

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2012, AT 7.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor A Jackson (Chairman/Leader)
Councillors M Alexander, M Carver,
L Haysey, P Phillips and M Tindale.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews, E Buckmaster,
Mrs R Cheswright, M McMullen, P Moore,
M Pope, J Ranger and S Rutland-Barsby.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services

278 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors M Alexander and P Moore declared pecuniary interests in the matter referred to at Minute 280 – East Herts Housing Strategy 2012 – 15, in that they were both board members of Riversmead Housing Association. They left the chamber whilst this matter was considered.

279 **CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN (2013/14 TO 2016/17)**

The Executive considered a draft of the Council's Strategic Plan 2013/14 – 2016/17, which outlined priorities for the next four years and identified key outcomes it would be seeking to achieve. The Leader emphasised the Council's developing roles and, in particular, its role as an enabler of services working with other community partners and agencies.

The Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 21 August 2012, recommended the Plan for adoption.

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support referred to the description of councillors' roles as strong community leaders. She sought an amendment to the third bullet point which balanced the role of being a local champion with the wider need for councillors to take a more strategic view. This was supported by the Executive.

The Executive supported the Plan as now submitted, subject to the amendment now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the comments of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee be received; and

(B) the 2013/14 – 2016/17 Corporate Strategic Plan be approved, subject to the amendment now detailed.

280 **EAST HERTS HOUSING STRATEGY 2012 - 15**

The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support submitted a draft of the Council's new Housing Strategy 2012 -15 and associated action plan. She stated that the intention of the Plan was to be as flexible as possible and so it would be reviewed annually.

The Community Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 28 August 2012, supported the Strategy and action plan subject to a strengthened statement regarding the Armed Forces Covenant. The Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support commented that the forthcoming review of the Allocations Policy would look at how this group and others could be dealt with.

The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport commented on the need for the final document to be made available in hard copy for those members of the community without access to the internet. In reply, the Leader stated that as this comment applied to other documents, he would be raising this general issue with Officers.

In response to a question from Councillor J Ranger, the Executive Member for Finance confirmed that the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme had commenced, but that take up, to date, had been weaker than expected.

The Executive Member for Finance referred to the affordable housing figures and expressed concern that the Authority appeared to be failing its stated objective. Given the continuing economic difficulties, he questioned whether a greater number of affordable housing units could be achieved by actually lowering the 40% threshold. He was also unclear as to whether the economic development challenge had been sufficiently addressed. He suggested deferring the report and reviewing the policy on the affordable housing threshold.

The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport referred to the ongoing work in drafting the District Plan in which the continued provision of an affordable housing threshold on development sites would have to be evidenced as obtainable. He reminded the Executive that the current policy was “up to 40%”.

Various Members spoke against the Executive Member

for Finance's suggestion on the basis that the current policy enabled the Development Control Committee some flexibility to exercise discretion on a case by case basis.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised Members that the affordable housing policy was set as part of the Local Plan and that the Housing Strategy sought to reflect that policy.

On a show of hands, the Executive supported the draft Housing Strategy 2012 – 15, as now submitted, by four votes to one.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the comments of the Community Scrutiny Committee be received;

(B) the Housing Strategy 2012 - 15 be adopted;
and

(C) an annual report to monitor progress of the action plan be submitted to Community Scrutiny Committee.

281 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND STRATEGY
(2013/14 TO 2016/17)**

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report which considered revisions to the Financial Strategy including the policy on Reserves and the proposed planning assumptions to be used in updating the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 21 August 2012, considered the report and made a number of comments as now submitted.

The Executive Member for Finance outlined the funding changes regarding Council Tax Support and Business Rates. He referred to the Financial Strategy as detailed at Essential Reference Paper 'C'. He also detailed Government funding forecasts and other assumptions

built into the MTFP model as detailed at Essential Reference Paper 'F' of the report submitted. Here, he reminded Members of the intention for a nil council tax increase in the remaining term of the current Council through to 2015.

The Executive Member for Finance also referred to the application of the New Homes Bonus and his proposal to cap this at 2012/13 levels until such time as specific initiatives had been identified. The Leader suggested that this could be reviewed as business cases for expenditure came forward.

Councillor J Ranger referred to the recommendation that Officers be asked to extend the financial model until 2019/20 and expressed his view that it would be a waste of time to look beyond the current five year period. The Executive agreed to delete this recommendation, but asked the Executive Member for Finance to revisit the potential merit of this proposal when the new Director of Finance and Support Services was in post.

The Executive supported the proposals as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the comments of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee be received;

(B) the proposed Financial Strategy, as now submitted, be adopted; and

(C) the planning assumptions, as now submitted, be adopted as the basis for framing the 2013/14 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan to 2016/17.

282 **MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - JUNE AND JULY 2012**

The Leader of the Council submitted an exception report on finance and performance monitoring for June – July

2012 and risk monitoring for May - June 2012.

The Executive supported the proposals as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the budgetary variances set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report be noted;

(B) Investment Income in excess of the budgeted sum, to the extent that it is not needed to offset adverse budget variances during 2012/13, be transferred to the Interest Equalisation Reserve at 31 March 2013, as detailed at paragraph 2.2 of the report submitted;

(C) a Supplementary Revenue Estimate of £120,000 in respect of increased workloads in the Revenues and Benefits Service, as outlined in paragraph 2.4 of the report submitted, be approved; and

(D) spend of £358,000 for the provision of rent accommodation from the monies held by Uttlesford Council who act as banker for these funds, be approved, as detailed at paragraph 2.6 of the report.

283 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 31 July 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

284 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY

The Executive received a report detailing those issues referred to it 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.

285 CORPORATE ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12

The Leader of the Council submitted the Annual Report 2011/12, documenting the Council's key achievements for each of the corporate priorities over the last financial year. He also provided an overview of the Council's financial position and performance and a statement on contracts.

The Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 21 August 2012, recommended the Annual Report for adoption.

The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport referred to various statistics and asked Officers to clarify these and to ensure that the 2011 Census data, where available, was quoted. He also sought an amendment to the final sentence of "The Area" in Section 2, which he believed was clumsy in the way it referenced encroaching development. Finally, he reminded the Executive that some members of the community did not have access to the internet and so requested that some hard copies be produced and made available for the public that wanted it.

Officers undertook to clarify the points raised and make the necessary amendments before the final document was published. A few hard copies would be sent to parishes and made available in libraries. Subject to these amendments, the Executive approved the Annual Report 2011/12 as now submitted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee be received; and

(B) the 2011/12 Annual Report be approved.

286 DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2011/12

The Leader submitted a report on the draft 2011/12 Annual Governance Statement, in which the Executive had been invited to submit any comments to the Audit Committee. He referred to the comments of the Corporate Business Scrutiny

Committee, at its meeting held on 21 August 2012, in which it had suggested to the Audit Committee, that further clarity was needed in relation to stating the appointment of the Leader and Executive Members. It was suggested that clarity could be provided by referencing the relevant legislation.

The Executive supported the draft Statement subject to the comment now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee be received; and

(B) the Audit Committee be advised that the Executive supports the Annual Governance Statement 2011/12 and Action Plan 2012/13, subject to the clarification relating to the appointment of the Leader, as identified by the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.31 pm

Chairman
Date