

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
12 MARCH 2013, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor G McAndrew (Chairman)
Councillors S Bull, Mrs D Hollebon,
Mrs D Hone, J Mayes, C Rowley,
N Symonds and C Woodward.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M Alexander, D Andrews,
L Haysey, P Moore.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Mark Kingsland	- Leisure Services Manager
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
Brian Simmonds	- Head of Community Safety and Health Services

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Nicolson	- SLM Limited
Chris Yearly	- SLM Limited

670 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Beeching, T Herbert and M Wood. It was noted that Councillor C Rowley was substituting for Councillor R Beeching.

671 MINUTES

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

672 REPORT FROM THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING PANEL

Councillor N Symonds, Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Panel provided Members with an update on the work of the Panel and of health related activities occurring at Hertfordshire County Council.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and
(B) the Minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Panel meeting held on 11 December 2012 be noted.

673 CRIME AND DISORDER REPORT - POLICE CRIME COMMISSIONER'S BUDGET AND PLAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR EAST HERTS

With the consent of Members, the Chairman agreed to consider this item before the Annual Leisure Contract Performance report in order to allow representatives from SLM more time to attend.

The Head of Community Safety provided a summary of the new Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) role, what Mr Lloyd intended to achieve and the implications for East Herts Council. There was a duty on the part of the PCC to work with Community Safety Partnerships. The Head of Community Safety advised that the PCC

intended to set its own agenda, having discretion over funding and highlighted the prospective financial impact this could have on the Council. It was noted that the Council's Community Safety Partnership expected to receive approximately £13,000 for 2013/14 and in 2014/15 might not receive anything. Two years ago, the Council received a grant of £128,000.

The Head of Community Safety referred to the difficulties of competing with other Councils for funding given that East Herts had low levels of crime. A particular concern was the possibility that funding might not be granted for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and of their uncertain future. Members acknowledged the valuable contribution which PCSOs made to the community and to the Police, in terms of local intelligence. It was noted that any loss of PCSOs would also have a direct impact on the Police and how they managed their resources.

Councillor C Woodward referred to the roles of the Neighbourhood Watch, the use of volunteers and the role of PCSOs which he believed were all at risk and the "fantastic" contribution they made to the community. He urged Officers to explore ways of finding extra funding. The Head of Community Safety advised Members that in order to seek funding for PCSOs, the Council would have to provide evidentiary support to the PCC. Councillor N Symonds advised that she would be happy to provide any help she could on this matter.

Councillor D Andrews advised Members that his Parish Council had sponsored a PCSO who was considered "indispensable". Councillor C Woodward suggested that sponsorship of a PCSO be relayed to other Town and Parish Councils.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment summarised the functions of the Police and Crime Panels, how the Police Crime Commissioner would be held to account and the role of the Panel. He explained the focus of the Police Plan stating that the

PCC could not get involved with the day to day operational activities of the Police.

Councillor Mrs D Hollebon voiced her support for the contribution that PCSOs made. She asked that when the PCC is invited to attend a future meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee, that he be asked to explain the way forward in using the resources of volunteers and specials.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment acknowledged the important role of specials and PCSOs in terms of local knowledge and useful local intelligence, adding that in terms of volunteers, businesses were very reluctant to release their employees, but that special officers could choose their own working hours themselves. He referred to the salary anomaly between PCSOs and Constables. The issue of the powers of arrest for PCSOs was considered.

It was noted that the PCC had been invited to attend the next meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee on 25 June 2013. Councillor Mrs D Hollebon suggested that Members be provided with regular updates from the Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment and the Head of Community Safety. This was supported.

Members expressed their concern on funding issues and the potential negative effect this would have on the future of PCSOs, given the low levels of crime in the District which, Members felt, had been achieved as a result of the Council's proactive work on crime prevention.

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

(B) Members' concerns regarding funding and the potential effect this would have on the future of PCSOs and crime prevention work be referred to the PCC.

674 ANNUAL LEISURE CONTRACT PERFORMANCE FOR 2012

The Head of Environmental Services submitted a report presenting the fourth annual review of the Council's ten-year leisure contract with Sport and Leisure Management Ltd (SLM) known as "Everyone Active".

The Leisure Services Manager stated that Officers were satisfied with the overall performance of SLM, the detail of which was set out in Essential Reference Papers 'B' and 'C' of the report now submitted. Medium term financial planning savings targets had been achieved. He provided a summary of visits to the gyms, adding that there had been 550,000 visits to all leisure site facilities in the last 12 months. There had been a dramatic increase in customers in the last 4 years and growth had been significantly greater than throughput targets set at the beginning of the contract.

In response to a query from Councillor C Woodward regarding a reduction in swims, the Leisure Services Manager explained that nationally, there had been a decline in swimming. The Leisure Services Manager explained what energy efficient (green) measures had been taken to reduce expenditure costs.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services referred to problems with parking which had now been resolved. The Chairman referred to the works at the site by Network Rail and asked if the temporary area used at the time could be used for parking on a more permanent basis. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained that there were a number of issues affecting car parking at the site and provided a summary. The Head of Environmental Services reminded Members of planning proposals for the development of Bishop's Stortford North and of the impact this may have generally on the area. Consideration of how this would affect the infrastructure of the area and the demand for leisure facilities would need to be considered as part of the planning process.

In response to a query from Councillor S Bull regarding a decline in under 16s swimming, the Head of Environmental Services agreed that numbers were dropping, but increasing for adults. He referred to national trends, adding that SLM were doing all that they could to encourage usage, including making the facilities more attractive (tiling of the swimming pool at Grange Paddocks had just been undertaken) and scheduling more 'fun swim' sessions.

The Head of Environmental Services explained how and why there had been inconsistencies in the Performance Indicator EHP12 (Net cost/subsidy per visit) for 2012.

In response to a query from Councillor Mrs D Hollebon, the Leisure Services Manager explained that the new crèche was now open at Grange Paddocks and that fun swims would be launched on 23 March 2013. In response to a query from Councillor N Symonds, Matthew Nicholson, SLM Area Manager, explained the decision around the timing of the fun swims.

Councillor L Haysey referred to the suggestion by Hertfordshire County Council of using Health and Wellbeing Board publicity health icons on their literature. Officers undertook to look into this.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services commented that in relation to swimming, the numbers provided needed to be taken in perspective and that on the whole, and in terms of the contract, SLM were performing very well.

In response to a query from Councillor J Mayes, the Leisure Services Manager assured the Member that water quality at all sites was within industry standards and that the quality of the water in all SLM's swimming pools was good. Councillor Mayes expressed concern regarding the steps to the pool.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding extending SLM's corporate social responsibility, the Leisure Services Manager provided an update on how SLM were working with the Council to integrate the "Everyone Active" activities with facilities offered by the Council. Councillor C Woodward suggested that disabled sporting events also needed to be taken on board. Mr Matthew Nicholson of SLM provided an update on initiatives being considered.

Members received the report and thanked SLM for their good work on the Council's behalf.

RESOLVED – that (A) performance of the leisure contract be noted; and

(B) SLM be thanked for their good work on the Council's behalf.

675 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY HEALTH CHECK (OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2012)

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report setting out the performance of key indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period October to December 2012, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and Essential Reference Paper 'B'.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained the background to the increased time taken to process Housing Benefit / Council Tax new claims and change events (NI 181). He gave Members full assurance that any impact on individual claimants had been minimal. The time to process changes to Housing Benefit / Council Tax new claims and change events (NI 181) had dropped to 9.83 days for January. He reassured Members that residents were treated as a priority. Councillor N Symonds praised the service provided by the front line housing benefit staff.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services provided latest updates and announcements by government in relation to foster carers and the additional room subsidy (known as the 'bedroom tax').

Members received the report and wished to recognise the efforts of the front line benefit staff and their exemplary efforts in supporting residents.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and
(B) the efforts of the front line benefit staff and their exemplary efforts in supporting residents, be recognised.

676 WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report outlining the future work of Community Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Mrs D Hollebbon suggested that Officers investigate markets / farmers' markets in respect of supporting the local economy and economic development and that Officers should invite the Executive Member for Economic Development to the next meeting to provide an update. The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that there had been a full Task and Finish group considering Markets in East Herts in the past two years and suggested that the matter be picked up at the Members' scrutiny evaluation and topic planning workshop in April 2013 which would be considering future items for the scrutiny work programme. This was supported.

The Committee approved the work programme.

RESOLVED – that the work programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Chairman
Date