

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD  
ON TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2009 AT  
7.30 PM

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Grethe, A P Jackson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Lorna Georgiou	- Performance and Improvement Co- ordinator
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services

293 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of  
Councillor M J Tindale.

294 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor R N Copping declared a personal interest in  
Minute 296 – Underspending the Capital Programme  
regarding Cannons Meadow, Sanville Gardens, Stanstead  
Abbotts. The nature of the interest was not declared.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION295 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 August 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

296 UPDATE ON THE CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK (C3W) PROGRAMME

The Programme Director of Change submitted a report outlining the progress that had been made on the C3W programme.

A plan of the consolidated programme had been circulated and details were given of the progress made. The Director said orders for Council Chamber enhancements had now been placed and this was proceeding well. Many staff had taken part in training to help them cope with change and this had been well received.

In response to questions from Members, the Director explained that staff had been interviewed by managers concerning homeworking. They would have training on working from home and be able to complete self assessment health and safety forms to enable them to make an informed decision about this way of working. Some documents had been scanned and this was ongoing. The possibility of other organisations sharing the Council's reception area e.g. Police, Registered Social Landlords was being considered.

Councillor Wood expressed concern that the new meeting room at The Causeway, Bishop's Stortford would not be large enough for Development Control Committee meetings. He did not think the use of other accommodation in the town would be satisfactory. The Director confirmed that audio/visual equipment would not be provided at these venues to the standard of that proposed for the Council Chamber at Wallfields, Hertford. However, the new meeting room would seat 26 people

ACTION

comfortably and would also be capable of division into smaller rooms which would be more useful than a larger meeting room.

Members also raised questions on parking provision at Wallfields and the Director explained that this was under discussion.

The Committee decided to note the report.

RESOLVED - that the progress on the Changing the Way We Work (C3W) programme be noted.

297 UNDERSPENDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Leader of the Council presented a report on underspending of the Capital Programme and ensuring better forecasting of the timing of its capital spending plans as previously requested by the Committee.

He commented that underspending occurred because of a number of factors. Guidance had been issued by the Treasury on underspending of capital as this problem was not uncommon amongst local authorities. The Treasury had given advice on what it termed 'optimism bias' by project appraisers. The Council's Financial Services would be issuing a simple version of this guidance for use within the Council. This would help to improve forecasting. Other methods could also be used eg discounting a set amount from the estimated sum and bringing forward schemes planned for future years. He pointed out that the most significant underspend from last year came from the decisions made around the Presdales project. Slippage had been from a conscious and prudent decision, it had not happened by accident. If the Presdales figure was excluded from the calculation, then the percentage of original estimate spend went up from 59% to a much more acceptable 79%.

ACTION

Councillor Ranger suggested the amount of the adjustment to the estimates should be specified and the Committee agreed with this.

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

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

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- (A) in proposing capital spending plans, Officers should have regard to the guidance on optimism bias issued as supplementary guidance to the Treasury's Green Book; and
- (B) pending implementation of (A) above a judgemental adjustment be made to annual spending totals of 10% to 20% to anticipate a level of slippage for the programme as a whole.

298 2008/09 PLACE SURVEY FINDINGS

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on the findings of the 2008/09 Place Survey. As part of changes to Best Value legislation a new survey had been developed known as the Place Survey. The survey was intended to be relevant to anyone living in the area as a whole and was not specific to any one agency or service or particular client group. There was a focus on improving outcomes for local people and places, capturing local people's views, experiences and perceptions and the changes in them so solutions could reflect local views and preferences.

The first Place Survey undertaken by East Herts Council had run from September 2008 to January 2009 and all Hertfordshire authorities had jointly taken part. It had been a postal survey and residents had been randomly selected.

ACTION

The Committee considered the key findings of the survey and the relevant sections of the action plan.

Members commented that there were a number of areas in the survey over which they did not have direct control e.g. support for older people. They noted they could influence such provision through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

The Leader of the Council highlighted that on some issues the survey showed the perceptions of those surveyed rather than actual situations. In addition, East Herts Council's own Residents' Survey results would be available at the next meeting. Some of the early results of this suggested better results for East Herts Council than the Place Survey.

Members raised the problem of keeping Parish and Town Councils aware of emergency planning procedures. It was reported that some training was being provided.

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 that the action plan should be structured to show also the work which would be undertaken through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

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299 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

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

The Scrutiny Officer explained joint meetings of all Scrutiny Committees would be held in January and February 2010 to consider the budget and service planning. These meetings would be followed by

ACTION

Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee meetings.

The Committee decided to approve the Work Programme and note arrangements for January and February 2010.

RESOLVED - that the Work Programme be approved and arrangements for joint meetings of Scrutiny Committees in January and February 2010 be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.