

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

PRESENT: Councillor G Jones (Chairman).
Councillors S Bull, J Mayes, W Mortimer,
T Page, M Pope, G Williamson and J Wing.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Phillips.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Philip Gregory	- Head of Strategic Finance
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Henry Lewis	- Head of Customer Services and Business Improvement
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Ceri Pettit	- Corporate Planning and Performance Manager
Paul Pullin	- Manager of Economic Development
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

586 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Ranger and J Wyllie.

587 MINUTES – 25 NOVEMBER 2014

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

588 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked the Committee for its support during the 2014/15 civic year. He extended a special thank you to Councillors J Mayes and J Ranger, the Vice-Chairman for his support, the Executive Member for Economic Development and to Officers for their support.

589 HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (LEP) MEMBER UPDATE 2015

The Economic Development Manager submitted a fact based update regarding the work of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The report provided Members with information relating to funding levels and their sources, funding structures, projects identified for support and potential opportunities for East Herts.

Councillor M Pope commented on the European Social Funding opportunities and the bidding opportunities open to Further Education establishments, such as Hertford Regional College. The Economic Development Manager advised that East Herts Council would also be looking to support the college.

Councillor T Page commented on the availability of the Strategic Economic Plan for Hertfordshire. Members were advised that this very large document was available. In reply to a query from Councillor Pope regarding the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), the Economic Development Manager undertook to respond after he had spoken to Planning Policy Officers.

Councillor Pope referred to the large numbers detailed in the report and he emphasised the importance of East

Herts securing a fair share. The Economic Development Manager commented that it was early days in terms of what could be achieved and it remained to be seen how the allocation of funding would play out.

Councillor J Wing referred to housing development and employment and the Strategic Economic Plan for Hertfordshire. He also referred to housing in the emerging District Plan. The Economic Development Manager referred to opportunities in East Herts resulting from the availability of employment land.

Councillor Wing commented on the security of the LEP funding. The Economic Development Manager stated that the funding was allocated by various government departments and the money was not being held in a LEP bank account.

In response to a comment from Councillor Page regarding the funding detailed in paragraphs 2.12 to 2.15 of the report, Members were advised that this funding should be secure as it had been allocated by central government.

The Economic Development Manager pointed out that he did not anticipate the allocations changing although the LEP itself could change over time. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

590 EAST HERTS IT STRATEGY 2015 – 2018

The Executive Member for Economic Development submitted a report that summarised the ICT Strategy for East Herts Council.

The Head of Business and Technology Services referred to the Shared IT Service and advised that the East Herts IT Strategy for 2015 – 2018 would be a 4 year strategy solely for East Herts Council.

Members were advised that the Strategy set out the current situation regarding East Herts Council's IT services. The report also detailed the work required to improve IT systems as well as savings that were being achieved due to the business case for the IT Shared Service.

The Head of Business and Technology Services provided a comprehensive summary of each of the sections of the IT Strategy for 2015 – 2018 and highlighted the recommendations. Members were advised that the strategy referred to improved wireless systems at Wallfields, Hertford Theatre and Charringtons House.

The Head of Business and Technology Services confirmed to Councillor M Pope that there were no immediate plans to use IT Cloud services. He advised that he was unaware of any Council that relied solely on IT Cloud systems for storing electronic data.

The Director of Finance and Support Services advised that the Authority had two local IT data centres that were geographically remote from each other. The Head of Business and Technology Services emphasised that the Authority could now have systems back up and running inside 4 hours instead of 2 to 3 days due to the daily operation of the IT service being significantly more resilient.

The Head of Business and Technology Services commented that there was now more efficient collaboration in the procurement of IT systems and the Authority also had a more equitable IT Service for Officers and Customers.

The Head of Business and Technology Services updated Members in respect of the recent baseline assessment of key business applications. Councillor Wing stressed the importance of IT Officers seeing through projects from start to finish to avoid customers facing staff being left to resolve IT problems.

The Director advised that the Authority had very strong governance arrangements in place regarding improvements in performance monitoring. The Executive Member for Economic Development confirmed that the IT function would be driven by the business needs of the Authority.

Councillor Pope commented on the cost effectiveness of using external resources to support ongoing IT projects. The Head of Business and Technology Services confirmed that the Authority now had sufficient Officers employed internally although if further resources were required to ensure delivery of specific projects then the case for employing additional resource would have to form part of the overall project business case. He confirmed to Councillor Page that Officers were mindful of the Customer Services Strategy in ensuring that there was a human element to the experience of customers using the Council's IT systems.

The Head of Business and Technology Services confirmed that a review of Member IT support would include consideration of whether there was a demand for an out of hours service to deal with any critical IT issues.

The Committee received the report and agreed that the recommendations detailed in the 2015 – 2018 East Herts IT Strategy be commended to the Executive for approval.

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

(B) the recommendations detailed in the 2015 – 2018 East Herts IT Strategy be commended to the Executive for approval.

591 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK – OCTOBER 2014 TO JANUARY 2015/QUARTER 3

The Director of Finance and Support Services submitted an exception report on finance and performance

monitoring for the period October 2014 to January 2015/Quarter 3.

The Chairman introduced and welcomed the newly appointed Head of Strategic Finance to his first meeting of the Committee. The Corporate Planning and Performance Manager stated that this report had been to the Executive earlier this month and although the financial analysis was unchanged, there was some additional analysis detailed in this report.

Members were referred to paragraphs 2.7 to 2.28 of the report. The Corporate Planning and Performance Manager provided the Committee with a detailed summary of the analysis relating to the Council's priorities of people, place and prosperity. Members were advised that the remaining sections of the report covered outturns, expenditure and savings.

The Director of Finance and Support Services undertook to provide a written response to a query from Councillor Page regarding the £24,000 overspend resulting from the unprecedented demand for the housing options temporary accommodation service, due to families that were intentionally homeless requiring more than one room.

The Director also undertook to give a more detailed written response to Councillor Page regarding the approved slippage into the 2015/16 capital programme of the renewal works for the pool heat exchanger at Grange Paddocks.

Councillor J Wing commented on the reduction in the amount of paper being recycled by the Authority. He referred to reduced use of newspapers and the need for this reduction to be factored into future recycling considerations. The Scrutiny Officer and the Director confirmed that a full annual report on the waste and recycling contract would be submitted to Environment Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting in the 2015/16 civic

year.

Councillor Wing stated that he found the People, Place and Prosperity headings less than helpful as he rarely knew which heading a particular issue belonged to. The Executive Member for Economic Development emphasised that the new look healthcheck report would be a more business-like format.

In reply to a comment from Councillor Pope, the Director confirmed that East Herts found recruitment for experienced Revenues and Benefits Officers a challenge as the Authority was competing with the London Boroughs and other Hertfordshire authorities to recruit and retain highly knowledgeable expertise. Members were advised that the extra resources were in support of the very valued Officers who worked in the Shared Service.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

592 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer invited Councillors to evaluate the work of the Committee from a Member perspective to ensure that the overview and scrutiny function was a Member led process. Members were asked to pay particular attention to progress against headline actions and targets.

Members were asked to let the Scrutiny Officer have feedback by Monday 23 March 2015. The Chairman submitted a report reviewing 2014/15 and setting out the future work programme for Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee for 2015/16.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the 4 year Corporate Strategic Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2019/20 would be brought

forward to the July 2015 meeting. A review of the Fees and Charges relevant to Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee would be reported to the August 2015 meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer further advised that the relevant Head of Service would deliver training in data protection and governance as part of the May 2015 meeting and there would also be an induction training session regarding local government finance prior to the July 2015 meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer commented that training in respect of finance and decision making could be arranged as part of the August 2015 meeting and a more comprehensive budget preparation training session would be arranged in October 2015.

The Scrutiny Officer emphasised that any gaps in the work programme would be considered by the new Committee to ensure that the Scrutiny process was as current and flexible as possible. The Committee approved the work programme as now detailed.

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

The meeting closed at 8.57 pm

Chairman
Date