

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2016, AT 7.00 PM

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Alder, D Andrews, P Ballam,
E Buckmaster, S Bull, M Freeman, P Ruffles,
S Rutland-Barsby, C Snowdon, R Standley
and G Williamson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Carol Bulloch	- Systems and Support Manager
Philip Gregory	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Martin Ibrahim	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Ceri Pettit	- Corporate Planning and Performance Manager
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Liz Watts	- Chief Executive
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Patrick Towey

- Hertfordshire County
Council (Pensions)384 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor K Brush.

385 MINUTES – 30 AUGUST 2016

Councillor B Deering referred to Minute 218 (Proposal to assess the feasibility of a Housing Company) in terms of resolution (B). He stated that it was his recollection that Members had supported a tentative approach rather than that stated in the minutes which, he commented, was a more definitive approach. The Chairman agreed that he felt that the discussion was more about supporting the feasibility of a housing development company. Members requested that the Minutes be amended accordingly. This was supported.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2016, be confirmed and a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendment of recommendation (B) to include the words, “feasibility for the” before the word, “establishment”.

386 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman commented that he had agreed to add an urgent item of business onto the agenda in terms of a presentation to Members regarding draft financial and business planning budget proposals covering a three year period, in order to avoid delays to the budget setting process.

The Chairman welcomed all present and Mr Patrick Towey from Hertfordshire County Council. He asked Members to switch off their mobile phones. The

Chairman announced that a new Scrutiny Officer had been appointed and would be joining the Council in mid-November 2016.

387 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee passed a resolution pursuant to Section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended, to exclude the press and public during consideration of Minute 388 – the presentation on Financial and Business Planning on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act.

388 MEMBER ENGAGEMENT – FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLANNING

The Corporate Planning and Performance Manager and Head of Strategic Finance and Property gave a presentation on draft financial and business planning proposals covering a three year period. They provided Members with an overview of the key activities in terms of the service planning process for 2017/18, investment proposals and where savings could be achieved. They also provided a summary of the Council's financial position and stated that Heads of Service had reviewed responsibilities within their remit and had advised the Leadership Team where savings could be made. Future funding proposals were explained. Members were provided with a summary of savings, income and growth proposals.

Following a debate on the draft proposals, Officers responded and clarified queries raised by Members. The Head of Strategic Finance and Property encouraged Members to write to him if they needed further information.

The Committee received the presentation.

RESOLVED – that the presentation on draft financial and business planning proposals be received.

389 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

Mr Towey from Hertfordshire County Council provided Members with an overview of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). He explained how the LGPS was administered at a local level by a Pension Committee, via investment managers, who managed a fund of £3.6bn in assets as at 31 March 2016. Mr Towey explained that the Hertfordshire Fund comprised 279 employers with 95,995 members.

It was noted that the fund was valued every three years to test its solvency and to review individual employers' situations, the objective being, that an employer's fund needed to be fully funded over a 20 year period. At the time of the last valuation in March 2013, East Herts was 79% funded. He explained how the proportion of current staff, staff who have left local government and retired staff affect the funding level, including the impact of an aging workforce profile.

Mr Towey explained governance and administration arrangements and the regulations in relation to funding and the valuation of assets and liabilities / investment strategies. He referred to the Government's request that all LGPS schemes consolidate and pool their assets to reduce costs, and make savings. It was noted that the Hertfordshire Fund was working with other Funds in the South East and East of England (ACCESS) had put forward their pooling submissions to the Government. It was estimated that it could make savings in the region of £25.5m by 2033, which would be channelled back to the employers.

In response to a query from Councillor J Kaye regarding new entrants to the LGPS, Mr Towey provided a summary of employers' responsibilities.

In response to queries from Councillor B Deering and Councillor M Pope, Mr Towey confirmed that the Council's fund was ring fenced and the implications on the Council of paying large additional sums over a three year period.

Councillor M Casey queried discount and deficit values. The issue of higher interest rates and the impact of the deficit values were debated. Mr Towey stressed that the issue of the Council being fully funded needed to be viewed in the context of a 20 year period. The Head of Strategic Finance and Property explained that the Council's assets totalled £89m, its liabilities £117m and that there was a deficit of £28.7m.

Mr Towey stated that the Fund was currently being valued by the Scheme actuary and that individual employer results would be available from November 2016.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

390 DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Executive Member for Finance and Support submitted a report on a policy for Discretionary Rate Relief. The Head of Revenues and Benefits, Shared Services provided a summary of the report. She explained that the Council was required to periodically review the procedure to determine those groups who were eligible for discretionary relief and so allow officers to administer the service.

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

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that, the revised Discretionary Rates Relief policy, as now submitted, be supported.

391 MID-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT ON THE DELIVERY OF
THE CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Executive Member for Finance and Support Services submitted a report which set out the progress which had been made during 1 April to 30 September 2016 in implementing key actions and performance indicators which supported the Council's Strategic Plan.

In response to a query from Councillor J Kaye regarding other independent leisure provision, the Chief Executive explained that the strategy looked at the Council's own provision and that some leisure centres (three) were shared with local schools. She stated that the new Head of Service was charged with looking at a leisure strategy which contributed to the whole health and wellbeing agenda.

Members referred to the target HH5.1 (Bring Empty Homes Back Into Use) and commented that the target of 10 should be increased to 15. This was supported.

Councillor B Deering referred to the slow progress of the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). The Chief Executive agreed that the target for empty homes needed to be improved and supported the suggestion to increase this figure. In relation to the CPO, the CE explained the problems and timeframes associated with a CPO and that at the eleventh hour, an owner might take matters into their own hands and put the property on the market themselves.

The Chairman expressed concern that some targets were not deliverable and cited CPS5.1 (Rationalised Web and Intranet content and Structure support). He stated that having looked on the website, the new templates were not available despite the September 2016 target. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained some of the difficulties encountered and advised Members that this would "go live" at the end of November 2016.

Councillor M Casey referred to priority HH17.2 (Undertake feasibility work on setting up a company to build new homes). He stated that although the report referred to a deadline, no formal decision to set up such a company had been made by the Council.

In response to a question regarding leisure provision in the District and particularly in relation to the shortage of football pitches, the Chief Executive explained that Leisure Officers were currently reviewing this issue in the context of the new leisure strategy.

Councillor P Phillips referred to service outcome CSP4.3 (Provision of efficient, easy to use telephony service facilities, to access services and for staff have the tools required to support efficient working) and queried how the target could be achieved, given recent telephone problems. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained the problems which the Council had encountered in relation to “outages” rather than service provision.

The Chairman referred to Service Outcome HH9.3 (Identify or build new partnerships and projects that meet Local Public Health priorities and are financially attractive for attracting future funding/commissioning) and suggested that this should not be deleted until there was clarity of other issues. This was supported.

Members supported the recommendation and agreed that the Executive be advised of Members’ comments as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) mid-year progress report be approved; and

(B) the Executive be advised of the comments now detailed.

392 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman submitted a report inviting Members to review the Committee’s future work programme for 2016/17.

The Democratic Services Team Leader explained that in relation to the meeting on 29 November 2016, the reports on Council Tax Support Scheme and the Four-Year Corporate Strategic Plan were no longer required. However, two new reports on Car Parking Fees and Charges and Digital East Herts would be added.

The Democratic Services Team Leader also advised that in relation to the review of the WENTA “MyIncubator” Centre, this would part of a wider review of business support in East Herts.

The Chairman asked Members to contact him if there was any item they felt needed to be added to a future agenda. Councillor M Pope referred to business improvement districts. The Chief Executive undertook to provide Members with information on this, via the Members’ Information Bulletin.

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 8.50 pm

Chairman
Date