

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE VIRTUAL MEETING
- ZOOM ON TUESDAY 5 JANUARY 2021, AT
7.00 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor L Haysey (Chairman/Leader),
Councillors P Boylan, E Buckmaster,
G Cutting, J Goodeve, G McAndrew,
S Rutland-Barsby and G Williamson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors R Bolton, M Brady, B Crystall,
H Drake, M Goldspink, D Hollebon,
M McMullen, S Newton, M Pope, C Redfern,
P Ruffles, A Ward-Booth and J Wyllie

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Manager of Housing Services
Lorraine Blackburn	- Scrutiny Officer
Richard Cassidy	- Chief Executive
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits

Shared Service

311 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

312 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader welcomed everyone to the Executive meeting for East Herts, the first in 2021.

The Leader reminded everyone that the meeting was being livestreamed via YouTube and that it was a formal meeting of the Council. The Leader asked that the "chat" function not be used and said that if anyone wished to speak, they should raise their hand. She asked Members to stay on mute and to leave their cameras on so that the public could see that everyone was an active participant.

The Leader wished all a Happy New Year.

The Leader commented that the world at the moment, was still challenging and that the county had moved into Tier 5 (Tier 4 plus) and that the numbers for the area were not good including those for the new variant. She said that the only way we could beat it was by following guidance. Although it looked depressing, a vaccination roll out was underway and all of this required us to play our part. The Leader said that hopefully by the summer, we could all meet.

For the benefit of those watching via YouTube, the Leader asked all Members of the Executive to introduce themselves and the remit their Portfolios covered.

313 MINUTES

Councillor Cutting proposed, and Councillor McAndrew seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Leader. The motion, on being put to the meeting and a vote taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

314 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Boylan declared a new interest which he said he would be reporting to Legal and Democratic Services, in that he had recently been appointed by Herts Community Trust, as a senior clinical manager to manage the mass vaccination programme.

Councillor Wyllie declared an interest in agenda item 7 (Note of a decision of the Chief Executive to approve a scheme for Local Authority Discretionary Grant fund under Urgency Provisions) by virtue of the fact that he was a small business owner.

315 CONTRACTING OUT OF HOMELESSNESS REVIEWS

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods submitted a report, summarising a proposal to trial the contracting out of the determination and issuing of homelessness reviews requested by those subject to homelessness decisions made by the Council up to 31 March 2022.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods explained that the report provided the background and arrangements for the management of statutory reviews of decisions made by the Council relating to homelessness applicants.

The report proposed moving to an external review process used by many other Councils, but that before committing to a longer term, the review process would be trialled until 31 March 2022. The Executive Member explained that depending on the outcome of the trial, one of the recommendations proposed that the decision be delegated to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Head of Housing to determine the best way forward.

There being no comments, Councillor Boylan proposed and Councillor McAndrew seconded a motion supporting the recommendations in the report. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) work to determine and issue, in accordance with the relevant legislation, the outcome of reviews requested by those subject to homelessness decisions made by the council up to 31st March 2022 be contracted out to a suitably qualified and experienced independent contractor;

(B) authority be delegated to the Head of Housing and Health to appoint a contractor, in accordance with the Council's Contract Procurement Rules, from the Hertfordshire Framework Agreement for Homelessness Reviews Contracts developed by Three Rivers and Watford Councils; and

(C) authority be delegated to the Executive Member

for Neighbourhoods, acting in consultation with the Head of Housing and Health, to review the outcome of the trial of the contracted out service and determine whether or not to contract out this function beyond the trial period.

316 AFFORDABLE HOUSING RESEARCH AND OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods submitted a report which explained that the Council had commissioned an important piece of independent research from Housing Quality Network (HQN) nearly a year ago, into the future provision of affordable housing. Their final report had now been received and a presentation had been provided to Members in December 2020. He said that this study would guide the Council's efforts to bring forward a steady supply of affordable homes matched to local need.

The Executive Member said that the report summarised the findings and recommendations in the report and provided an outline on how the Council planned to use that valuable evidence in preparing various strategies and policy documents going forward. This would also be helpful when reviewing the Council's housing strategy this year and how Members would be consulted and involved in that journey. The Executive Member concluded by saying the report also summarised the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group's recommendations on how we can better engage with registered providers.

Councillor Goldspink said that she welcomed the report and the report by the HNQ. She was delighted to see the

recommendations and also those following on from the Task and Finish Group and the relationship with housing associations. Councillor Goldspink said she was fully supportive of the recommendations.

The Leader thanked Councillor Goldspink for her comments adding that the report was a good piece of work, thoroughly researched and that the outcome of the report and recommendations were “spot on”.

Councillor Boylan proposed and Councillor Goodeve seconded a motion to support the recommendations in the report. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report into Affordable Housing produced by the Housing Quality Network be used to inform the identification of options for further enhancing the supply of affordable housing informed by local needs; and

(B) that the Head of Housing and Health, acting in consultation with the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, draws on the HQN report’s findings when revising the Council’s Housing and Health Strategy and Tenancy Strategy for consideration by Council in due course in 2021/22

(C) the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee’s recommendations, presented in section 3, for enhancing the Council’s working arrangements with registered providers be approved.

317 NOTE A DECISION OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE TO APPROVE A SCHEME FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY DISCRETIONARY GRANT FUND UNDER URGENCY PROVISIONS

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability submitted a report which was to note a decision of the Chief Executive to approve a scheme for the Local Authority discretionary Grant Fund under the Council's urgency provisions.

The Executive Member explained that following the second national lockdown, the government announced in November 2020 further grant funding for businesses for those affected by the restrictions then imposed. This included the Additional Restriction Grant (ARG), a discretionary grant for local authorities to design and administer under which funds could be allocated to eligible businesses. To avoid delays the Chief Executive used urgency powers available within the Constitution. It was noted that the Constitution required that it be brought back to the next meeting of the Executive for noting when such decisions were taken under these powers.

The Executive Member also sought Members' support that delegated authority be granted to the Head of Revenues and Benefit in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Financial Sustainability, to revise the scheme, where appropriate.

Councillor Wyllie referred to the information contained in paragraph 2.3 of the report which appeared to conflict with the information on the online form (the date for applications had closed); this asked applicants to state their last date of trading. He felt that this wording may have deterred applicants from applying for a grant that

they may have been entitled to and should have asked applicants if they were still trading as a “Yes/No” answer. If the answer was “yes” they should have been asked the date of their last trading date. Councillor Wyllie suggested that the date for applications should therefore be extended and that the wording on the online form be rephrased to make it clear that if there were still trading; they could still apply for a grant.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits and Shared Services explained that it was always the intention to maximise take up of the grant and that if there was anything unclear, then an approach could have been made by the applicants to the Council for clarification. She appreciated that some might not have wanted to contact the Council and may have excluded themselves. The Head of Revenues and Benefits said that if Members wished to extend the time limit, it was for them to decide but that this may create a delay in paying those who had already applied.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the issue of a lack of clarity and agreed that people could have phoned to seek clarification. He commented that it was possible to extend the scheme for a few days with a caveat that this would delay payments to other applicants.

The Leader sought Members’ views on extending the scheme for a couple of days, suggesting that this could be publicised via social media, and updating the website and to disseminate information as far as possible, so that if people had misconstrued, it gave them an extra opportunity to apply. The Leader said that there was a need to be mindful of the new scheme which the Government had announced on 5 January 2021, to assist businesses through the next period of lockdown and of the pressures

this caused to the revenues team.

Councillor Buckmaster agreed that potential applicants could have phoned the Council to query the information if needed. He accepted that the service was under considerable pressure but that this did not stop other applications being validated in the meantime. Councillor Buckmaster said that he didn't think this would affect many, but was happy to support an extension of the scheme.

Councillor Boylan commented that as this issue had been highlighted, the Council had to take appropriate action and that it was only right that the Council should allow some extra time i.e. an extra 48 hours extension of the scheme. He accepted that this would delay some payments, but would rather know that everyone had had an equal opportunity.

Councillor McAndrew suggested that a couple of days would not make any real difference and that applications could be processed as they came in. He supported an extension of the scheme.

Councillor Cutting concurred to a 48 hour extension of the scheme.

Councillor Rutland-Barsby agreed with the proposed extension and thanked the Head of Revenues and her team for all their work.

Councillor Williamson was happy to endorse and extension of the scheme which he suggested was covered by recommendation (B).

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed that a decision to extend the scheme by 48 hours would be covered by the wording detailed in recommendation (B) of the report.

The Leader asked Members to vote on the two recommendations with an understanding that Officers would work with the Head of Revenues and Benefits to agree a suitable time period extension but that it should not go beyond Thursday night or Friday 8th January (lunchtime). Additionally, that the Communications Team be asked to send out tweets so that it can be retweeted and via the use of Facebook. Additionally that the website be updated to reflect the extended time.

The Leader thanked Councillor Wyllie for bringing the matter to the Executive's attention.

Councillor Williamson proposed and Councillor Rutland-Barsby seconded a motion supporting the recommendations in the report and support for an extension of the scheme. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the decision to approve the scheme taken by the Chief Executive be noted.

(B) delegated authority be granted to the Head of Revenues and Benefit Service in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Financial Sustainability, to revise the scheme, where appropriate.

318 UPDATE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Wyllie, the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee explained that O&S had had a brief meeting on 8 December 2020 but had nothing to report to the Executive.

319 UPDATE FROM AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor Pope, the Chairman of Audit and Governance said that A&G had not met since the last Executive and that there was nothing to report on.

The meeting closed at 7.26 pm

Chairman
Date