

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 12 JANUARY 2010, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A P Jackson (Chairman/Leader)
Councillors M R Alexander, M G Carver,
L O Haysey, T Milner and R L Parker.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews, R Gilbert,
M P A McMullen, J O Ranger, J Warren and
C Woodward.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Caroline Goss	- Communications Officer
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

458 APOLOGY

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

459 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

460 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY

The Executive received a report detailing those issues referred to the Executive by the Scrutiny Committees. Issues relating to specific reports for the Executive were considered and detailed at the relevant report of the Executive Member.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

461 CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN: ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

The Executive Member for Environment and Conservation submitted a report seeking approval for energy efficiency and environmental initiatives.

He advised that £40,000 had been agreed within the 2009/10 Capital Programme for larger environmental and energy saving initiatives to the corporate estate concentrating mainly on the Wallfields building. A further range of projects which was currently being developed would be subject to a future bid from the 2011/12 Capital Programme.

The Executive Member summarised five initial capital schemes, which had been identified within the Climate Change Action Plan, based on energy and carbon savings as well as water efficiency. He detailed the estimated capital costs, the potential revenue savings and the payback period for each scheme.

He drew attention to the fact that the costs totalled £44,500, but that Officers were exploring the possibility of funding assistance through external grant schemes. The most likely source was the Government's Low Carbon Building Programme Phase 2 which might provide up to 50% match

funding towards the use of renewable energy technology. However, the costs detailed in the report assumed that no such funding was available.

Members noted the long payback period for the solar thermal scheme and agreed that this should still be pursued if external funding was not forthcoming. To this end, the Director of Customer and Community Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Conservation, was authorised to determine further whether to proceed with this scheme. Councillor J O Ranger suggested that a delay in this scheme might be beneficial in terms of the cost decreasing over time.

In response to a query from Councillor R Gilbert, the Executive Member undertook to respond in writing on the use of low energy light bulbs in Council premises.

The Executive Member for Community Development, Leisure and Culture confirmed that the small scale hydro proposal at Castle Hall would be subject to a business case.

The Executive approved the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) subject to (B) below, the projects identified and prioritised in the report now submitted, be implemented as part of the 2009/10 capital programme and be undertaken, where appropriate, as part of the tendered works for the C3W building refurbishment programme; and

DCCS

(B) in respect of the solar thermal scheme, in the event that external funding is not obtained, the Director of Customer and Community Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Conservation, be authorised to determine further whether to proceed with this scheme.

DCCS

462 TRANSPORT AND PARKING STRATEGY - A NEW WAY FORWARD

The Executive Member for Planning Policy and Transport submitted a report on the enactment of the Local Transport Act 2008 and its implications for the development of the Council's Transport and Parking Strategy.

The Executive recalled that the 2009/10 Customer Services Service Plan, adopted on 17 March 2009, contained a commitment to: *“Manage a review of transportation policy to be undertaken by East Herts Council during 2009/10.”* A completion date of March 2010 had been ascribed to this task. However, the Local Transport Act 2008 had made significant changes to the way in which local transport authorities (in this case Hertfordshire County Council) must produce and deliver a Local Transport Plan (LTP). The nature of these changes suggested that East Herts Council should cease work on its Transport Strategy as originally planned and prepare a revised strategy in parallel with the County Council's evolving Local Transport Plan - LTP3.

It was noted that Hertfordshire County Council had confirmed that LTP3 would be published by April 2011. As a key stakeholder for its District, East Herts Council should expect to contribute fully to the development of LTP3. It was suggested that East Herts Council should re-focus its efforts into full participation in HCC's preparation of LTP3, and develop its own, parallel strategy, with clear linkages to the HCC document and using the same methodology and timeframe.

The Executive Member proposed a timeframe as set out at paragraph 3.1 of the report now submitted. He referred to the comments of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 1 December 2009, which were supportive of his proposals.

The Executive approved the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) the comments of the Environment Scrutiny Committee be received;

(B) the changed circumstances since East Herts Council began preparation of its Transport and Parking Strategy be noted;

DCCS

(C) a revised approach and timescale for the preparation of this strategy be supported;

(D) East Herts Council's active involvement in Hertfordshire County Council's preparation of a new Local Transport Plan (LTP3), to reflect changed requirements recently imposed by central government be supported; and

DCCS

(E) East Herts Council prepare its transport and parking strategy for the District in tandem with HCC's preparation of LTP3, using the same framework and with links to this document where appropriate.

463 STAFFED TELEPHONE OPENING HOURS

The Leader submitted a report analysing the cost and benefit of extended staffed telephony services.

The Executive recalled that a salary budget of £24,000 had been approved to enable an extension of staffed telephony opening hours in 2009/10. This had subsequently been reduced to offer £12,000 as a permanent salary saving, the remainder being used for a trial to determine the cost and benefit of extended hours of operation. The trial had involved two temporary staff and had not been advertised to enable a true assessment of demand, avoiding the movement of day time callers to the extended period.

The Leader detailed the outcome of the trial in the report now submitted and concluded that staffed telephony services should only be available from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

The Executive approved the proposal as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the operation of staffed telephony services within the hours of 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, be endorsed. DCCS

464 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report on the implications arising from the issues identified in the External Auditor's Annual Letter. In his absence, the Leader presented the report.

The Annual Audit Letter for 2008/09 had been considered by the Audit Committee on 25 November 2009 (Minute 395 refers). The Committee had considered the issues in respect of the audit of the accounts, grant claims and returns and the scoring of the Use of Resources Assessment. The Executive was asked to determine whether there were improvements in managing finances, commissioning and procurement and managing resources on which to receive proposals.

The Leader drew attention to the External Auditor's comments in respect of the Council performing well and the score for managing resources being solely attributable to the underlying score for workforce management. In response to a comment from Councillor J O Ranger, the Leader confirmed that Officers were investigating the availability of regional assistance in this area.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Protection referred to the additional audit fees that had been incurred as a result of questions asked by electors and queried whether budget provision for this should be made in future years. Councillor J O Ranger advised that the Audit Committee had raised this issue and that the External Auditor had advised that the number of elector questions asked had been unusual compared to other Authorities.

The Leader suggested that in order to minimise such costs in the future, Officers be requested to explore the viability of including a mechanism whereby such questions could be put

to Officers in the first instance where the enquirer was happy to do so, and with recourse to the Auditor if dissatisfied by the explanation. The Director of Internal Services undertook to consider this further.

In response to a question from the Executive Member for Planning Policy and Transport on the benchmarking of the level of Members' Allowances, the Director of Internal Services advised that the Council would always seek to ensure that like for like Authorities were used as far as possible.

The Executive approved the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) Corporate Management Team be asked to identify and report to the Executive, the scope and costs of actions needed to improve assessment scores, in particular, in respect of: CE

- Managing Finances
- Commissioning and Procurement
- Managing Resources;

(B) in order to minimise the level of audit fees payable for dealing with questions on the accounts by the public, Officers be requested to explore the viability of including a mechanism whereby such questions can be put to Officers in the first instance, where the enquirer is happy to do so and with recourse to the Auditor if dissatisfied by the explanation. DIS

465 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - OCTOBER 2009

The Leader of the Council submitted an exception report on the finance, performance and risk monitoring for the month of October 2009.

In response to a comment from Councillor R Gilbert on the budget variance arising from planning appeals, the Leader advised that the Executive Member for Community Safety and Protection and the Chairman of the Development Control

Committee were considering issues relating to ensuring that quality decisions were made as far as possible.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Protection drew attention to the recovery of the swine flu costs from the NHS.

The Executive approved the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) the budgetary variances set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report, be noted;

(B) a supplementary estimate of £149k in respect of net rents forgone following the Causeway land transactions be approved; and DIS

(C) the Capital programme be reprofiled as set out in paragraphs 2.33 – 2.36 of the report now submitted. DIS

466 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - NOVEMBER 2009

The Leader of the Council submitted an exception report on the finance, performance and risk monitoring for the month of November 2009.

Councillor J O Ranger referred to the capital programme and expressed the hope that expenditure would be achieved by year end.

The Executive approved the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) the budgetary variances set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report, be noted; and

(B) £10k of the Hartham CCTV budget be transferred to the Leisure Development project. DCCS/
DIS

The meeting closed at 7.36 pm