

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
20 NOVEMBER 2012, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor G McAndrew (Chairman)
Councillors R Beeching, T Herbert, J Mayes,
N Symonds and M Wood

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors L Haysey and P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Manager of Housing Services
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Marian Langley Paul Newman	- Scrutiny Officer - Interim Licensing Manager
Will O'Neill	- Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services
Claire Pullen	- Engagement and Partnership Officer
Mekhola Ray	- Community Projects Team Manager

418 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Bull, Mrs D Hone, Mrs D Hollebon and C Woodward. It was noted that Councillor C Rowley was substituting for Councillor Mrs D

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420 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred to agenda pages which had been misprinted and asked if Members had received replacement pages.

421 MINUTES

The Chairman referred to Minute 275 (Annual Performance Report from Riversmead and South Anglia Housing Associations 2011/12), and stated that the "Bedroom Tax" would be effective from April 2013 and not "October 2012" as stated.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2012 as amended, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

422 HEALTH AND WELLBEING PANEL

Councillor N Symonds, the Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Panel provided Members with an update on the work of the Panel and of health related activities which she had agreed to undertake. Councillor N Symonds referred to the last meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Panel and stated that the feedback from that meeting had been very positive.

It was noted that the next meeting of Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny had been cancelled and notification

of a revised date was awaited.

RESOLVED – (A) that the report be received; and

(B) the Minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Panel meeting held on 16 October 2012, be noted.

423 CONSULTATION ON POSSIBLE REVISIONS TO EAST HERTS HOUSING REGISTER POLICY

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report seeking comments on potential revisions to the East Herts Housing Register Policy, which had been prompted by the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted. It was noted that, as a result of the Act, the Council had more discretion in how it could frame the Housing Register Policy. The Manager of Housing Services sought comments from Members on what they might wish to see included in the Register and how applicants' priority for social housing might be assessed for inclusion in the Register, as a basis for consultation.

The Manager of Housing Services explained that Essential Reference Paper "B" summarised the position in terms of how the Council might frame the Register Policy.

Councillor N Symonds thanked the Officers for the report. She expressed concern about Anti-Social Behaviour (including drug dealing) by one or two tenants which caused problems for many others. She cited two locations where she knew this was occurring. The Manager of Housing Services explained the difficulty in terms of the burden of proof and of the need to frame tenancy agreements in a more robust manner.

Councillor N Symonds referred to ex-servicemen and of the need to ensure that this category of people were not penalised. She referred to the needs of the elderly suggesting that more bungalows be built. The Manager of Housing

Services explained that with regard to ex-service personnel, future legislation would allow the Council to give additional preference “points” to Armed Forces Service personnel leaving the Service where they already fell into one or more “preference category” for housing, e.g. medical need. Councillor R Beeching supported this approach. He also agreed that firm action be taken against those tenants acting antisocially.

The Manager of Housing Services explained the Council’s role in housing those who were found to be intentionally homeless if they had lost a previous home due to anti-social behaviour and of the possible benefits of “starter tenancies” especially regarding known perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. The Manager of Housing Services explained that it was about “managing expectations of behaviour” once they had a tenancy and the role of the housing associations. The Young Persons Project in Baker Street, Hertford and the role of the YMCA in Bishop’s Stortford were discussed in terms of the provision of more suitable housing for young people in East Herts and the training that would be mandatory on budgeting, how to manage a tenancy and expectations of behaviour.

Councillor T Herbert suggested that reasonable preference and additional points might be given to those who had benefitted the community in some way. The Manager of the Housing Services agreed that this could be considered but that some Community Benefit was easier to quantify for the award of additional points than others, for example fostering and potential adopters.

The Manager of Housing Services explained that from a developer perspective, building bungalows was not economically viable. Councillor S Bull suggested that developers should be encouraged to ensure a good “mix” of properties and commented on the role of Parishes in letting the Council know what properties were needed in their areas. The Manager of Housing Services advised that there has been a large number of 4 bedroom private properties being built in the District compared to previous years and that from

an affordable home perspective, this was not the highest need accommodation size. The Housing Service therefore, often had discussions regarding the best mix of affordable homes with developers and housing associations on these sites. The impact of the “Bedroom Tax” was discussed in relation to the larger properties.

The Committee Chairman referred to a letter which Councillor J Ranger had submitted to him regarding choice based lettings, of people choosing to move to more rural areas then wanting to move back to areas where there were more amenities. He queried whether extra points could be allocated on a locality basis for people wishing to stay in villages. The Manager of Housing Services explained the fundamentals of the Choice Based Scheme and how points were allocated. She agreed that this could be reviewed but needed to be robust to make it fair and transparent. The Manager of Housing Services also emphasised the need for the Policy to be robust as this was open to judicial review challenge.

Members agreed the report and supported the future options detailed in Essential Reference Paper “B” of the report now submitted and that the essence of Members’ comments detailed above be taken on board and included within the Draft East Herts Housing Register and Allocations Policy

RESOLVED - that the future options detailed in Essential Reference Paper “B” of the report now submitted be approved, and that the essence of Members’ comments now detailed, be taken on board and included within the Draft East Herts Housing Register and Allocations Policy.

424 HOUSING STRATEGIC TENANCY STRATEGY 2012 - 2015

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report on the Council’s first draft Strategic Tenancy Strategy, the detail of which was set out in Essential Reference Paper “B” of the report now submitted.

The Manager for Housing Services explained the difficulty in co-ordinating with 10 – 12 other registered providers each developing their own Tenancy Policies to manage their tenancies to dovetail with the Council.

Councillor R Beeching queried the rent level of affordable rents. The Manager for Housing Services stated that the new affordable rents being implemented by registered providers were set at 80% of local market rents and that registered providers of housing were obliged to “plough back” a percentage of the additional rent into new developments. However, this did not need to be within this District. This was managed by the Homes and Communities Agency who had contracts with the registered providers to build additional affordable homes.

Members reviewed the draft Tenancy Strategy and agreed that the document be circulated for consultation with stakeholders and that their comments be included within the Strategy, for approval by the Executive.

RESOLVED – that (A) the draft Tenancy Strategy be agreed and circulated for the purpose of consultation with stakeholders; and

(B) comments from stakeholders be incorporated within the Draft Tenancy Strategy submitted for approval by the Executive.

425 REVIEW OF TAXI LICENSING POLICY AND PROCESSES
(TASK AND FINISH REPORT)

Councillor R Beeching, as the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, submitted a report summarising the findings following a review of the Taxi Licensing process in East Herts, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and the revised Essential Reference Paper “B”. Councillor R Beeching thanked the Scrutiny Officer and Licensing Manager for their help managing and bringing clarity to the process.

In response to a query from Councillor T Herbert concerning the introduction of a “uniform”, the Chairman explained that it was not a uniform as such. Rather, it was about introducing uniformity of clothing, e.g. a standard polo shirt which, it was felt, could give clients a feeling of confidence and professionalism of their taxi drivers.

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support stated that drivers needed to be aware of the needs of the elderly and those with physical difficulties. The Licensing Manager suggested that several drivers had already undertaken a NVQ Level 2, which addressed such issues and that funding was provided by the Government. He also suggested that holding the NVQ award taken alongside the authorities own ‘penalty point’ scheme, could be used as the basis of a Gold Standard status amongst East Herts drivers.

Members endorsed the approach and the findings of the Task and Finish Group and agreed the recommendations as set out in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the findings of the Task and Finish Group be endorsed;

(B) Licensing Committee be recommended to agree that a robust “Convictions Policy” be introduced, the detail of which was set out in Essential Reference Paper “B” of the report now submitted;

(C) Licensing Committee be recommended to agree that some decision making relating to taxi licensing could be devolved to designated officers in line with the terms set out in any agreed “Convictions Policy” along the lines of the assessment grid detailed in Essential Reference Paper “B”; and

(D) Licensing Committee be recommended to agree that they receive a progress report on the suggested actions set in the report now submitted when actions have been evaluated.

426 EAST HERTS AGEING WELL - REVIEW OF PROGRESS

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a report on the progress made against earlier recommendations made by Members at their meetings on 28 February and 28 August 2012, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

Members noted and supported the progress being made by Members and Officers.

RESOLVED – that the progress made by Members and Officers against the three recommendations made at Community Scrutiny Committee on 28 February and 28 August 2012, be noted and supported.

427 COMMUNITY GRANTS REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS
QUARTER 1 AND QUARTER 2 ALLOCATION

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a progress report on the Community Grants programme following policy amendments made by the Executive on 10 January 2012, which included the establishment of a one-off Jubilee and Olympic Fund; a general community capital pot; and a simpler application process for projects costing less than £2,000, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

The Community Engagement and Partnerships Officer provided a breakdown of those organisations which had received grants. The grants had been classified into Summer Activities; Olympic / Jubilee; Community capital (large and small 1st round (rural); Councillor Engagement; and Performance for Excellence (Arts and Sport). It was noted that the total community capital budget for 2012/13 was £198,600 and the total revenue budget for the same period stood at £49,390. The Community Engagement and Partnerships Officer drew attention to the huge difference even small grants could make to a community / organisation

and drew Members' attention to comments received following successful grant applications, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

The Chairman referred to the fact that more people were approaching the Council for assistance from a diminishing pot. He referred to the New Homes Bonus which would benefit the towns more than rural areas. The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support explained how the grant process now worked and said that Officers attempted to allocate funds fairly and geographically. It was noted that priority for our own funding pots was usually given to rural areas. The Head of Communications, Community Engagement and Cultural Services explained that Officers had contacted Towns and asked them to make the District Council aware of their local town allocation policy for use of this new money and what help could be provided from the towns' portion of the New Homes Bonus for applicants in the town.

Members praised Officers for their work and the success of events. Councillor M Wood referred to the former Councillor Grants which he said, helped Members engage with their community. He queried whether this could be reintroduced. The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community agreed that there were issues within the grants scheme which needed to be reviewed and agreed to discuss this issue with other Executive Members at the appropriate budget time. Members supported this approach.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress made in allocating grants according to the new policies be noted; and

(B) the Executive be requested to review community grants and specifically, the allocation of grant monies formerly distributed by Members in order to allow grants to be used in the most flexible and appropriate way possible.

AND EXCEPTIONS REPORT

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report which provided a mid-year summary of the Council's achievement against its priorities for 2012/13 and sets out those service plan actions which were off target and which had a revised completion date, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted. The report also monitored the outstanding service actions from 2011/12, the detail of which is set out in Essential Reference Paper "D".

Members noted the progress against the Council's priorities, the revised completion dates against the 2012/13 Service Plan actions and agreed that the 2011/12 Service Plan actions be received.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress against the Council's priorities and the revised completion dates against the 2012/13 Service Plan be noted; and

(B) the 2011/12 Service Plan actions be received.

429 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTH CHECK JULY - SEPTEMBER 2012

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period July – September 2012.

The Chairman drew attention to EHPI 3a (Usage: number of swims Under 16) and confirmed that Sports Leisure Management (SLM) would be asked to provide an update when they next presented their annual report on contract performance. This was supported.

RESOLVED – that (A) the performance for the period July to September 2012 be noted;

(B) SLM be requested to provide an update on the issue of Under 16 swims when presenting their annual report on contract performance.

430 WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report outlining the future work of Community Scrutiny Committee. She referred to the recent Police Commissioner Election and the Council’s responsibility to receive an annual Crime and Disorder report. In the circumstances, it was suggested that the new Police Commissioner be invited to the next meeting to give Members a 15 minute presentation and that Councillor M Alexander be also invited to attend in his role as this authority’s representative on the new Police and Crime Panel. This was supported.

Members also supported the suggestion that SLM be requested to address the issue of Under 16 swimming and meeting the needs of older residents when they report on the Leisure Contract performance. This was supported.

The Committee supported the updates.

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

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm

Chairman
Date

