

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD  
ON TUESDAY, 14 JULY 2009 AT 7.30 PM

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors N P Clark, A P Jackson and  
P A Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Ceri Pettit	- Head of Strategic Direction (Shared) and Performance Manager
Neil Sloper	- Head of Customer Services

93 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of  
Councillor J Hedley.

ACTIONRESOLVED ITEMSACTION94 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 May 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

95 COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) UPDATE

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The Head of Customer Services submitted a report detailing the progress in implementing the Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) procedure. He advised that the new procedure simplified the process for monitoring complaints. Reminders would be issued to services to ensure that Officers responded to complaints promptly and appropriately.

The Committee was advised that an in-house IT System had been piloted with two services and revised leaflets had been made available for customers. Members were advised that between October 2008 and March 2009, 86 % of complaints had been addressed within 14 days. 2% of the complaints received within this period had been upheld.

The Head of Customer Services advised that Corporate Management Team (CMT) had endorsed a quarterly review of the 3Cs project as part of the health check process. Councillor R Gilbert sought clarification in respect of four development control complaints that had not been dealt with within 14 days. The Head of Customer Services stated that such complaints could by their very nature take longer than 14 days to resolve. He also stated that 20 compliments had been received relating to Development Control.

Councillor R H Beeching commented on whether compliments were passed on to services. The Head of Customer Services advised that it was left to individual

ACTION

directorates to determine how Officers were congratulated for their work.

Councillor J O Ranger stated that the Committee should monitor the situation on what appeared to be an excellent system. He further commented that although the system would be monitored through Performance Indicators, he would like to see a more detailed analysis come before this committee when there was a full year of data to analyse. The committee agreed and the Scrutiny Officer undertook to programme this into the work schedule.

The Leader commented that a disciplined approach allowed the Council to learn from mistakes and ensure complainants were satisfied that they had been dealt with courteously, even when the outcome of a complaint might not be what they wanted to hear.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED - that (A) the progress in implementing the Council's comments, compliments and complaints (3Cs) procedure be noted.

(B) the performance monitoring and review regime agreed by Corporate Management Team (CMT) be noted.

96 CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2010/11 - 2013/14

The Leader submitted a report that detailed the Council's four year Corporate Strategic Plan. The Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Performance Manager stated that the plan outlined what key outcomes the Authority hoped to achieve at a strategic level in the next four years.

The Committee was advised that the plan was supported by services and also influenced the drafting of medium term financial plans and service plans. Members were advised that the plan had been changed to ensure that it was possible to differentiate between short, medium and

ACTION

long term objectives. Members were advised of a number of amendments as detailed in a document that had been circulated before the meeting.

The Committee was advised that the plan was reviewed annually and would be used in drafting the 2011/12 budget setting process. The Head of Strategic Direction summarised the recommendations detailed in the report now submitted.

Councillor J O Ranger commented that environmental management should be a priority. He also stated that, aside from a reference to fly tipping, the plan should articulate more clearly a commitment to the needs of villages.

The Leader commented that the Authority was entering a phase that local government had never seen before and a greater focus was required in the current financial climate. He commented that the Authority might have to consider which services were discretionary and those that were a statutory requirement.

Councillor Ranger expressed concern at the slow pace of change resulting from demands being placed on developers to adhere to planning conditions. The Leader agreed that pressure should be placed on the Local Government Association to take action to ensure developers did what was right for East Herts. He commented that the Local Development Framework (LDF) process should ensure this occurred.

In response to Councillor M Wood's concerns in respect of Council Tax being set at an affordable level, the Leader detailed a list of questions that Members should consider when setting the Council Tax in years to come. He commented that an affordable level of Council Tax would assist the Authority in managing finances for up to 7 years forward.

ACTION

In response to a query from Councillor J P Warren on the expenditure on Grange Paddocks and Hartham Leisure Centres, the Leader commented that the revenue costs should be recovered in 6 to 7 years. Councillor Warren referred to residents' concerns in his Ward on the lack of progress on improvements to facilities at Ward Freman.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED - that (A) the Corporate Strategic Plan for 2010/11 to 2013/14 be supported; and

(B) the Executive be informed that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee believes that the needs of village communities should be articulated in the Corporate Strategic Plan.

CE

97 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Director of Internal Services submitted a report that set out the context for the budget round and rolling forward of the medium term financial plan. He stated that this report was an opportunity for Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee to articulate how the re allocation of monies can impact on policies and also the level of service that could be provided. He invited the Committee to state its views and forward comments to the Executive.

Councillor J O Ranger welcomed the report and commented that the Authority had often overestimated spending plans. He referred to the need to be realistic in respect of future capital spending.

In response to a query from Councillor N P Clark, the Director stated that the future plans identified in the report were aimed at ensuring identifiable cash savings for the Authority. He expressed his hope that this report would facilitate adequate involvement for the Committee in the Medium Term Financial Planning process.

ACTION

Councillor R H Beeching sought and was given clarification on the basis for the figures stated at paragraph 4.4 of the report now submitted. The Director commented that the figures ensured consistency between the retail price index (RPI) and actual pay levels.

Councillor R Gilbert commented on whether guidance had been sought from financial advisors. The Director commented that there were two views in the finance sector. One view was that the economy would continue to suffer and interest rates would stay low. Another view was that the national debt could trigger adverse inflation and interest rates would be increased accordingly. The rates detailed in the report reflected the middle ground.

Councillor Ranger commented that regardless of which political party was in power, draconian action was inevitable on local authority funding. He stated that the grant to local authorities would be drastically cut in 2011/12 in particular. He commented that if employment costs proved higher than indicated, then percentage pay increases would be lower as a result.

The Leader commented that prudent budgeting was required in respect of the pay award. He stated that too low would be an issue if a negotiated settlement proved higher as in 2008/09. He commented that local authorities were tied by the national pay award.

The Director reminded Members that a review of Officer terms and conditions had just begun. The Committee supported a suggestion from Councillor Ranger that the Executive should consider including a figure that reflected total remuneration rather than just salaries.

The Committee noted the report.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that (A) the Financial Strategy at Appendix 'A7' to the report now submitted, be adopted to underpin the Medium Term Financial Plan and that the 2010/11 budget round focus on the outcomes set out at paragraph 4.2 of the report; and

(B) the Executive be informed that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee believes that the Executive should consider including a figure for total remuneration in 2011/12 rather than just salaries.

CE

98 CORPORATE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report inviting the Committee to consider the revised Corporate Procurement Strategy and Risk Register. He reminded Members that the Authority had entered into a joint working arrangement with North Herts District Council.

The Director stated that both Authorities shared an electronic marketplace solution set up by a shared procurement officer. He referred Members to pages 8.28 and 8.29 of the action plan now submitted.

The Director referred in particular to a number of planned developments detailed on page 8.32 of the action plan. These were payment by BACS, faxing of remittance advice notes, back end data imaging of paid invoices, procurement cards for ordering and payment and an E-tendering solution.

Councillor D Andrews commented that he was pleased to see that Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) were protected. The Director commented that care must be exercised to ensure that rules of competition were not breached. In response to a query from Councillor R Gilbert on contractual responsibilities, the Director confirmed that the countywide stationery contract was due to be retendered.

ACTION

In response to further queries from Councillor Gilbert, the Director stated that e-tendering was part of a national process that would end the use of the standard “blue label” system currently in use at East Herts Council.

Councillor N P Clark expressed concerns over the significant number of actions showing as red or amber in the action plan. The Director stated that this was due to the strategy and action plan being new. In reference to procurement cards, the Committee was advised that internal audit had been involved and the system would work well if tightly controlled and monitored.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers that the Corporate Procurement Strategy should be approved.

DNS

99 DRAFT 2008/09 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that presented the 2008/09 Annual Governance Statement. The Committee was advised that the statement had been considered by the Audit Committee and was being submitted to this Committee as part of the wider consultation process.

The Committee was advised to focus on page 9.18 onwards in reference to Appendix ‘A9’ to the report now submitted. Councillor J O Ranger confirmed that all of the Audit Committee’s comments had been incorporated into the document.

The Committee noted the report.



ACTION

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers that the Draft 2008/09 Annual Governance Statement should be approved.

DNS

100 CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK (C3W) PROGRAMME UPDATE

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The Programme Director for Change submitted a report updating the Committee on the progress made to date with the Changing the Way We Work Programme (C3W). He confirmed that the overall programme had made steady progress.

The Committee was advised that space plans were now on the second and third drafts out of a total of five. The Director commented that two thirds of workshops had been completed with Planning and Building Control and work with the Benefits Section due to start.

The Director stated that the initial programme phasing had been a best guess and delays could be partly attributed to the challenges posed by introducing mobile and home working solutions. He also stated that the concept of early adopters had been abandoned due to the difficulties of setting up individual uses across the Authority.

The Committee was advised that Phase 1 was now much broader in terms of services involved and was now more robust. The Director stated that the overall end date for the programme remained unchanged. He referred Members to Appendix 'A10' of the report submitted, for the revised phasing.

The Committee was advised that examples of the revised phasing were that Democratic and Legal Support Services had moved to Phase 2 and Environmental Services had moved to Phase 3 so as not to disrupt the launch of Alternate Refuse Collections (ARC).

ACTION

The Director confirmed that the phone system was being piloted with the IT section and would be running in Revenues and Benefits in October with a roll out to other services in November and December. A handover of the entire system to IT was due after Revenues and Benefits had gone live. The supplier would work closely with IT following the handover.

The Director also confirmed that “thin client” technology was a significant improvement over previous and current home-working systems. He stated that significant use was being made of the change management toolkit and Officers would receive training in change management and also on coping with change.

The Committee was advised that Officers would receive FISH customer services training. This was an innovative and stimulating training package that would change the Authority’s approach to customer service. The home working solution was due to be rolled out in October. The Trade Union was working closely with Human Resources and the C3W user group to address Officers’ concerns.

The Committee was advised that automated payment machines would soon be available to allow customers to pay for services and be issued a receipt. The Director invited Members to receive and comment on the report now submitted.

Councillor R H Beeching commented that a great deal of work had been done in a short time. The Committee was advised that an automated option for putting customers through to parking had been introduced in the new phone system as 68 % of calls to the Authority were to pay parking fines.

Councillor J O Ranger commented that many Officers’ homes might not be suitable for home working and queried whether the Authority would have to inspect them. The Director stated that a self certification option was being

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looked at. He stated that the issue of space in the home was a key consideration and an element of trust was essential. It was made clear by the Director that no Officer would be forced to work from home. He commented however, that the Authority would have to be more forceful at promoting remote and home working.

In response to a query from Councillor Ranger on Officer communication, the Director detailed the various media that had been and would continue to be used to communicate with the staff about C3W. Councillor Ranger suggested that the Executive be requested to ensure that Officers were engaged at every stage of the C3W programme. The Leader confirmed that the Executive would closely monitor all aspects of the C3W programme.

Councillor D Andrews referred to the significant culture shock C3W posed for Officers and the Authority. He expressed concerns that introducing FISH Customer Relations Training, IT changes and physical changes at the same time was too much.

The Director agreed that C3W would be a culture shock but commented that toolkits were available to the Authority to ensure the programme was successful. Planning for changes and actual physical changes would not occur at the same time.

Councillor R Gilbert queried why a new IT consultant had been appointed for 6 months. The Director stated that Officers had not always been clear on the best solutions for C3W. In response to a further query from Councillor Gilbert, the Director gave a detailed explanation of the colour coded phasing detailed in the Appendices to the report now submitted.

The Director confirmed to Councillor Gilbert and the Committee that robust back up policies would be in place to protect data security. In response to a query from Councillor J P Warren, the Director described the benefits and technicalities of the new telephone system and “thin

ACTION

client" technology.

Councillor N P Clark commented on whether a full picture of the costs for C3W would be presented to the Executive in September 2009. The Director stated that Officers hoped this would be the case. He stated that he expected the essential work to be achieved within the capital programme. Any further expenditure that was required would be the subject of a report to the Executive.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED - that (A) the progress of the Changing the Way We Work Programme (C3W) be received; and

(B) the Executive be requested to closely scrutinise all aspects of the C3W programme as they relate to staff involvement and communication.

101 REPORT FROM SHARED SERVICES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

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The Chairman of the Shared Services Task and Finish Group submitted a report that summarised the findings of the Task and Finish Group. He commented that the Committee should recommend to the Executive that a checklist be applied in all situations where shared services were being considered.

Councillor Ranger stated that Appendix 'A11' to the report now submitted was a checklist that should be used for this purpose. He commented that using this checklist would ensure that shared services were considered very carefully before being adopted.

The Leader commented that the checklist would prove very helpful to the Executive as an "aide memoire" when considering shared service arrangements. Councillor N P Clark thanked Councillor Ranger and Officers for their work and said that he had enjoyed working on the Shared

ACTION

Services Task and Finish Group.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED - that (A) the findings of the task and finish group be endorsed by Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee and commended to the Executive; and

CE

(B) the Executive be requested to adopt the 'Characteristics of Success' checklist, as detailed in Appendix 'A11' to the report now submitted, when establishing new shared services or partnerships as part of the risk assessment/evaluation process.

CE

102 REPORT WRITING AND PLAIN ENGLISH TASK AND FINISH GROUP SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chairman of the Report Writing and Plain English Task and Finish Group, Councillor J Mayes, expressed Members' gratitude to the Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services, the Behaviour and Reputations Coordinator and also to the Scrutiny Officer for their support of the work of this Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Mayes commented that the work of the Task and Finish Group had highlighted common mistakes in report writing and had also identified where more work was needed.

The Committee approved the final recommendations of the task and finish group as now detailed.

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

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(A) the East Herts 'Clear and concise report writing' guide for officers should be approved;

ACTION

(B) the East Herts 'How to write a good report - the practical guide' intranet/webpages for Officers should be approved;

(C) the documents referred to above should be used in future officer report writing training/development events;

(D) the report writing course piloted on 28 April 2009 should be made available in the corporate training programme (with the course content amended to make reference to the revised report template); and

(E) the above, along with the previous recommendation to adopt the revised corporate report template, be commended to the Executive.

103 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

The Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee submitted a report inviting the Committee to review its work programme.

The Committee noted that reports in respect of the Place Survey Results and the Data Sharing Protocol would be submitted to the Committee on 25 August 2009. The Data Sharing Protocol would also be submitted to the Audit Committee on 2 September 2009.

The Committee noted that reports in respect of the 3Cs analysis and the Corporate Strategic Plan would be brought back to the Committee on 1 June 2010. The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Procurement Action Plan would be monitored as part of a two year programme and would be reported back to the Committee before the end of that programme.

ACTION

Members were also advised that the Work Programme would include outline agendas for meetings in the 2010/11 civic year when reported to the Committee on 25 August 2009.

RESOLVED - that (A) the Work Programme be noted; and

(B) the following items be added to the work programme:

(i) 3Cs analysis of one full year of data (1 June 2010); CE

(ii) the Annual Governance Statement and the Corporate Strategic Plan 2011/12 – 2014/15 (20 July 2010); and CE

(iii) the Procurement Action Plan monitoring report. CE

The meeting closed at 9.45 pm.

Chairman	.....
Date	.....