

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON TUESDAY, 20 JANUARY 2009 AT
7.30 PM

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M G Carver, N P Clark, Mrs
M H Goldspink, A P Jackson, M J Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Mike Collier	- Acting Director of Internal Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

RESOLVED ITEMS

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527 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting of the
Committee held on 11 November 2008 be confirmed
as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ACTION528 REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report on proposed changes to the Council's Constitution which had been reviewed.

The current version had been reviewed with the support of a small joint Member/Officer Working Group. The Group had looked at proposed changes arising from the issuing of regulations under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Some regulations were still awaited, which might require further changes to the Constitution.

The Group had looked at ways of making the Constitution more user-friendly, especially the website version, and improving its layout and clarity. Some duplication would be removed and the web-version would be more accessible. It was suggested that the Monitoring Officer be given delegated authority to make further non-material changes as necessary.

Members considered the details of the changes given in the report. The Monitoring Officer also gave details of additional changes suggested for electing Vice-Chairmen of Committees at Council, including more information on the Executive's Forward Plan and reviewing the arrangements for Health Scrutiny.

The Committee agreed to these amendments and to giving the Monitoring Officer authority to make minor amendments to the Constitution.

RESOLVED - that Council be informed that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers that:

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(A) the proposed amendments detailed in the report now submitted and at the meeting should be approved and the Monitoring Officer should be

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authorised to amend the Constitution accordingly;
and

(B) the Monitoring Officer should be authorised to make minor non-material amendments to the Constitution as necessary.

529 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on the revised Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Risk Register. The Strategy had been revised following an audit of the Council's approach to risk management. The new Strategy was intended to define risk management, explain the benefits of a strategic approach, outline implementation, identify roles and responsibilities and formalise the process of risk management.

The Committee decided to inform the Executive that the draft Strategy should be approved. Members also asked for an amendment to the matrix as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers the draft Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Risk Register should be approved subject to the amendment of the matrix to read "5-Highly probable - 95% or more chance".

530 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report setting out proposals for the Council's capital programme for the period 2008/09 (Revised) to 2011/12. The revised budget for the current year of £6M reflected a slippage of £2.4M compared to the "current approved" position of £8.4M.

A number of proposed new schemes were shown in bold in

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the Appendix of the report now submitted.

A Member of the Committee suggested a number of additions to the Capital Programme. These included a cycle track from the former "Red, White and Blue" Public House to Bishop's Stortford Town Centre through the Meads; four public tennis courts in Bishop's Stortford; an eco-house in a non-rural location; a digital "What's On" board for Bishop's Stortford and a scheme to fill the Moat at Bishop's Stortford with water.

Members discussed these items and agreed to support the provision of a digital "What's On" board and asked Officers to investigate the possibility of providing a cycle path through the Meads with the County Council and other relevant agencies.

Members also discussed charging for replacement waste and recycling bins but thought it was preferable to provide these free of charge for the time being as there was no evidence of unreasonable claims being made by residents.

The Committee decided to make the comments now detailed to the Executive.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers:

- (A) the new Capital Programme 2008/09 (Revised) to 2011/12 should be approved;
- (B) the provision of a digital "What's On" display board in a non-rural location should be considered by the Executive; and
- (C) Officers should be asked to investigate whether the County Council or Sustrans can provide a cycle path from the former "Red, White and Blue" Public House to Bishop's Stortford Town Centre

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through the Meads.

531 SERVICE ESTIMATES - REVENUE BUDGET
PROBABLE 2008/09 - ESTIMATES 2009/10

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report on estimates for all General Fund Services.

Members were given details of all services' estimates. They raised some queries on homeless hostels and concessionary transport. Concern was expressed that more support was needed for the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) particularly during the current economic downturn. The Leader of the Council explained the CAB was being encouraged to restructure and find new ways of working.

It was suggested by a Member that the budget for Members' Allowances should not be increased in view of the current economic difficulties being experienced by residents and this was supported by the Committee. The Committee decided to inform the Executive the service estimates should be approved subject to the amendments as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers that the probable Revenue Estimates for 2008/09 and the draft Revenue Estimates for 2009/10 should be approved subject to no increase in the budget for Members' Allowances for this financial year and the following two years.

532 FEES AND CHARGES 2009/10

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report detailing additional income to the Council that could be generated by increasing fees and charges in 2009/10 in relation to a variety of services.

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Concerns were raised over the increase in charges for certain residents parking in Council car parks under a long standing agreement. The Executive Member for Planning, Policy and Transport gave a detailed explanation of the situation. He said that the Council was seeking to move this discretionary provision on to a more commercial footing over the next four years.

It was reported that the charges for copies (apart from Ordnance Survey documents) would have to be reduced for some services and the fee for the food export health certificate would be charged at an hourly rate to better reflect the cost to the Council of providing this service.

The Committee decided to inform the Executive that the fees and charges should be approved with the amendments now detailed.

RESOLVED - the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers that the increases in fees and charges for 2009/10 as set out in Appendix A9 of the report now submitted should be approved, subject to the amendments for the food export health certificate and for copies (excluding Ordnance Survey extracts) discussed at the meeting and to consultation on Hackney Carriage fees and charges.

533 CAR PARK FEES AND CHARGES 2009/10

The Executive Member for Planning Policy and Transport submitted a report seeking the support of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee for revised pay and display charges to come into effect on 30 March 2009. In addition, the Committee was asked to support proposals for VAT on car park charges following the Government's reduction of the rate from 17.5% to 15%. The Executive Member added that a discount rate would be offered for five hour and all day periods when the fee was paid by using the Council's Parking Smartcard.

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A local Member welcomed the proposed changes for Sawbridgeworth.

A local Member for Bishop's Stortford raised concerns about the effect on local businesses of raising charges in the town.

The Committee decided to inform the Executive that the revised charges should be approved subject to the discount suggested and the approach on VAT should be approved.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers that:

(A) the 2009/10 pay and display charges proposed in Appendix A10 of the report now submitted should be adopted subject to a discount being offered for five hour and all day periods when the fee is paid using the Council's Parking Smartcard; and

(B) the proposed treatment of the VAT element of pay and display income for the period April to December 2009 be supported.

534 CONSOLIDATED BUDGET - PROBABLE OUTTURN
2008/09: REVENUE BUDGET 2009/10 AND MEDIUM
TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2009/10 TO 2012/13

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report which consolidated data from reports on the Capital Programme, Service Estimates and Fees and Charges. The four year General Revenue Plan (Medium Term Financial Plan) 2009/10 to 2012/13 would indicate the financial sustainability of the Council's plans over that period. The detailed Probable Outturn 2008/09 and the proposed Revenue Budget for 2009/10 were considered.

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It was reported that the Council had addressed a number of issues arising from the economic situation. Some income streams had reduced and interest rates on investments were expected to be lower in future. At the same time, there had been an increased demand for services such as benefits.

Suggestions for growth and savings had been considered by previous meetings of the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

Members raised concern over increases in the salary budget and asked for an additional check of the amount allowed for incremental increases and a local award. Members were assured that Officers were monitoring salary costs carefully. Members also asked for the 'growth' items to be renamed to reflect that most were actually reductions in income.

The Committee decided to make the comments now detailed to the Executive.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers:

- (A) the draft Medium Term Financial Plan for 2009/10 to 2012/13 should be approved;
- (B) £900,000 additional income in 2008/09 from interest on investments should be added to the Interest Equalisation Reserve;
- (C) the revenue budget for 2009/10 should be approved;
- (D) the proposed Council Tax increase of 3.8% for 2009/10 and indicative increases of 3.8% in 2010/11 to 2012/13 should be approved;

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(E) the proposals for reserves and balances as detailed in the report now submitted should be approved;

(F) the percentage figure assumed for staff pay increments and the local award should be checked by Officers; and

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(G) the 'Growth' items should be renamed appropriately to reflect that most were actually reductions in income.

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535 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2009/10

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support reported on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for borrowing and the Annual Investment Strategy.

Details of prudential indicators were given together with borrowing requirements and prospects for interest rates.

The Committee decided to inform the Executive of the comments now detailed and to ask for a report on Treasury Management policies to be submitted to a future meeting.

RESOLVED - that (A) the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers that:

- (1) the 2009/10 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy and Prudential Indicators for East Herts Council should be approved;
- (2) delegated powers should be given to the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support in conjunction with the Section 151 Officer, to enable some of the gains made within the Managed Funds to

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return “in house”; and

- (3) the policy on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) should be approved; and

- (B) a further report on treasury management policies be considered by the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee in the next civic year.

DIS536 CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK PROGRAMME

The Programme Director of Change submitted a report explaining progress on the Changing the Way We Work (C3W) programme.

The Executive had agreed that a review should be carried out of how the Council worked, what changes could be made and how this would improve the way it worked as an organisation under Review of Working Arrangements. The Executive had subsequently agreed that East Herts should have a single site for its back office functions at Wallfields, Hertford whilst maintaining a presence in the two main towns.

It was reported that the C3W Programme would provide a systematic approach to managing the changes. A Programme Director of Change had been appointed and the programme had been divided into three themes of Customer Service, Business Improvement and Accommodation. Theme leads had been appointed for each of these. Corporate Management Team (CMT) was undertaking the role of Programme Board with responsibility for ensuring the programme was delivered. Various groups had been appointed to help with this. Details of the themes, programme philosophy and plan were given.

The Committee noted that everyone concerned was being consulted on the changes and the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee would receive a quarterly update on

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progress.

RESOLVED - that the progress of the Changing the Way We Work (C3W) Programme be noted.

537 WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Chief Executive submitted a report inviting the Committee to review its Work Programme.

The Chairman reported that the Council's annual scrutiny report 2007/08 had been used by the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA) as a good example. All Members were invited to a meeting to review the current year's scrutiny work before the next meeting of the Committee on 24 February 2009.

The Committee decided to add some items to the work programme as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that the following items be added to the Committee's Work Programme:

- (A) New Comprehensive Area Assessment Framework - Impact on Use of Resources - Presentation by Auditor (24 February 2009);
- (B) Treasury Management Policies (early in new civic year); and
- (C) Corporate customer feedback procedure monitoring (14 July 2009).

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm.