

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 22 MAY 2018, AT
7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Pope (Chairman)
Councillors A Alder, S Cousins, K Crofton,
D Oldridge, T Page, L Radford, S Reed,
P Ruffles and T Stowe

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews, L Haysey,
J Goodeve, W Mortimer and P Phillips

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Nathan Bookbinder	- Policy Officer
Isabel Brittain	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Fiona Corcoran	- Scrutiny Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Louise Harris	- Housing Strategy and Development-Manager
David Thorogood	- Environmental

Liz Watts Ben Wood	Co-Ordinator - Chief Executive - Head of Communication s, Strategy and Policy
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28 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor M Pope and seconded by Councillor D Oldridge that, although absent, Councillor J Wyllie be appointed Vice Chairman of Performance, Audit and Governance Scrutiny Committee for the civic year 2018/19. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that Councillor J Wyllie be appointed Vice Chairman for the civic year 2018/19.

29 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Ballam, P Boylan and J Wyllie.

30 MINUTES

It was moved by the Councillor M Pope and seconded by Councillor D Oldridge that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on

13 March 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members that in the interests of greater visibility and transparency of decision making, recommendations needed to be formally moved and seconded, before voting by a show of hands in relation to items such as the Minutes, the Work Programme and any changes to report recommendations other than those for information (such as presentations and updates).

The Chairman asked Members to note a change to the substitute membership arrangements which had been agreed at Annual Council (and therefore after the dispatch of the agenda). It was noted that Councillor D Andrews had been replaced by Councillor R Brunton.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members thanked the Scrutiny Officer, Fiona Corcoran for all her help in supporting the work of the Committee and wished her well in her new role.

The Chairman stated that, at the last meeting Members had referred to the issue of IT resilience and that this would be covered by a report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2018.

32 HOUSING AND HEALTH STRATEGY UPDATE

The Head of Housing and Health submitted a report providing Members with an update on the Housing and Health Strategy 2017/18, in delivering the objectives

stemming from the Action Plan 2016-21. Going forward, he asked Members to consider ways of achieving other objectives. The Housing Strategy and Development Manager provided a summary of the strategic objectives and achievements delivered in 2017/18 and priorities for 2018/19.

Councillor A Alder referred to the issue of houses in multiple occupation and queried how many individuals had benefited from “warmer home” schemes. The Head of Housing and Health explained how the Council was made aware of houses in multiple occupation and undertook to write to Members on those who had benefited from “warmer homes” schemes. The Committee Chairman referred to the difficulties of insulating rural homes adding that many were of single wall construction. The Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator commented that there was some funding available for energy efficiency works through the Energy Company Obligation Scheme offered by some utility companies.

Members debated the report at length. They sought and were provided with clarification on a number of issues including:

- The Council’s proactivity in securing good, affordable housing in the context of the District Plan and partnership working.
- Dementia friendly homes and a recent decision by the Home Improvement Agency (HIA), to now move this forward.
- Encouraging occupiers to downsize their under-

occupied homes including the need to build more bungalows with better amenities, such as access to outside space, improved space standards and to a better specification which might act as an inducement to downsize.

- An update on the success of Government Grants for the delivery of new affordable housing and whether there was a need to scrutinise housing partners. It was noted that regular meetings were held with key housing providers. Members supported a suggestion that social housing approaches to maintenance and repairs be reviewed and included within the Work Programme. The Committee Chairman undertook to submit a scrutiny proposal form to the Scrutiny Officer.
- Empty homes and the impact this might have on those receiving benefit and steps officers were exploring to bring empty properties back into use. In response to a query, the Head of Housing and Health explained options available to the Council, to assist those faced with the possibility of homelessness. He explained that there was increased emphasis on preventing homelessness.

It was moved by Councillor M Pope and seconded by Councillor A Alder that the recommendations, as detailed be supported. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the recommendations were declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress made in 2017/18 in delivering the objectives stemming from the Housing and Health Strategy Action Plan 2016-21 be

noted;

(B) Members' suggestions on how to achieve the objectives detailed in the Action Plan be forwarded to the Head of Housing and Health for consideration;

(C) the Head of Housing and Health write to Members on those who had so far applied for assistance from the new "Hertfordshire Warmer Homes" scheme; and

(D) the Committee Chairman be requested to submit a Scrutiny proposal form in order for the Committee to scrutinise the issue of repairs and maintenance undertaken by social housing providers and to include this issue on the Work Programme.

33 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

The Executive Member for Finance and Support Services submitted a report updating Members on the progress made against corporate strategic plan priorities for the previous year and to seek Members' views on a draft plan for approval by the Executive. The Policy Officer provided a summary of the report and highlighted some of the actions achieved.

Councillor D Oldridge, queried KA23 (support Ward Councillors to facilitate super-fast broadband in rural areas) and asked whether the scope could be widened to include local MPs. The Policy Officer explained the positive work already undertaken by the Executive Member for

Environment and the Public Realm and Oliver Heald MP. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained a revised approach by some broadband providers who had decided to concentrate on more lucrative contracts but that things were now moving in the right direction.

Officers provided an update in relation to KA58 (Review of Business start-up provision) and specifically Launch Pad in Bishop's Stortford which had had 50 start ups in the last six months.

Officers advised that a new website had been designed (KA25 implementation of a new website) and that this was now down to 500 pages and should take three clicks at most to access information being searched. This had increased user satisfaction levels to 42%. Councillor D Oldridge said that it had taken four clicks to access this evening's meeting information. He asked if there was a way to simplify this. Councillor D Oldridge also asked what progress was being made toward more e-newsletter type communications delivery referencing Ware Town Council's success in this matter. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained that this was under continual review and that Officers were exploring an "e-news" letter provider.

Councillor L Radford queried KA42 (increase domestic recycling) and queried whether there had been a drop in recycling with more going to landfill or whether people were being more careful at the point of purchase. The Policy Officer explained that the total amount of waste had reduced and that there was the possibility that people were being more careful at the point of purchase.

The Committee Chairman congratulated officers on their efforts to process housing benefit new claims and changed circumstances (KA15) which was now down to 7.6 days.

The Committee Chairman expressed his concern at the lack of progress in relation to the procure replacement kiosks for payment in the customer service centres (KA27). The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy provided an update and explained that some machines needed updating but that this was still under review.

Councillor A Alder queried working arrangements with partners to assist customers through the Universal Credit transition (KA18) and queried what liaison was carried out with officers in other authorities in relation to licensing issues. The Policy Officer explained that generally, there was a view by officers that there would be a low take-up of Universal Credit assistance initially, but that this may pick up as more users were transitioned over to Universal Credit.

The Head of Housing and Health explained the issues of cross boundary working and that it was good to get processes aligned and referred to a number of joint working initiatives. He advised that officers at East Herts had been asked to help Uttlesford DC with a piece of work in relation to taxi licensing.

The Committee Chairman referred to the issue of increased income generation (KA37). The Policy Officer explained that working groups had been established to look at ways of generating income from various services. Community lottery and crowd funding had also been

investigated.

Councillor L Radford referred to the Council's figures in relation to the prevention of homelessness. The Head of Housing and Health explained that this had been achieved by applying the Council's powers and duties to secure accommodation and by directing those in need, with helpful advice.

In response to a query regarding Launchpad Users and a review of business start-up provision (KA58), the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained 14 of the 50 users had stayed on beyond the three month introductory period and that feedback had been very positive. He said that it should be noted that some people did not want to work from home and preferred an office environment. The Head provided an update in relation to the Ware incubator which was in receipt of EU funding until the end of the financial year and that other Launchpad venues were being explored. Councillor A Alder suggested that such facilities should be considered for smaller communities in Sawbridgeworth and Buntingford. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy stated that all data received and feedback would be provided in a further report to Members in September 2018.

It was moved by Councillor D Oldridge and seconded by Councillor P Ruffles that the recommendations, as detailed be supported. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the recommendations were declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that Members (A) noted the progress made against the corporate strategic plan priorities over 2017/18; and

(B) the Draft Annual Plan be recommended for approval by the Executive.

34 CASTLE WEIR MICRO HYDRO SCHEME

The Executive Member for Environment and Public Space submitted a report detailing the need to revisit the proposal to construct a micro hydro power scheme at Castle Weir, Hertford and to reconfirm the business case and costings and updates. The Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator provided a summary of the report.

Councillor P Ruffles referred to the historical and educational value of the mill site and acknowledged the time officers had spent in moving the initiative forward. Councillors K Crofton, S Cousins and L Radford echoed the sentiment adding that it set a great example to the community and the positive impact this would have on the carbon footprint. They thanked officers for the excellent report and in moving the initiative forward.

Councillor D Oldridge sought and was provided with clarification regarding the impact of the micro hydro power scheme on the river scene and the export of the electricity to the national grid. The Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator explained why the Council was likely to make an application to lodge a tariff in advance of the works taking place.

It was moved by Councillor P Ruffles and seconded by Councillor S Cousins that the recommendations, as detailed be supported. After being put to the meeting and

a vote taken, the recommendations were declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the revised business case and the revised indicative timetable be noted and that any comments be forwarded to the Head of Housing and Health; and

(B) the impact on the Council's carbon reduction and sustainability targets be noted.

35 PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE - WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

The Chairman of Performance, Audit and Governance submitted a report setting out the Committee's future work programme. The Scrutiny Office provided a summary of the report and explained that a planning workshop was being arranged for 21 June 2018.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that she would add the proposal on social housing in relation to repairs and maintenance as soon as the Committee Chairman submitted a Scrutiny proposal form.

It was moved by Councillor S Cousins and seconded by Councillor A Alder that the draft work programme, as amended and as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the recommendation was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the draft work programme as amended, for Performance, Audit and Governance Scrutiny committee, as now detailed, be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Chairman

Date