

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 15 JANUARY 2013, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor David Andrews (Chairman).
Councillors W Ashley, E Bedford,
R Beeching, E Buckmaster, S Bull, J Mayes,
G McAndrew, W Mortimer, T Page, M Pope,
J Ranger, C Rowley, N Symonds,
G Williamson, J Wing and M Wood.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors L Haysey, P Moore, P Ruffles
and M Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

536 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

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

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

537 APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Abbott, P Ballam, K Crofton, Mrs D Hollebon, D Hone, G Jones, N Poulton, C Woodward, B Wrangles and J Wyllie. It was noted that Councillor C Rowley was substituting for Councillor Mrs D Hollebon.

538 MINUTES – 14 FEBRUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the joint meeting held on 14 February 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

539 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred Members to the replacement Essential Reference Papers in the supplementary agenda. Members were reminded to refer to these papers in place of the versions in the main agenda.

The Chairman also reminded Members that there was an Essential Reference Paper relating to the matters referred to at Minute 540 that was not for publication. Members were advised that should they wish to discuss these matters during the debate, the Committee should resolve to exclude the press and public.

540 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2012/13 (REVISED) TO 2015/16

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report setting out proposals for the Council's Capital Programme for the period 2012/13 (Revised) to 2015/16. Members were advised that the Capital Programme had been amended to take account of slippage and rephrasing. Members were reminded that there had also been amendments approved as part of the Council's monthly healthcheck process.

Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for the full Capital Programme information, in particular

the estimates for the 4 new schemes.

Councillor N Symonds commented on the £500,000 estimate for provision of IT Investment. The Director of Finance and Support Services confirmed that ICT infrastructure was in need of investment to ensure that this service was fit for purpose. The need for investment in ICT had also been highlighted by the recent peer challenge visits.

Councillor J Mayes commented on the significant increase to £84,600 in the revised estimate for the renewal of the roof covering to Hertford Theatre. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services advised that Officers had not been able to accurately estimate the cost of repairs until the roof had been inspected.

In response to a query regarding the Micro Hydro Scheme at Hertford Theatre, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services advised that the business case remained in place and Officers would continue work on this project. The Director undertook to provide written responses to Members' queries in respect of estimates relating to the replacement footbridge at the Ware Library Car Park and the new footbridge over the River Stort.

In response to a number of comments that had been made by Members, the Executive Member for Finance stated that the Authority did not charge for replacement bins and with the exception of the schemes already identified in the capital programme, there would be no additional capital for new schemes.

Councillor M Pope sought and was given an update in respect of the play area development programme at The Bourne, Ware. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed that match funding for this project was no longer available and Officers were scaling down the project to fit within the

available budget whilst still looking for match funding from elsewhere.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees resolved to inform the Executive that the Capital Programme 2012/13 (revised) to 2015/16, as now submitted, should be approved.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees considered that the draft Capital Programme 2012/13 (Revised) to 2015/16, as now submitted, should be approved.

541 FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report detailing the additional income to the Council that could be generated by increasing discretionary fees and charges in 2013/14 for a variety of services. Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for the detailed suggested increased to discretionary fees and charges.

In response to a query from Councillor G McAndrew relating to the 2013/14 estimate of £467,600 in respect of commercial waste, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed that the cost of this operation would increase yearly as this cost included landfill charges, which were due to increase yearly by a significant amount.

Councillor T Page commented on the policy basis for the significant increases to Planning and Building Control fees detailed in paragraph 2.5 of the report now submitted.

The Director confirmed that the increases were not a policy decision but were an Officer recommendation. Members were advised that building control fees were subject to external competition and Officers preferred not

to significantly increase these fees as the Authority may not secure as much work.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees resolved to inform the Executive that the fees and charges should be approved as detailed in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees considered that the 2013/14 fees and charges, as detailed in Essential Reference Paper ‘B’ of the report now submitted, should be approved.

542 SERVICE ESTIMATES – REVENUE BUDGET PROBABLE
2012/13 – ESTIMATE 2013/14

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report that set out proposals for the Council’s Service Estimates for 2012/13 (Revised) and the 2013/14 Estimates. The Director of Finance and Support Services advised that the reference to Essential Reference Papers in the recommendation should have read Essential Reference Paper ‘B1’ and Essential Reference Paper ‘B2’.

Councillor J Ranger referred to the salary estimates for 2013/14, as detailed in paragraph 2.5 of the report now submitted. He emphasised that if the possible 1% pay award was skewed towards the lowest paid in the workforce, the situation may not be as simple as portrayed in the report.

Councillor N Symonds referred to Community Safety and commented on whether East Herts Council should increase funding for PCSOs as the work of these Officers was excellent in steering people away from crime.

The Executive Member for Finance stated that the issue for Members was whether the Authority should step in to fund PCSOs that had previously been funded from elsewhere. Members were reminded that the PCSO provision was ultimately the responsibility of the new

Police and Crime Commissioner. The Chairman stated that the new Commissioner had agreed to attend the June meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee but his 2013/14 budget and plans would be discussed at Community Scrutiny Committee at its March meeting.

In response to a query from Councillor R Beeching regarding the alternative financial model regarding recycling, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services provided an explanation of the current status of the financial model.

Councillor E Buckmaster commented on the low operational performance of the parking enforcement contract. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained some of the constraints the Authority was bound by in terms of parking enforcement. Members were advised that the £86,000 underspend had occurred as the mobile camera enforcement and vehicle removals policies had not yet gone into operation so had not incurred any operational costs this financial year.

Councillor J Ranger suggested that the Executive should be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees considered that the policy in respect of the use of capital salaries should be reviewed in light of the changing balance between capital and revenue budgets. This was agreed by the joint meeting. Members also resolved to inform the Executive that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees had supported the probable revenue budget for 2012/13 as well as the estimates for 2013/14.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees (A) support the probable revenue budget for 2012/13 as well as the estimates for 2013/14; and

(B) considered that the policy in respect of the use of capital salaries should be reviewed in light of the changing balance between capital and

revenue budgets.

543 CONSOLIDATED BUDGET REPORT AND 2013/14 –
2016/17 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report recommending the consolidated budget for 2013/14 and the 2016/17 Medium Term Financial Plan. The Executive Member invited the comments of the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services apologised to Members for not getting the report out earlier. Members were advised that the grant information had been late arriving from central government.

The Director of Finance and Support Services advised that regular updates were still being sent to Officers, with the latest information arriving just prior to this meeting. The Director reminded Members that this information was central to the Council's budget setting process for 2013/14 and for future years. The finance settlement from central government was still provisional and it was not clear yet when the settlement would be confirmed.

Members were referred to paragraphs 1.1 to 1.8 for the background information to the consolidated budget report and the changes to the way the Council would receive its funding. Members were also referred to page 181 for a detailed breakdown of the financial model used for the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that the Strategy would also be affected by the comprehensive spending review due in early 2013 for 2015/16 onwards.

Officers responded to a number of Members' queries in respect of welfare reform, cardboard recycling and the impact of the new homes bonus. Councillors G McAndrew and J Ranger referred to the proportion of the local government grant that would be allocated to East

Herts Council.

The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that the formula for the government grant made assumptions in terms of the spending power of East Herts Council, as well as considering the income the Authority was likely to receive from NNDR (business rates). Members were referred to the line in the budget in respect of the planning contingency fund through to 2016/17.

The Director of Finance and Support Services reminded Members that the Authority was currently benefiting from income due to higher interest rates from previously agreed investment deals but this would not be sustainable as currently available interest rates remained low. Members were advised that details of the revenue support grant, as well as other changes to the way local government was funded, would appear in the Members Information Bulletin either this week or the week after.

Councillor G McAndrew referred to the importance of economic development in East Herts. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that East Herts was one of the very few Authorities to have such a team for this purpose.

The Director of Finance and Support Services referred Members to Essential Reference Papers 'C' and 'D' for the information relating to stress testing of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and the budget consultation that had taken place in 2012.

Councillor J Ranger suggested that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees welcomed the anticipated detailed information in respect of finalised Government Grant funding. Councillor Ranger also suggested that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting welcomed the anticipated report detailing the savings identified on page 182 of the report now submitted. Members agreed to both of these suggestions.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees also decided to inform the Executive that the budget should be approved as detailed in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees (A) considered that the Consolidated Budget should be approved as detailed in the report now submitted;

(B) welcomed the anticipated detailed information in respect of finalised Government Grant funding; and

(C) welcomed the anticipated report detailing the savings identified on page 182 of the report now submitted.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Chairman
Date