

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 29 MAY 2012, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman).
Councillors E Bedford, S Bull, J Mayes,
W Mortimer, T Page, M Pope, J Ranger,
G Williamson and J Wing.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors L Haysey.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Karl Chui	- Performance Monitoring Officer
Lorna Georgiou	- Communications Team Leader
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Will O'Neill	- Communications and Engagement Manager
Ceri Pettit	- Corporate Planning and Performance Manager
Neil Sloper	- Head of Customer Services and Parking

54 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor J Ranger and seconded by
Councillor J Mayes that Councillor G Williamson be

appointed Vice–Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee for the 2012/13 civic year.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, Councillor G Williamson was appointed Vice–Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee for the 2012/13 civic year.

RESOLVED – that Councillor G Williamson be appointed Vice–Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee for the 2012/13 civic year.

55 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor G Jones. It was noted that Councillor S Bull was in attendance as substitute for Councillor G Jones.

56 MINUTES – 20 MARCH 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57 REVIEW OF COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS APRIL 2011 TO MARCH 2012

The Head of Customer Services submitted a report detailing a summary of the formal comments, compliments and complaints (3Cs) that had been logged by the Council between April 2011 and March 2012. The report highlighted the key issues arising from these 3Cs and also presented the 3Cs action plan for 2012/13.

Members were advised that the 2011/12 target for percentage of complaints resolved within 14 days was 70%, not 90% as detailed on page 6 of the report now submitted.

The Committee was also advised that in preparing the

report, an error had been discovered in the previous calculation of performance indicators caused by adding stage 2 (review) complaints to the totals. The data in this report was confirmed as accurate and the indicators had been updated accordingly.

The Head of Customer Services provided a breakdown of the complaints performance of the Authority. He emphasised that, considering the Council received over 1.5 million phone calls in a year, the 62 formal complaints received was a relatively low figure.

The Authority was within its targets in respect of stage 2 complaints and there had been a one third reduction in complaints overall. Of the 19 cases registered with the Local Government Ombudsman, there had been no instances of maladministration by the Authority.

Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'E' for all the corrective action that had been taken following the receipt of complaints, which included staff training and actions taken to ensure appropriate service delivery.

Members were reminded that some complaints related to cases where Officers had acted in accordance with Council policy but the complainant remained unsatisfied with the Authority. In some cases, there was a need to distinguish between a formal complaint and a request for service from the Authority.

Councillor D Andrews stated that 62 complaints was a low figure and constituted excellent performance. Councillor J Mayes stated that more meaningful results would be available if performance in the report was detailed as actual figures as opposed to percentages.

Councillor J Ranger congratulated Officers on what seemed to be a very satisfactory situation regarding complaints. He stated that there were important distinctions to be drawn when classifying contact with a resident as a complaint, particularly in relation to statutory

planning matters and cases brought before the Standards Committee.

Councillor J Wing referred to planning and stated that the system was imbalanced as there was no third party right of appeal.

Councillor J Wing stated that the seemingly good performance should not lead to complacency and the Authority should be careful in analysing such data. He commented that there were groups that, whilst reluctant to raise formal complaints if they were dependent on continuing grant or aid from the Council, were none the less dissatisfied with aspects of the Authority.

Councillor Wing raised a particular concern in respect of the lack of grant support from East Herts for bringing the Great Bed of Ware to Ware.

The Head of Customer Services stated that the actions taken to resolve complaints ranged from a basic delivery of service to one to one training or a team meeting. The number of complaints was small and many were down to minor errors by Officers rather than an indication of a serious problem.

Councillor T Page requested that this report be further developed to outline what, if any, improvement actions needed to be taken across the Authority. Councillor J Ranger stated that a press release should be issued explaining what areas were inside and outside the control of the Authority, for example the regulations regarding Development Control were not set by East Herts Council.

Councillor J Wing commented that complaint resolution was not helped when the adjudicator was the Head of Service for the service involved. The Head of Customer Services explained that Directors would often adjudicate, such as when a complaint was made about a Head of Service. Members were also advised that planning professionals were often required to adjudicate when a

complaint related to complex planning issues.

Members requested that future reports draw a closer link between complaints, remedial actions and outcomes. This was supported.

The Director of Internal Services stated that many complaints were down to basic human error and training could easily correct such situations. He emphasised however, that some complaints were very difficult to resolve if Officers had followed appropriate procedures in line with Council or Government policy and it was the underlying policy which the complainant objected to.

The Committee received the report.

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

(B) future reports draw a closer link between complaints, remedial actions and outcomes; and

(C) the actions detailed in the report be supported.

58 EAST HERTS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2012

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report introducing a new Communication Strategy and Action Plan together with a set of social media principles.

Members were advised that this report was the first stage in securing a proactive communications strategy for the Authority, in order to ensure there was a targeted approach to communications. Officers would then be able to ensure that appropriate messages were delivered to audiences across the District.

The Committee was advised that social media would assist Councillors in engaging with communities at a local level. Members would be given training on the

appropriate usage of social media and there would also be a workshop on community engagement at ward level.

In response to a number of comments from Councillor J Ranger, Members were advised that all Parish and Town Council Clerks had been contacted. Members were also advised that the new strategy would assist with ensuring that the public were more able to distinguish between the functions performed by East Herts Council and Hertfordshire County Council.

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support stated that the strategy would ensure the exciting and innovative use of communication to publicise the good work being carried out across East Herts. Councillor D Andrews commented that the Members Information Bulletin would be reviewed as part of the strategy.

In response to a query from Councillor M Pope, Members were advised that the strategy would also provide residents with an important linkage between value for money and the services of East Herts Council. The Director of Internal Services reminded Members that the freeze in Council Tax was particularly relevant.

The Committee received the report and recommended that the 2012 East Herts Communications Strategy should be adopted.

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

(B) the 2012 East Herts Communication Strategy be recommended to the Executive for adoption.

59 2011/12 END OF YEAR SERVICE PLANNING REPORT

The Leader of the Council submitted a report detailing a summary of 2011/12 Service Plan actions that had been achieved and also those that required a revised completion date or had been deferred/suspended.

Members were advised that the Authority would no longer be submitting a bid to secure the new watercourse and maintenance contract as, due to a change of plan by the Environment Agency, small contracts had now been included in a South of England contract, which was too large for the Authority to manage.

In response to a query from Councillor J Mayes, the Committee was advised that the implementation of an enhanced self-service telephony system should be completed by the end of May 2012. Councillor D Andrews commented that the automated telephone system appeared to be working well.

Councillor J Ranger congratulated Heads of Service and Officers for delivering service plan actions, particularly in the context of difficult times in 2011/12.

In response to concerns from Councillor J Ranger, the Director of Internal Services advised that 2011/12 had been a difficult year but there had been a steady improvement in access to Council information. Members were advised that an externally hosted web development tool would improve the visibility of the website from a customer perspective.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the revised completion dates against the 2011/12 Service Plan actions be noted.

60 2011/12 PERFORMANCE OUTTURNS

The Leader of the Council submitted a report detailing the performance indicators that the Council was required to monitor and publish annually in the Annual Report. The purpose of the report was to advise Members of the performance outturns for 2011/12 and any changes to targets.

Members were advised that the report covered 57

performance indicators, of which 55 were the subject of targets detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B'. The report also covered the Monthly Corporate Healthcheck exception report for February and March 2012, which was detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'C1'.

In response to a query from Councillor J Mayes, the Corporate Planning and Performance Manager stated that the Authority should retain performance indicators relating to percentages of Officers employed with disabilities or from Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) groups. Members were advised that the Authority did everything possible to encourage applications from these groups.

The Director of Internal Services confirmed it was important for the Human Resources Committee and Officers to be mindful of these indicators to ensure that the Authority was not discriminating against any potential applicants when undertaking recruitment. Councillor J Ranger confirmed that the Human Resources Committee had discussed this issue in relation to ensuring targets were realistic and sensible.

Councillor J Mayes commented on EHPI 8 – percentage of invoices paid on time being just off target. Officers confirmed that most invoices were paid on time. Councillor D Andrews stated that EHPI 181 – time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events was also off target but only by a very narrow margin.

Councillor J Ranger stated that the recommendation relating to EHPI 156 – buildings accessible to people with a disability should be changed to 90 or 91%, as opposed to 90.91%. Councillor J Wing requested that all Essential Reference Papers should contain text that adhered to the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) guidelines of not less than 14 point font, as he was unable to scrutinise these documents in their current form.

Councillor M Pope observed that the total salary budget was detailed as an overspend at year end. The Director predicted that this budget would show a slight underspend 2012/13.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received;

(B) the Outturns for 2011/12, as detailed in Essential Reference Paper ‘B’ of the report submitted, be noted;

(C) the 2013/14 target of 65% for EHPI 3 – overall satisfaction with the Authority, be noted;

(D) the revised target from 2013/14 onwards of 90 or 91% for EHPI 156 – buildings accessible to people with a disability, be noted;

(E) the revised target from 2013/14 onwards of 80% for EHPI 2.15 – Health and Safety Inspections, be noted;

(F) the proposed deletion of EHPI 14 – retirements, be noted;

(G) the actions detailed in the report in respect of improving data quality be recommended to the Executive for approval;

(H) the budget variances and performance detailed in Essential Reference Paper ‘C1’ of the report submitted, be noted; and

(I) the Executive be recommended to authorise Officers to re-evaluate EHPI 16a and EHPI 16b – the percentage of staff with disabilities and the percentage of top 10% of earners with a disability.

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the Committee's future work programme for 2012/13, the detail of which had been set out in Essential Reference Paper 'B' to the report now submitted.

Councillor J Ranger stated that a Task and Finish Group should be set up to conduct a fundamental review of how IT benefited the operations of the Authority and its customers, both internal and external. He commented that this work should not be undertaken by a Member working party but by a Task and Finish Group.

In response to comments from the Scrutiny Officer regarding budget restraints and the fact that topics had already been identified for Task and Finish Groups, Councillor Ranger stated that each Scrutiny Committee should have at least one Task and Finish Group in a civic year.

Councillor Ranger commented that there was a light list of topics for the July meeting. He stated that a report relating to the roles of Members in respect of outside bodies could be submitted to that meeting. This was supported.

Members also agreed that a scoping report would be submitted to the July meeting in respect of a Task and Finish Group relating to a fundamental review of how IT benefited the operations of the Council and its customers, both internal and external.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that reports in the work programme relating to Community and Public Engagement would be refocused as part of the wider Communications Strategy work. A full report would be submitted to the meeting in March 2013 and an interim report would be submitted to the meeting in October 2012. This was supported.

The Committee approved the report, as amended.

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

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Chairman
Date