

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 30 AUGUST 2016, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Allen (Chairman).
Councillors R Brunton, M Casey, B Deering,
J Kaye, M Stevenson and J Wyllie.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Alder, M Freeman, L Haysey,
G Jones, P Ruffles and G Williamson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Philip Gregory	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Ceri Pettit	- Corporate Planning and Performance Manager
Kevin Steptoe	- Head of Planning and Building Control Services
Liz Watts	- Chief Executive
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

211 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of
Councillor M Pope.

212 MINUTES – 12 JULY 2016

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

213 CORPORATE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

The Executive Member for Finance and Support Services submitted a report that introduced a draft of the Council's 2015/16 Corporate Annual Report, and documented the key achievements of the Council in relation to the corporate priorities over the financial year.

The Corporate Planning and Performance Manager referred to the new briefer format of the 2015/16 Corporate Annual Report. Members were advised that a draft of the 2015/16 Annual Report had been submitted to the Committee for comment and was also available on the Council's website.

Following a brief debate and responses from Officers to Members' questions, the Committee received the report and approved the recommendations now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the 2015/16 Corporate Annual Report be recommended to the Executive for approval.

214 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2015/16 AND ACTION PLAN 2016/17

The Leader of the Council submitted a report that presented the 2015/16 Annual Governance Statement as detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B' to the report submitted.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property referred Members to Essential Reference Papers 'B' and 'C' to the report submitted. Members were advised that the tracked amendments were designed to demonstrate transparency

to the public.

Members received the report and approved the recommendations now detailed.

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

(B) Audit and Governance Committee be advised, via the Executive, that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the proposed Annual Governance Statement and Action Plan.

215 FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN FROM 2016/17 TO 2020/21

The Executive Member for Finance and Support Services submitted a report that considered revisions to the Financial Strategy for the years 2016/17 to 2020/21. This included the policy on reserves and the proposed planning assumptions to be used to update the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in preparation for annual budget setting.

Members were reminded that this report had been postponed from the July meeting to allow Officers to take account of the implications of the EU referendum outcome. The immediate impact that Officers wished to consider had not materialised although there would be significant financial implications for the public sector when the Government triggered Article 50 to start the 2 year negotiating period for leaving the EU.

Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper ‘C’ for the financial planning assumptions that had been made with particular focus on inflation in 2018/19. Officers referred to contributions to the collection fund reserve due to uncertainty regarding business rates.

Members were reminded of the importance of retaining a buffer against future shortfalls. Officers advised that the figures in Essential Reference Paper ‘B’ were cumulative

across the years that were presented as part of the MTFP revenue budget.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property responded to a number of comments and queries from Members. The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

216 HERTFORD URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY – REQUEST TO FUND TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS

The Chief Executive submitted a report regarding the Hertford Urban Design Strategy that was adopted by East Herts Council in May 2016. Members were reminded that a Member steering group had been established to implement or support the implementation of the recommendations and there had also been fruitful conversations with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Members were also advised that this was the first significant step in implementation and would address the areas of The Wash, Maidenhead Street and Bull Plain. The Chief Executive stated that the recommendation should be amended on the basis that East Herts Council commits up to a maximum of 50% of the required £1m subject to other partners coming on board.

The Head of Planning and Building Control provided a background to the proposal and summarised in detail what was being proposed to achieve improvements in design for the urban realm of Hertford Town Centre. Following a query from Councillor J Kaye, Officers confirmed that this funding would result in improvements that would amount to a perceptible improvement in quality in Hertford.

The Head of Planning and Building Control Services confirmed to Councillor M Stevenson that the proposals would improve the operation of Hertford town centre and

would on balance improve quality. He also confirmed for Councillor R Brunton that Officers had a range of enforcement powers to encourage the improvement of shop front signage.

Officers responded to a number of other comments and queries from Members.

Councillor R Brunton proposed and Councillor M Casey seconded, a motion that the recommendation be amended as suggested by the Chief Executive. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

Members received the report and supported the amended recommendation now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that East Herts Council commits up to a maximum of 50% of the £1m required to implement key improvements to The Wash, Maidenhead Street and Bull Plain, Hertford, as detailed in the Hertford Urban Design Strategy, subject to other partners coming on board.

217 PROPOSAL TO SET UP A COUNTY WIDE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SERVICE IN HERTFORDSHIRE

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing submitted a report that set out a proposal to establish a county-wide Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to help elderly and vulnerable persons to remain living independently at home. The initial focus would be the provision of statutory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and in time the HIA could provide handyperson schemes and promote measures to tackle issues such as fuel poverty.

The Head of Housing and Health advised that East Herts Council had been working with other Hertfordshire Districts and the County Council on a business case for a

shared service with the aim of providing a consistent, high quality service that had the potential for financial efficiencies.

Members were advised that the participating authorities were being asked to confirm their commitment to participate in a shared service to enable detailed implementation plans to be devised with a view to the service 'going live' in 2017/18.

The Head of Housing and Health responded to a number of comments and queries from Members. Members received the report and supported the recommendations now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received;

(B) the proposal that East Herts Council becomes a partner in the Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency be supported; and

(C) the Council's revenue and capital budgets earmarked for processing and paying for Disabled Facilities Grants for 2017/18 onwards be used to fund East Herts' contributions to the shared Home Improvement Service be supported.

218 PROPOSAL TO ASSESS THE FEASIBILITY OF A HOUSING COMPANY

The Head of Housing and Health submitted a report that outlined the proposed approach to assessing the financial viability of setting up a housing company owned by East Herts Council. It was proposed to first assess the case for establishing a housing investment company to acquire properties then rent them out at market rents thereby generating a revenue income for the Council.

Members were advised that should a housing investment company be established, it was proposed that the feasibility of a council-owned housing development

company would be explored. The policy aimed for the establishment of a housing investment and development company as detailed in the report now submitted.

Officers stated that a business case would be considered by Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee on 29 November 2016 and by Executive on 6 December 2016 before determination by Council on 14 December 2016. Members were reminded of the proposed phasing and were advised that the above dates were provisional.

In response to comments to Councillor J Wyllie, the Head of Strategic Finance and Property advised that the investment detailed in the report would be more productive than investments in the financial or banking sector due to the ongoing low interest rate. The Head of Housing and Health responded to a number of other comments and queries from the Committee. Members received the report and supported the recommendations now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the preparation of a full business case be supported; and

(B) the establishment of a housing development company be supported as detailed in paragraph 2.10 of the report submitted.

219 QUARTERLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK – QUARTER 1
JUNE 2016

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property and the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy submitted a report updating Members on finance, performance and strategic risk monitoring for East Herts Council for 2015/16 as at 1 June 2016. Officers provided a summary of the report in relation to revenue budget forecasts, capital schemes and performance indicators.

Members received the report and supported the recommendations now detailed.

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

(B) the Executive be advised that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee has no comments to make in respect of the following:

1. the revenue budget forecast underspend of £424k as set out at paragraph 2.1 of the report submitted;
2. the capital forecast underspend of £752K as set out at paragraph 6.1 of the report submitted;
3. the reported performance for the period April to July 2016; and
4. the monthly and quarterly targets that have been set as detailed in paragraph 8.1 of the report submitted.

220 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman submitted a report inviting Members to review and determine the Committee's future work programme for 2016/17. The Scrutiny Officer advised that a report and presentation would be given to the October 2016 meeting in respect of the cost implications of the Authority leaving the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

Members were also advised that a full business case for Invest Co would be presented to the November 2016 meeting. The Committee approved the 2016/17 work programme, as now amended.

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

The meeting closed at 8.43 pm

Chairman
Date