

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
WAYTEMORE ROOM, BISHOP'S
STORTFORD, ON TUESDAY,
15 SEPTEMBER 2009 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D L E Hollebon (Chairman).
Councillors A L Burlton, Mrs R F Cheswright,
D Clark, Mrs M H Goldspink, G E Lawrence
(substitute for Councillor P Grethe), G McAndrew,
D A A Peek, N C Poulton.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews, R H Beeching,
M G Carver and J Hedley.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Nick Kirby	- Environmental Inspection Team Manager
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Andrew Pulham	- Parking Manager
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
David Thorogood	- Environmental Co-ordinator

240 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor P Grethe. It was noted that Councillor G E Lawrence was in attendance as substitute for Councillor P Grethe.

241 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded the Committee that Alternate Refuse Collection (ARC) had recently been publicised in Link and through delivery of leaflets to every household. She stated that a presentation on ARC would be given by the Head of Environmental Services at the Council meeting on 30 September 2009.

The Chairman expressed her gratitude and appreciation to the Members and Officers who had worked for many months on a number of Task and Finish Groups who were bringing final reports to this meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

242 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

243 PARKING FEES AND CHARGES 2010/11

The Parking Manager submitted a report on fees and charges relevant to the Parking Service for 2010/11. He commented that he sought Members' views in respect of the continuation of the policy position approved when parking enforcement was decriminalised in 2005.

The Committee was reminded of the current policy position that parking charges should increase by at least 5% per annum. The Parking Manager advised Members that a tariff increase of a minimum of 5% was assumed within the Council's current medium term financial plan.

The Parking Manager detailed three options for increasing the charges for 2010/11. Members were invited to comment on the options of increasing charges by 2 to 3%, 5 to 6% or 9 to 10%. He referred Members to Appendix F for details of other miscellaneous charges related to

parking.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink stated that a policy of 5% increase annually seemed a sensible approach when first approved. She agreed that the Authority should now consider a more flexible approach in light of the current economic climate.

Councillor Goldspink referred to a fall in income in Bishop's Stortford in 2006/07 and to more recent examples of falling income across the district. She commented that the 2.6% increase option could be considered for Hertford and Bishop's Stortford. She stated that option 1 at Appendix D should be the approach adopted by the Authority for 2010/11.

The Parking Manager commented that option 1 did result in an increase to long stay charges. He stated that, in the wider context of sustainability and climate change, these long stay users were the people who should be encouraged to seek more environmentally sustainable forms of transport. He reminded Members of the benefits of the smart card scheme, which would reduce a £4.50 charge to £4.05 and regular users could actually end up paying less.

Councillor N C Poulton commented that fees and charges would have to increase in some other areas of council activity to compensate for an increase of less than 5% in parking in order to balance the books overall. Councillor D A A Peek commented that retaining the 5% increase across the board was sensible and responsible due to the stability offered by this policy approach over medium term financial planning.

The Parking Manager reminded Members that every % point increase could result in an income increase of £30,000. He stated however that increases in parking charges were not a guarantee of increased income and he pointed out that the income in the current year was running below the expected target.

The Committee noted that Officers sought more flexibility when setting parking fees charges. The Parking Manager stated that tariffs could only change in units of 10 pence and previous increases had been on the high side of 5%. He commented that this report sought members' views on breaking away from this fixed pattern of regular 5% increases to allow Officers a greater degree of flexibility to be more sensitive to local situations.

Councillor M G Carver commented that appropriate fees and charges would have to be finally set by the Executive.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink proposed and Councillor D Clark seconded, a motion that the fixed policy of 5% per annum increases should be amended to allow Officers the discretion to be flexible when setting parking fees and charges.

After being put to the meeting and vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

The Committee noted the report and rejected the other recommendations detailed in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the fixed policy of 5 % per annum increases should be amended to allow Officers the discretion to be flexible when setting parking fees and charges.

DCCS

244 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES IN THE PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL SERVICE AREA

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a review of fees and charges relevant to the Planning and Building Control service area. The Committee was advised that many of the relevant fees and charges were set by regulations and were not discretionary. However, the remaining fees had been reviewed against the Fees and Charges policy of the Council.

Members were advised that the timing of this report was

compromised due to changing guidance due from central government. In response to a question, the Director stated that the charge introduced for high hedges advice should be retained but he did undertake to explore how this might be apportioned between complainant and other parties involved.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink commented on whether cash payments could be taken for copying below £3 in value rather than giving copies for free. The Director agreed this could be an issue and advised that recommendation D should be withdrawn from this report. Officers felt a wider, corporate review of low value payments should be carried out and applied across the Council.

The Committee noted the update now submitted.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that this Committee considers that (A) where charges are levied on the basis of an hourly rate of Officer time, these are standardised at £75 per hour;

(B) fees should be introduced for the reproduction of documents in colour at twice the rate of the black and white reproduction fee;

(C) the fee of £15 per disc for copies of documents provided electronically should be endorsed; and

(D) no other change be made to the charges levied by the service area and no new charges be introduced.

(E) all fees and charges within Planning and Building Control have been reviewed in line with the Fees and Charges Strategy.

245 REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES FEES AND CHARGES

The Head of Environmental Services submitted a review report for fees and charges relevant to the Environmental Services area. He commented that some charges were statutory while others were controlled by legislation. He advised that all fees and charges had been reviewed in line with the fees and charges strategy.

The Committee was advised that the only fee which fell outside the policy was that applied to allotments. East Herts Council was not a major allotment provider. The authority did retain ownership of 3 allotment sites. The income generated by the fees collected did not facilitate full cost recovery and Members needed to make a conscious decision to continue with what amounted to a subsidy. The Head of Environmental Services pointed out that allotments contributed to the wider priority of wellbeing of residents and made a contribution to the sustainable community agenda.

The Chairman advised the Committee that Councillor P Grethe had written to Officers to point out errors in paragraph 4.12 of the report now submitted. The Head of Environmental Services confirmed that the East Herts Council charge per 25m² should read £2.20 not £2.50 and the Hertford Town Council charge was currently £2.70 with the £2.85 figure representing the fee for next year. Councillor Grethe had also raised a number of queries in respect of individual allotments and these queries had been passed to Officers.

Further discussions indicated Members were content to see fees for allotments continue to be below full cost recovery and should only be increased in line with those charged by the Town Councils.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink thanked Officers for the report. She commented on whether a concessionary rate could be considered for the elderly when a wasp's nest

required treatment by Pest Control Officers.

The Head of Environmental Services commented that there was a concessionary rate for residents claiming benefits. He commented that a concessionary rate for the elderly was a wider issue for the authority to consider as some elderly residents could have high incomes. Councillor N C Poulton commented that a concessionary rate for the elderly would need to be means tested and this was not necessarily something the council wanted to undertake.

The Committee noted the update now submitted.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) all fees and charges within Environmental Services have been reviewed in line with the Fees and Charges Strategy.

DCCS

(B) the current approach of maintaining low charges for allotments should be continued.

246 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT POLICY REVIEW

The Chairman of the Planning Enforcement Policy Review Task and Finish Group submitted a report detailing the outcomes of the work of Task and Finish Group.

The Committee was advised that paragraph 3.21 on page 8.16 of the report now submitted contained an incorrect reference to a customer satisfaction survey. Members were advised that the correct title was Post Closure Customer Survey.

The Committee was further advised that the Task and Finish Group had met with Town Councils and also with a planning agent in private practice.

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group sought Members consent to amend recommendation C as now detailed. He also requested an additional recommendation as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) the draft revised policy formulated by the Planning Enforcement Policy Task and Finish Group be endorsed;

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(B) the draft revised Planning Enforcement Policy be commended to the Executive for approval;

(C) the continuation of the Task and Finish Group, in order to look at the policy guidance notes as detailed in the report now submitted, be supported; and

(D) once the policy has been approved by Council, a copy be sent to all Town and Parish Councils.

247 EAST HERTS CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Chairman of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group submitted a report on the outcomes of the public consultation on the Draft East Herts Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. The Chairman also presented the final version of the Strategy and Action Plan as agreed by the Task and Finish Group.

Members were advised that Parish Councils and Community Voice meetings had both been included in the public consultation process. Members noted that there had been a good response to the consultation and the feedback had been positive.

The Committee was advised that the Task and Finish Group had felt that this had been a very good and robust debating group and the strategy was better for such debate. The Committee noted the report and was supportive of Officers reporting back at a later stage on progress against the Climate Change Action Plan.

RESOLVED - that (A) the findings of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group be endorsed; and

(B) the draft East Herts Climate Change Policy and Action Plan be commended to the Executive for approval.

DCCS

248 REPORT FROM ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chairman of the Environmental Quality Task and Finish Group submitted a report summarising the findings of the Task and Finish Group and presented proposals to improve the way the Council works in partnership with other agencies to manage local standards.

The Committee was advised that one area of frustration was that Network Rail had declined to get involved at any level with the work of the Task and Finish Group.

The original ENCAMS (the Tidy Britain Group) report had stated that the majority of the Environmental Quality work carried out by East Herts Council was good but other areas, which were the responsibility of partners, needed improvement. The Task and Finish group had worked hard to gain their support. The Group had also attended the Rural Parish Conference in Standon and Puckeridge.

The Committee was advised that Hertfordshire County Council was keen to work with East Herts Officers to improve the East Herts area. The Committee noted the report and was supportive of Officers reporting back to its meeting on 8 June 2010 in respect of progress against the action plan.

RESOLVED - that (A) the findings of the Task and Finish Group and the Draft Action Plan be endorsed;

(B) the findings of the Task and Finish Group and the Draft Action Plan be commended to the Executive for approval; and

(C) a report be submitted to the Committee in respect of progress against the action plan on 8

June 2010.

249 ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY HEALTHCHECK – MAY TO JULY 2009

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted an exception report on the performance of the key indicators related to Environment Scrutiny Committee for May to July 2009.

The Director stated that the reference to Appendix A in paragraph 1.5 should have read Essential Reference Paper B. He also commented that the EHPI unit cost indicators, as detailed in the table at paragraph 2.1, should all have been prefixed by 8.

The Committee was advised that there were no planning applications received in June 2009 so a nil return had been entered in performance data available for this period for NI 157a.

Councillor D Andrews commented on whether EHPI 8.47 had the correct unit of measurement detailed in the table at paragraph 2.1. The Head of Environmental Services commented that the figure quoted in EHPI 8.47 was the net cost of street cleaning per annual metres cleansed. He also stated that this was incorrectly presented. The figure shown was per metre and the correct figure should be £57.51 per kilometre.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

250 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

The Committee considered items to be included in the work programme for 2009/10 and approved the programme now submitted with additions. Members agreed that a report detailing progress against the Environmental Quality action plan be submitted to the meeting on 8 June 2010. The Committee also agreed that a report in respect of the

Climate Change action plan be submitted to the Committee 1 year after the plan was implemented.

The Committee agreed to a request from the Head of Environmental Services that a report setting out the criteria for a Task and Finish Group to draft the specification for a new refuse and recycling and street cleansing contract be submitted to the meeting on 1 December 2009. The Committee also agreed for report on the outcome to be submitted to the meeting on 16 March 2010.

Following a request from Councillor N C Poulton, the Committee agreed that the Planning Enforcement Review Task and Finish Group report back to the meeting on 16 March 2010. The Committee approved the work programme as now amended.

RESOLVED – that the work programme as now amended, be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Chairman
Date

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