

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 4
FEBRUARY 2020, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J Wyllie (Chairman)
Councillors M Brady, K Crofton,
I Devonshire, H Drake, J Frecknall,
M Goldspink, D Hollebon, D Snowdon,
M Stevenson, N Symonds and
A Ward-Booth

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors S Bull and G Cutting

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Scrutiny Officer
Leila Dewhurst	- Digital Content Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

332 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors
S Bell and J Ranger.

333 MINUTES - 10 DECEMBER 2019

It was moved by Councillor D Hollebon and seconded by Councillor M Goldspink that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

334 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were reminded that they had discussed the issue of public speaking and the issue of different venues for future meetings at a previous meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In the context of public involvement, the Chairman said that the Constitution did allow Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive evidence from the public in the form of public speaking. Councillor D Snowdon said that this was acceptable so long as requests to speak sent to Democratic Services were routed through the Chairman of the Committee. This was supported.

Councillor M Goldspink said time limited public speaking would ensure effective management of public speaking. Councillor K Crofton said that public speaking should only be by invitation where the person asking to speak could contribute to a topic being discussed by the Committee.

335 REVIEW OF WEBSITE SATISFACTION PERFORMANCE

The Executive Members for Corporate Services and Financial Sustainability submitted a report inviting Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the performance of the East Herts website. Website satisfaction had been identified as an area of concern following the first meeting of the Committee in 2018/19 and this report had been requested from the Head of Service.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy confirmed that this report had been requested some months ago. He said that satisfaction levels with the website had been in the red category for some time, as measured by the Gov.metric system. The Committee was advised that there had been 2.5 million webpage views within the last 12 months and it was worth noting that face to face feedback was always higher than website ratings.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that wording could be uploaded to the website to explain that the online Planning Portal was not controlled by East Herts. The Digital Content Manager explained that updating the new website was an ongoing process.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said the website was a useful tool for customers and the most commonly visited pages were council tax, bin collection/missed bins, planning and elections. He said that the planning portal was often subject to downtime which reflected badly on the website even though the

portal was separate to East Herts.

The Committee was also advised that the Council Tax pages had technical limitations in terms of what customers could do beyond making basic payments. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy advised that the Housing, Waste and Licensing pages were more popular. He said that the quality of the service customers received was passed on via the Gov.metric tool.

The Digital Content Manager said the new website had been redesigned with new 2019 European Union (EU) regulations in mind as all the pages on the website had to achieve the AA accessibility rating and the new website had this accessibility built into it at source. All of the content on the website also had to meet the same accessibility standards in terms of making the website more accessible.

The Committee was advised that the new legislation covered all documents on the website as well as all videos. The AAA rating could not be achieved if maps and videos were included on the website.

The Digital Content Manager said the Gov.metric tool or widget would be added to online forms and modernised as part of a better reporting system. She commented on the modular layout of the website and a data driven approach to making the website more appealing so that users had better journey when navigating the website.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

confirmed to Councillor M Goldspink the definition of SOCITM (Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation). Councillor A Ward-Booth said that the block style layout of the website was an improvement.

The Digital Content Manager said that the old website had a bounce rate of 50%, with visitors spending 2 minutes on the site. The new site has a bounce rate of 30% with visitors spending 3 minutes on the site. She stated that the aim was to achieve 3 “clicks” to get customers to the page they sought.

Councillor D Snowdon asked whether the time and financial savings could be quantified. He was advised that Officers would investigate and let Members know. He queried who to contact regarding the website and was advised that the Digital Content Manager was the relevant Officer.

Councillor J Frecknall said the East Herts new website was significantly better than other websites. Councillor M Goldspink said it was challenging to locate phone numbers for Officers on the website. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said most forms on the website did have a “contact us” section and that the website steered the public towards “self service”.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said the new structured website format would avoid Officers having to go back to the customer as all the necessary information was secured at the first point of contact.

Councillor D Hollebon referred to those who did not

use technology and in particular the proportion of over 65s who preferred to talk to someone. She was advised that there was no intention to do away with telephony or face to face customer contact at both receptions.

The Chairman commented that a report regarding the performance of the website would come back to the Committee in future. Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that the review of website satisfaction performance be received.

336 TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report that reviewed the actions included in the existing work programme and proposed amendments to the ongoing work programme. She drew Members' attention to the scoping document within the agenda and referred to the work of Task and Finish Groups.

The Scrutiny Officer referred in particular to the Parking Task and Finish Group and advised Members that the Head of Operations would be reporting on these recommendations and other related matters to Executive on 11 February 2020 with the recommendation that the findings be submitted to the next ordinary Council meeting for a decision.

The Scrutiny Officer said that following discussions with the Chairman and Vice Chairman a decision had been taken not to scrutinise the matter of Hertford

Town Centre and Bircheley Green, as the owners of the site needed time to bring forward their development proposals for the site.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that the first meeting of the East Herts Climate Change Forum had taken place on 15 January 2020 and further meetings would be held in 2020/21 across the District at three monthly intervals. Members agreed that an update in relation to the Environmental Climate Forum be included as a standing item on each OS Committee

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee in respect of the matter of cycle storage provision in Bishop's Stortford which had been raised by a Member. She explained that the issue had been raised with Greater Anglia and partner organisations and the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability had been involved in research. The Scrutiny Officer explained that as a result of the information already available in terms of cycle provision and future proposals for the District and following discussions with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman that a Task and Finish Group was not needed.

The Committee was reminded that a Task and Finish Group had explored the relationship between the Council and registered social housing providers. A Task and Finish Group had met on 19 December 2019 which had established what probing questions could be asked to both tenants' representatives and to senior Officers of two housing associations. The Scrutiny Officer explained that she was still trying to arrange meeting with relevant parties.

Councillor N Symonds said that smaller meetings with tenants and the housing associations was the best way forward. She confirmed that the Head of Housing at Network Homes could also be invited. The Chairman reminded Members that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had tasked the Task and Finish Group to speak to the Housing Associations on behalf of the Committee. Councillor D Snowdon said that the Task and Finish Group Members should be allowed to carry out what had been asked of them.

The Scrutiny Officer said that the Performance, Audit and Governance Oversight Committee had received a report on Section 106 allocations on 24 September 2019 and Members had agreed to take no further action. Members were asked to agree that this subject be removed and from the current work programme. This was supported.

Councillor H Drake said that where an item had been added to the work programme by Members, the Committee expected a report to be submitted by Officers. The Scrutiny Officer explained that the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) best practice advice was that two in depth reports on a scrutiny agenda was sufficient to allow effective scrutiny to take place.

The Committee debated at length the matter of public speaking as well as the venue for future meetings of the Committee. Councillor A Ward-Booth said that premises that were satisfactory for holding Town Council meetings were acceptable for Overview and Scrutiny Committee. At Members' request, the

Scrutiny Officer undertook to book the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Bishop's Stortford Town Council on 31 March 2020.

Councillor A Ward-Booth proposed and Councillor M Goldspink seconded, a motion that the proposed Work Programme be approved, as detailed in Appendix A and scrutiny of Section 106 allocations be removed from the Work Programme as it was considered in detail at a meeting of Performance, Audit and Governance Oversight Committee.

Members expressed their concern that a report on Pre-Planning Advice had not been included on the agenda for this meeting. The Chairman reminded Members that when a report had been asked by Scrutiny at a specific meeting then this request should be adhered to. The Scrutiny Officer explained that the Head of Planning and Building Control had explained that the process needed time to embed and that this was why a report had not been forthcoming to Members at this time. While Members acknowledged the position, they insisted that the Head of Planning and Building Control report back to the next meeting on 31 March 2020.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the proposed Work Programme be approved, as detailed in Appendix A, which had been amended in line with progress on:

- the Task and Finish Group (Parking);
- consideration of issues relation to Hertford Town Centre and Bircheley Green, Hertford;
- to include on each OS Committee an update on the Environmental and Climate Forum as a standing item;
- consideration of cycle storage provision in Bishop’s Stortford
- the Task and Finish Group (social housing)

(B) Scrutiny of Section 106 allocations be removed from the Work Programme

(C) a report in respect of pre-planning advice be added to the work programme for the 31 March 2020 meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.22 pm

Chairman Date
