involved in the successful evacuation of Hillmead School and in particular, the emergency services.

In respect of Minute 323 – Council Budget and Integrated Service Planning Process 2009/10 – 2012/13, in response to a question from Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink, the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support advised that the Fees and Charges Strategy had been agreed earlier in the year and that, proposals on the major items would be submitted to Members. It was noted that a report was scheduled to be submitted to the next Executive meeting.

Councillor D Clark referred to the Appendix of the report submitted to the Executive, which was the medium term financial plan model and had been dated 'January 2008'. She had been advised by the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support that this was the current

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version available and yet the Section 151 Officer had provided her with a later version dated 'February 2008'. She believed that the Executive Member had given incorrect information and questioned whether he understood the finances of the Council.

Councillor N Clark referred to the importance of the budget process and the challenges that would need to be faced in the current economic climate. He believed that the important issues, such as interest rates, the impact of the proposed relocation to Wallfields, the likely fall in council tax collection rates and inflation rates, had not been discussed openly by Members. He did not believe that the budget process allowed sufficient time for budgetary issues to be scrutinised.

He referred to basic service costs and overheads and believed that these had not been scrutinised. Preliminary information on indices used to be reported in September, but had not been in this year to date. He questioned why such important issues had not been debated.

In response, the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support reminded Members that there had been two interest rate changes since the October Executive meeting. Therefore, the flexibility provided by the recommendation allowed an opportunity for the right decisions to be taken at the right time. He undertook to provide a written response on the questions raised.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meetings held on 14 October and 25 November 2008, be received, and the recommendations contained therein, be adopted.

460 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES(A) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
– 24 SEPTEMBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 24 September

ACTION

2008, be received.

(B) CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 7 OCTOBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 October 2008, be received.

(C) HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
– 15 OCTOBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 15 October 2008, be received.

(D) COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
– 21 OCTOBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 October 2008, be received.

(E) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
– 22 OCTOBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 22 October 2008, be received.

(F) LICENSING COMMITTEE – 5 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 5 November 2008, be received.

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- (G) ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
– 10 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 November 2008, be received.

- (H) CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 11 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11 November 2008, be received.

- (I) STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 18 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 18 November 2008, be received.

- (J) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
– 19 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 19 November 2008, be received.

- (K) AUDIT COMMITTEE – 26 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 26 November 2008, be received.

- (L) ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
– 2 DECEMBER 2008

In response to a question on the terms of reference from Councillor D Clark, the Leader undertook to arrange for a written response to be provided.

ACTION

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 December 2008, be received.

461 STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services submitted a report seeking to appoint two parish council representatives to the Standards Committee.

It was noted that, having been invited to submit nominations, four nominations had been made by parish councils for the two vacancies. As a result, a poll had been held and the most number of votes had been received by Jeff Jones (Buckland and Chipping Parish Council) and Colin Marks (Standon Parish Council).

It was further noted that the Director of Internal Services, under delegated authority and in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, had replaced Councillor N C Poulton with Councillor R L Parker as a member of the Standards Committee.

Council approved the appointment of the two parish representatives as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that Jeff Jones and Colin Marks be appointed as parish representatives to the Standards Committee until the end of the 2010/11 civic year.

The meeting closed at 8.52 pm

Chairman
Date