

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 19 MARCH 2013, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman)
Councillors E Bedford, S Bull, J Mayes,
G Williamson, T Page and J Ranger

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Andrew Pulham	- Parking Manager
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
Neil Sloper	- Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services

700 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Jones and M Pope. It was noted that Councillor S Bull was substituting for Councillor G Jones.

701 MINUTES

Councillor T Page commented that there had been an

omission in relation to Minute 444 -Local Scheme for Council Tax Support and the discussion around a hardship “fund”; a scheme to help individuals. Councillor Page stated that he had later sought clarification from the Chief Executive and Director of Community and Support Services about the details of the scheme. Councillor J Ranger provided clarification on the discussion as he understood it at the time, adding that the Council had always given Officers discretion in terms of reviewing hardship cases.

The Chairman reminded Members that the Minutes were not a verbatim account of the meeting and were intended to reflect the “flavour” of the discussion.

Councillor Page asked that the Minutes reflect that there was an omission in relation to the discussion on the “hardship fund”. Members supported this amendment.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting, as now amended, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

702 UPDATE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services submitted a report which provided an update on the communications plan and engagement resulting from the work of the Task and Finish Group and provided a review of the Communications Strategy.

The Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services explained that a checklist for Councillors to use in accessing the new Community Grant Fund had been detailed in the last edition of Members’ Information Bulletin and the form for accessing support from the Community Engagement and Communication Team was attached at Essential Reference Paper ‘C’.

Councillor S Bull stated that residents who wanted to see

a change in his community, usually asked for the issue to be raised on a Town Council agenda. He queried whether the Community Grant Fund was the right approach. Councillor J Ranger supported the statement by Councillor S Bull, adding that grants aimed at community organisations should be given wider publicity in the media and that the Council should be highlighting its successes where monies had been spent, including in the use of Parish magazines. The Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services confirmed that more publicity would be undertaken both in the Communications Team Plan and the Rural Business Development Plan.

In response to a query from Councillor J Ranger about the use of automatic texts responding to residents, the Head of Communications, Engagement and Cultural Services explained that there were difficulties in collating personal information and in respect of data protection issues. However there was now the option for any member of the public to register for updates through the new 'govDelivery' link on the front/home page of the council's website.

Councillor T Page stated that the coverage the Council received in the local press regarding grants was good, but if the Council was to review communication of press releases, he suggested that Officers should include the Chief Executive Officer at Bishop's Stortford Town Council.

Members welcomed the progress made against the communications plan and engagement activity, as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the progress made against the communications plan and engagement activity, as now detailed, be noted.

703 DATA PROTECTION AND INFORMATION SECURITY UPDATE

The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services submitted a report updating Members on the management of Data Protection and Information Security and which asked Members to support adopting governance arrangements for Data Protection.

The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services explained the potentially serious implications for the Council and individuals in relation to breaches of data compliance, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and supporting Essential Reference Papers. He drew attention to Members' role in relation to managing data protection requirements, especially when working on constituency case work and the details of individuals.

The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services explained that the Council had been strongly recommended to revise guidance in relation to Data Protection, so that Heads of Service were informed of the impact of the Data Protection Act, aligning this to Council's existing arrangements for managing and monitoring risk. In order to facilitate this, Corporate Management Team had agreed to the establishment of a one year post of Data Protection Compliance Officer.

In response to a query from Councillor J Wing regarding the need for a full time Officer, the Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services explained the rationale behind the need for such a post. By way of example, Councillor J Ranger explained how the involvement of many agencies, some external, came into play in trying to resolve a resident's issue and of the data protection implications of sharing such information. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained that it was crucial to embed data protection into the working culture so that each service took ownership of the information they held and processed. He explained what difficulties might occur and what personal penalties would be incurred, should

personal and sensitive information be lost on unencrypted laptops. All Members who had not already done so were urged to ensure their laptops were encrypted as a matter of urgency.

Members noted the Council's Data Protection Action Plan and supported adopting governance arrangements for Data Protection including the role for this Committee and the training that Members would receive to undertake this role. Members also recommended that the Executive be requested to ensure that strong action be taken to ensure that all the Council's computers were encrypted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Council's Data Protection Action Plan as now detailed, be supported;

(B) governance arrangements for Data Protection and monitoring the Data Protection Action Plan be supported; and

(C) the Executive be asked to ensure that strong action be taken to ensure that all the Council's computers were encrypted.

704 WEBSITE UPDATE

The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services submitted a report on the changes being made to the Council's Website and sought comments on the Website Action Plan, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and Essential Reference Paper 'B'.

The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services summarised the content of the report in a presentation which, among other issues, reviewed the most common activities on why the website was visited, how this was found (e.g. via Google), navigating the website and what could be done to make this a better customer experience. The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services stated that action to reduce the amount of content of the

website and enhance the quality of information would assist the search engine in producing more relevant information.

Councillor J Ranger referred to the difficulties in accessing relevant Development Control information and of the difficulty in being able to obtain specific information about planning applications.

In response to a query from Councillor T Page regarding the East Herts' website statistics in terms of "hits", and revenue opportunities, the Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services provided clarification. In response to a query from Councillor Page concerning Members' possible involvement in the website's restructure, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer Services reminded Members that they could contribute via the Action Plan and suggested that Members might wish to inform Officers of what they "hated" about the website.

The Head of Information, Customer and Parking Services explained how the search engine was being re-written to monitor searches to enable its capabilities and accuracy to be enhanced.

The Chairman reminded Members that the report before them was a direct response to evidence from users of the website and that it was about shortening the customer journey in terms of accessing information and ongoing management of the website.

Members received the report and the presentation. Members also requested that the Executive be advised that the Committee welcomed the fact that urgent matters in relation to the East Herts website were being addressed in an ongoing way, including simplification of the website.

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

(B) the Executive be advised that the Committee welcomed the fact that urgent matters in relation to the East Herts website, were being addressed in an ongoing way, including simplification of the website.

705 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK – OCTOBER 2012 TO JANUARY 2013

The Leader of the Council submitted an exception report on finance and performance monitoring for East Herts covering the period October 2012 to January 2013, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted and in Essential Reference Papers.

In response to a query from Councillor T Page regarding the time taken to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax new claims and change events, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services provided clarification as to why this had occurred. Councillor T Page suggested that staff should be congratulated for their efforts in achieving this result. This was supported.

Members noted the budget variances and performance and asked that Members' thanks be passed to staff for their efforts in achieving a turnaround in processing Housing Benefit / Council Tax benefit new claims and change events.

RESOLVED – that (A) the budget variances and performance, as now submitted be noted; and

(B) the Committee's thanks be passed to staff for their efforts in achieving a turnaround in processing Housing Benefit / Council Tax benefit new claims and change events.

706 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report setting out the

future programme for the Committee.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services advised Members that in 2008 there had been a review undertaken by Halcrow consultancy to look at employment land across the District (excluding rural areas), to assess their conditions and how they met the District’s needs. A study had been undertaken recently to update that report. In response to a query from Councillor J Ranger regarding its inclusion in the District Plan, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained how the information supported the development of the Local Plan. It was suggested that the Employment Land Review be included on the agenda for the second meeting of this committee in the next civic year on 2 July 2013. This was supported.

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

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Chairman
Date