

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 18 JANUARY 2011, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman)
Councillors W Ashley, R Beeching,
R N Copping, A D Dodd, R Gilbert,
Mrs M H Goldspink, J Hedley,
Mrs D L E Hollebon, Mrs D Hone, J Mayes,
G McAndrew, M Newman, N C Poulton,
J O Ranger, V Shaw, J P Warren, M Wood
and C Woodward

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M G Carver, L O Haysey,
A P Jackson, S Rutland-Barsby and
M J Tindale

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

504 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor J O Ranger and seconded by Councillor C Woodward that Councillor D Andrews be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

RESOLVED - that Councillor D Andrews be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

505 APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Ballam, P Grethe, G E Lawrence, D A A Peek, J J Taylor and N Wilson.

506 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman welcomed Councillor M Newman to the meeting.

507 MINUTES

RESOLVED –that the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

508 PRESENTATION - BUDGET ITEMS

The Director of Internal Services gave a short presentation on all the budget reports to be considered at the meeting. He explained briefly the topics covered by them, how they linked together and the questions Members needed to consider.

Councillors R Gilbert and J Mayes raised the comments made by Unison on the reports. The Director explained these would be considered by the Local Joint Panel and comments on the Unison response to the budget would be passed to the Executive with the budget reports.

509 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/11 (REVISED) TO 2013/14

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report setting out proposals for the Council's Capital Programme for the period 2010/11 (Revised) to 2013/14. The Capital Programme had been amended for items of slippage and rephrasing. Other amendments had

been approved through the Council's monthly healthcheck. Lead Officers had submitted proposals for new schemes and investment requirements had been identified through the Medium Term Financial Plan process.

The Programme was presented with various detailed schemes having been combined which would facilitate the overall management of resources. The aggregate of proposed spend on individual schemes had been adjusted by a provision for slippage to produce a programme total against which total spending would be performance managed.

Existing rolling programmes of work had been continued up to 2013/14. These provided funding in areas such as affordable housing, private sector renovation grants, provision of play equipment, community grants, information technology upgrades and various environmental initiatives. The provision of replacement litter bins had been extended and the ongoing budget for commercial waste bins reflected growth in that area.

The Programme, in the Essential Reference Paper attached to the report now submitted, included proposals for a number of new schemes which were shown in bold type.

The details of how the programme would be funded were given. The Council would need to consider the sustainability of the programme.

Members raised questions on a number of topics. These included the renewal of the disabled lift in Wallfields reception area, which it was explained, was going to be refurbished and would be managed and maintained by a new company in future. In response to a question, the Director of Community and Customer Services explained the purchase of Baldock Road and Apton Road car parks would save money in the long term. He also undertook to give a written response on expenditure on shared-facility swimming pools. Members queried expenditure on the footbridge in Bishop's Stortford and a replacement Land Rover and Officers explained the need for this. One Member suggested it would be more

useful to spend money allocated for a new pedestrian bridge at Grange Paddock on improving the footpath leading to the town centre.

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

RESOLVED - that (A) the Executive be informed that the Joint Scrutiny Committees note the invest to save aspects of the Capital Programme and consider it is appropriately phased and the Programme should be approved; and

(B) a written response be provided on shared-facility swimming pools' expenditure.

510 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT
2011/12 AND MINIMUM REVENUE POLICY STATEMENT

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

The Council's Annual Investment Strategy, as included in the report now submitted, set out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving relative priority to the security and liquidity of investments as against investment returns. The Council had recently approved the use of some structured deposits which involved maturity beyond that recommended by the Council's treasury advisors following recommendations from Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee.

The Council needed to agree options for the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) (the provision to repay debt) annually. Details of the options for capital expenditure on or after 1 April 2009 were given together with methods for repayment of borrowing for capital expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008. The Committee decided to recommend the option/method detailed below to the Executive.

In response to a question, the Director of Internal Services

explained the figure which was still included in the report for the sale of The Causeway office building. The Leader of the Council explained that paying off another sum raised by a consortium of authorities had been thoroughly investigated but would be too expensive.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Joint Scrutiny Committees consider that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment and Prudential Indicators 2011/12 should be approved and the option/method recommended for the Minimum Revenue Provision in the report now submitted (Option 1 and Method 2) should be approved.

511 FEES AND CHARGES 2011/12

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report on increasing discretionary fees and charges in 2011/12 to generate additional income.

The Committees were reminded that the Council had adopted a fees and charges strategy and a set of key principles on which fees and charges should be set. Officers had been requested to bring forward proposals for charges having regard to the principles of the strategy. A proportional approach having regard to the level of income generated within each service had also been advocated. Information on proposals for individual services was given.

Members considered the charges for local land charge services, Hackney Carriage services and development pre-application by charities and Parish and Town Councils and decided to make the comments detailed below to the Executive.

Councillor R Gilbert suggested a concession could be made for OAPs for residents' parking. The Director of Community and Customer Services undertook to give a written reply to Councillors V Shaw and C Woodward on new charging arrangements for CCTV cameras.

The Committees decided to inform the Executive that the fees and charges should be approved with the additional comments detailed below.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that, the Joint Scrutiny Committees consider the fees and charges as set out in Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report now submitted, should be approved, including a concessionary rate of planning pre-application fees for charities and Parish and Town Councils, changes to fees for the land charges service in line with neighbouring authorities and setting the Hackney carriage fees to reduce the subsidy.

512 SERVICE ESTIMATES - REVENUE BUDGET PROBABLE
2010/11 - ESTIMATES 2011/12

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report on the estimate of all general fund services. The probable estimate showed a favourable variance from the original estimate for 2010/11. The use of £10,000 from the Legal Reserve would be required.

The 2011/12 estimate showed a decrease from the 2010/11 estimate. The use of earmarked reserves was included in the 2011/12 estimate. The estimates presented did not show recharges of divisional and support costs.

Efficiency savings from the emergency budget in September had been incorporated into the estimates. Members had been consulted on further efficiency savings.

In answer to a question from Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink, the Director of Internal Services confirmed that staffing efficiencies would involve loss of jobs and staff who left not being replaced.

The Director of Community and Customer Services undertook to provide a written response to Councillor M Wood on the public toilets in Bishop's Stortford. He confirmed reductions in

the cost of the refuse contract could lead to a surplus for markets which could contribute to overheads.

The Committees decided to make the comment detailed below to the Executive.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that, the Joint Scrutiny Committees consider the budget variances in the report now submitted are reasonable and the estimates should be approved.

513 CONSOLIDATED BUDGET REPORT: PROBABLE
OUTTURN 2010/11: REVENUE BUDGET 2011/12: MEDIUM
TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2011/12 TO 2014/15

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report recommending the consolidated budget for 2011/12 and seeking the comments of the Joint Scrutiny Committees.

The budget had been prepared in the light of constraints imposed by the Government. The Council's revenue grants had been reduced and savings proposals had been reviewed. Grants would be further reduced over the next four years. The Secretary of State had agreed reserves should be called on to offset the first year impact of this reduction. Interest rates were also expected to remain low reducing the Council's income from investments.

The Government had set out a plan to pay a grant equal to income from a 2.5% increase in Council Tax to Councils agreeing to freeze their tax. As a consequence, the budget proposed no increase in Council Tax.

Details of the opening balances for 1 April 2010 were given. The general and earmarked reserves put the Council in a better position to meet the challenge of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. The report contained details of reductions in grants and savings which had been agreed.

Councillor J O Ranger asked for provision to be made for a Member Development Officer (1 day a week) and the Committee agreed to suggest this to the Executive.

Councillor M H Goldspink asked that reserves be used to avoid job losses and to reinstate leaf clearance and PCSOs. Other Members expressed support for continuing to fund PCSOs and the Leader of the Council expressed a wish that this would be possible for one year to allow a wider review of Community Safety to take place during 2011/12. Both points were supported by Members. The Leader of the Council also explained that it was hoped reserves could be used to freeze Council Tax for a further year after 2011/12.

The Committees decided to inform the Executive that the budget should be approved subject to the comments detailed below.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Joint Scrutiny Committees consider that the Consolidated Budget should be approved subject to the following comments:

- (A) an addition of a Member Development Officer (1 day a week) should be considered;
- (B) support for PCSOs should be continued for one year;
- (C) a review of Community Safety be supported;
- (D) the aim to freeze Council Tax for a further year after 2011/12 be supported;
- (E) proposals for savings in support for the Chairman and Museum Service and Sunday and Bank Holiday car park charges should not be implemented; and
- (F) the decision to freeze car park charges from April 2011 be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chairman

Date