

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
17 NOVEMBER 2015, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D Hollebon (Chairman)
Councillors G Cutting, J Goodeve, R Henson,
J Jones and D Oldridge

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors E Buckmaster, L Haysey,
P Moore and N Symonds

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Manager of Housing Services
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Karl Chui	- Performance Monitoring Officer
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Louise Harris	- Housing Strategy and Development Manager
Joseph Liggett	-
Jane O'Brien	- Empty Homes Officer
Claire Pullen	- Engagement and Partnerships Officer (Grants)
Liz Watts	- Chief Executive
Sheila Winterburn	- Environmental Health Manager -

Ben Wood

Housing
- Head of Business
Development

399 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Pope, R Standley and K Warnell.

400 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

401 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting, including the new Chief Executive, Liz Watts.

402 2015/16 SERVICE PLAN AND KEY PROJECTS
MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Finance and Support Services submitted an exception report which provided a mid-year summary of the Council's achievements against its priorities for 2015/16 and on key projects. The Performance Monitoring Officer provided a summary of the report.

Councillor G Cutting referred to action CSH06 – Efficiency (Provide an effective service in dealing with requests for service about Licensed premises, antisocial behaviour and issues dealt with by Environmental Health). He asked what steps were being taken to ensure that the service was at full strength. The Director of Neighbourhood Services explained that new software was being rolled out which would improve the efficiency of the service and allow it to respond more quickly to issues. The Director added that a review had been undertaken of the service and that the action was only slightly

off target.

Councillor D Oldridge referred to performance indicator HS01 (Facilitate, support and maximise the provision of additional, appropriate affordable housing in association with developers, registered providers and the Homes and Communities Agency) and felt there was a need to pressurise developers in order to achieve affordable housing targets. The Director of Neighbourhood Services explained that the Council was in a difficult position as it did not develop itself and was completely dependent on the market and the industry to provide housing. The Director explained that every effort was made via Section 106 Agreements to try to achieve the up to 40% affordable housing target and that East Herts was one of the best performing Councils in the area in this regard. The Director further stated that the target had been included in the current Local Plan, but there was no science around the figure and that Members needed to accept that this might not necessarily be achieved.

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing explained that the provision of housing depended on the viability of the development and that there were legislative issues emerging which might impact on the Council having to review its affordable housing targets so that these were achievable.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that performance for the period April 2015 to September 2015 be noted and supported.

403 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK REPORT - AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER 2015

The Director of Finance and Support Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators for Community Scrutiny Committee for the period August to September 2015.

The Performance Monitoring Officer explained that Community Scrutiny Committee had 22 indicators within its performance monitoring basket, of which four were either on

target or exceeding their targets and one was just off target. The remaining 17 performance indicators only showed a trend. In relation to the short term trend, nine indicators out of the 22 had shown an improvement compared to the previous period, with three indicators maintaining the same level of performance. Ten had declined.

In response to a query from Councillor G Cutting regarding indicator EHPI 3.4 (the number of visits by Licensing Enforcement Officers to Licensed Premises), and the apparent discrepancy in the August 2015 figure, the Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that nothing of note had occurred in August, and it was just the variable nature of the work.

In response to a query from Councillor D Oldridge regarding markets, the Head of Business Development explained that income was received from traders (including Farmers' Markets), who paid the Council a fee for their pitches, and that markets at Hertford and Bishop's Stortford were the largest.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the reported performance for the period August to September 2015 be received.

404 EAST HERTS LEISURE STRATEGY

The Head of Environmental Services submitted a report seeking approval to establish a Task and Finish Group charged with developing a Leisure Strategy. The report outlined a number of risks and identified key issues which needed to be taken into account in planning future leisure provision within East Herts. The proposed Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group were set out in the report.

The Leisure Services Development Manager gave a presentation outlining the triggers for the development of a Leisure Strategy in order to assess sustainability of the existing facilities, support the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

and in terms of looking forward to changing demographics and leisure trends.

Councillor J Jones thanked the Officer for the report and supported the establishment of a Task and Finish Group. Councillor G Cutting encouraged as many Members as possible to submit their names for consideration on the Task and Finish Group. Both Members asked that their names be submitted for consideration.

The Chairman explained that the Task and Finish Group should be fairly represented with one representative from each town and one each from a rural area. She added that it was important to think about the District as a whole. The Chairman asked Members, including those from Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny, to submit their names to the Scrutiny Officer who would co-ordinate expressions of interest. The Leader would make the final determination in terms of the Group's composition.

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing commented that Members of the Task and Finish Group needed to keep an independent mind adding that the new contract would commence in two years and that it was important for the Group to look 12 years ahead in terms of health and wellbeing, ageing well and the challenges as a service provider, beyond gyms and swimming.

Councillor N Symonds referred to the number of adults who were classed as obese and stated that the County Council had given them three months free vouchers for slimming groups to get them started. She referred to the fact that those who were overweight might like to use the swimming pools but were self-conscious and that allowances should be made to allow them to wear t-shirts.

In response to a query from Councillor J Goodeve regarding monies from the New Homes Bonus to develop new facilities, the Leader explained that it was for the Task and Finish Group to review the Bishop's Stortford Sports Strategy.

The Committee supported the establishment of a Task and Finish Group charged with the development of a leisure strategy to determine the future of leisure provision and services over the next 10 years.

RESOLVED – that (A) a Task and Finish Group be established to provide advice to Officers on the development of a leisure strategy aimed at determining the future of leisure facility provision and services over the next 10 years; and

(B) expressions of interest for inclusion on the Task and Finish Group be submitted to the Scrutiny Officer.

405 REGISTERED HOUSING PROVIDERS - REPAIR SERVICES

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing submitted a report detailing comments from registered housing providers regarding their respective housing repairs service following concerns raised by Members at an earlier meeting. The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided a summary of the report and stated that Riversmead had experienced difficulties with many of their call centre staff leaving at the same time. The Director commented that Circle Anglia still had issues around repairs and the turnover of voids.

In response to a query from Councillor G Cutting that the figures provided by Circle Anglia were “woolly” especially around self- management and communal cleaning costs which were then divided and costed back to tenants.

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing stated that he was aware of the issues with Circle Anglia and had expressed his concerns with their senior management regarding repairs and voids. He commented that a call back had been arranged for Friday 20 November 2015 to discuss a way forward. The Executive Member said that it was important for them to understand that by the time the public had approached a Ward Member, it was because they had exhausted all other means.

Councillor N Symonds stated that vulnerable tenants appeared not to be treated as a priority under the policy operated by Circle Anglia but that they were getting better with voids. She referred to the anomalies of the system regarding voids and bidding for properties. The Housing Services Manager provided clarification on this aspect.

Councillor J Jones agreed that Circle Anglia was not performing well in his ward and referred to meetings with them which had been put back to next year. The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing explained the background around why the meetings had been put back. Councillor G Cutting stated that there was a history of Circle Anglia cancelling meetings.

The Committee agreed that registered housing providers' repair services with significant housing stock in the District, be monitored and supported a suggestion that this be reported annually and could be integrated within the Housing Stock Transfer Residual Undertakings Annual Statement report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the repairs services of registered providers with significant housing stock in the District continue to be monitored by the Director; and

(B) this report be integrated within the Annual Housing Stock Transfer Residual Undertakings Annual Statement report.

406 THE DRAFT HOUSING AND HEALTH STRATEGY 2016 – 2021

The Chairman of Community Scrutiny Committee submitted a report seeking support on a draft Housing and Health Strategy 2016-2021.

The Housing Strategy and Development Manager provided a summary of the key changes to the Draft Housing and Health Strategy 2016 – 2021 which had been given a “light touch” and how this would impact on the Council. It was noted that new legislation was imminent and would impact on the

strategy. The rationale behind the strategic objectives, short term tasks, and timescales were set out in the report.

In response to a query from Councillor R Henson regarding the consultation document and involving the public, the Housing Strategy and Development Manager explained that a press release would be issued and the document made available online. This could also be made available in a paper format on request.

In response to a query from Councillor D Oldridge regarding the need to make the issue of affordable housing more robust, the Leader explained that a recent training session on Section 106 Agreements explained the Council's powers and restrictions in using Section 106 Agreements at the planning stage. She explained that the new Bishop's Stortford North development would deliver 30% affordable housing and that the issue of affordable housing was something all local authorities struggled with.

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing explained that the document was a basis for consultation and that the new Housing and Planning Bill would change the business model for the Council's stakeholders such as housing associations, with regard to the requirement to provide starter homes, and more shared ownership homes.

In response to a query from Councillor J Jones regarding the Parish Housing Survey, the Housing Services Manager explained how this would be carried out.

The Committee supported the draft Housing and Health Strategy 2016-2021 for the purpose of public consultation.

RESOLVED – that the draft Housing and Health Strategy 2016-2021 be supported for the purpose of public consultation.

407 REVIEW OF EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing submitted a report on proposed changes to the Empty Homes Strategy 2015 – 2020, the potential resource implications and a proposed Action Plan. The Empty Homes Officer explained the drivers for change, the numbers of empty homes and proposals for the new strategy, including the need to secure additional resources in order to increase the number of properties actively targeted.

Councillor G Cutting stated that while working on a recent leaflet delivery, he had seen homes still empty which he had first noticed over a year ago, and this had demonstrated to him the need for increasing the Council's resources to achieve more in getting empty homes back into use.

In response to a query from Councillor J Jones regarding Members' role in the process, the Empty Homes Officer welcomed Ward Members help in identifying empty properties. She explained the administrative issues which needed to be overcome in terms of observing Data Protection requirements and in sorting the information into relevant areas, but that these problems could be overcome.

In response to a query by Councillor D Oldridge, the Empty Homes Officer explained that most of the empty properties were privately owned and that her role was to tackle empty homes, although the loan scheme available could also be used for the conversion of empty commercial premises. The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing reminded Members of the Council's powers to compulsory purchase properties left empty and in a dilapidated condition.

The Committee supported the proposed change in approach for prioritising and filtering empty properties for action. Members also supported a recommendation to the Executive that the Empty Homes Assistant post be made permanent and to ask the Executive Member to consider an increase in the resources available to Empty Homes to enable them to take

on the additional work, as set out in the report and action plan.

RESOLVED - that (A) the proposed change in approach for prioritising and filtering empty properties for action be supported; and

(B) the Executive be advised that Community Scrutiny Committee support:

- the Empty Homes Assistant post being made permanent; and
- consideration being given to increasing the Empty Homes resources to enable them to take on additional work, as detailed in the report and action plan.

408 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the proposed work programme for the 2015-16 civic year. The Scrutiny Officer explained that a report by the Task and Finish Group on Leisure Strategy would be reported back to Members in June 2016.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that the report on housing associations repairs would be integrated within the Housing Stock Transfer Residual Undertakings Annual Statement report and be reported to Members in September 2016.

A new request to bring an audit of market services to Members in March 2016 was supported by Members.

The Committee approved the report, as amended.

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

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman
Date