

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 5
MARCH 2024, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman)
Councillors P Boylan, E Buckmaster, V Burt,
R Carter, N Clements, N Cox, C Horner,
S Marlow, S Nicholls, C Redfern and
M Swainston

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors B Crystall and V Glover-Ward

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Scrutiny Officer
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Katie Mogan	- Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

362 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors McAndrew, Thomas and Woollcombe. It was noted that Councillor Burt was substituting for Councillor Woollcombe and Councillor Marlow was substituting for

Councillor Thomas.

363 MINUTES - 16 JANUARY 2024

Councillor Buckmaster proposed and Councillor Redfern seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024, 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 16 January 2024, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

364 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

365 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Buckmaster declared a non-pecuniary interest in the matter referred to in minute 366, on the grounds that he was a Member of Sawbridgeworth Town Council, which was listed as a recipient in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Councillors Carter and Redfern declared non-pecuniary interests in the matter referred to in minute 366, on the grounds that they were Members of Hertford Town Council, which was listed as a recipient in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Councillor Horner and Swainston declared non-pecuniary interests in the matter referred to in minute 366, on the grounds that they were Member of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, which was listed as a recipient in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

366 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND UPDATE

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth submitted a report that updated Members on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which was now approaching the final 12 months of delivery, having officially begun on 1st April 2022.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy set out the wider background to the shared prosperity funding dating back to 2016 following the Brexit referendum.

Members were advised that shared prosperity funding would still be coming through, and the programme would exist until 31 March 2025.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that East Herts was not an area of need based on a range of metrics such as employment and skills. He said that East Herts had issues in certain areas and levelling up meant different things to different places.

Members were advised that every area had an allocation based upon a population formula and the East Herts allocation was £1.77m payable over the three years.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy summarised the work that had taken place starting in the summer of 2022 culminating in a workshop at Fletchers Lea in Ware. He said that four different priority areas had been identified where the money should be spent and these priorities had been agreed at Council in January 2023 alongside a series of individual projects agreed for that year.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that the May 2023 elections had resulted in the Council decision being revisited in consultation with some of the portfolio holders who were now responsible for allocating that money. Members were advised that the steer from the Executive Members was that they were broadly happy with the decision from January 2023 and the overall

direction of travel.

Councillor Andrews welcomed the idea of supporting town and village centres. He mentioned the importance of keeping track of business support for Hertfordshire businesses in the villages that employed fewer than 20 people.

Councillor Redfern referred to a table on page 27 of the report and expressed her concern at the £50k of levelling up funding allocated to skills and transport projects. She said that the European fund for helping people develop literacy and digital skills had not been replaced.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that the government had been very clear in the guidance that the skills theme was to have no money spent on it until year 3, on the basis that the EU structural funding for skills and employment-based projects was still being honoured until 2023/24. He emphasised that East Herts Council would not be a major deliverer of any skills-based projects and there were other funding streams to support skills.

Councillor Nicholls said that she had raised the subject of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) at a Buntingford Town Council meeting. The Councillors there had not heard about it and as a result had missed the opportunity of receiving funding when they had a project that was ideally suited.

Councillor Nicholls ^{said} that Officers had made some considerable effort to contact them and wondered if there was any money left over for them to apply for next year.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy confirmed that the Economic Development Team had made considerable efforts to attend all the town and parish councils from 2022 onwards. He said that 14 applications had been received from the 37 villages and 5 towns.

Councillor Horner said that he was concerned that only six parish villages had received UK SPF money. He said that it was good that all the village parishes that had applied had received funds. He said that he was pleased to see that work had been done with community halls and with energy hubs.

Councillor Horner referred to the levelling up agenda and expressed a concern over whether this could be focussed on communities of locality or communities of minority where there was known to be deprivation.

Councillor Boylan referred to contact with parish councils and said that he was curious to understand how many of them had responded. He said that there was a variety of projects that had been granted funding and he wondered if there was an upper limit to a grant given to a rural community.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that a spreadsheet had been sent out in July with all the projects under consideration and their values listed. She said that the most expensive project was about £800k and requests for funding above that level might be a bit of challenge.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that there had recently been an opportunity to update spreadsheets in terms of old email addresses and an audit trail had been kept of all contact made.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy answered a question from Councillor Carter in respect of revenue and capital elements of the grant on page 23 of the report. Councillor Carter asked how the cultural activities grants were triaged in terms of which activity was funded and from which pot of funding. She also asked which training providers had been spoken to in terms of the ageing demographic and areas of deprivation.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that he understood the importance of skills delivery. The council was not yet at the stage of talking to skills providers. He said that one idea that was being progressed were "Careers fairs" with the LEP to connect young people with local businesses and schools.

Councillor Clements asked about the long-term financial viability of the projects that were being supported. He asked about the priorities in terms of which projects were being prioritised and whether there was any more detail about options for larger projects at the £250k level.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy reminded Members that this was a time limited project which would end on 31 March 2025 and of the uncertainty over future Government funding. He referred to match funding requirements and said that Officers had been keen to make it clear to project applicants that the aim of any funding should result in a legacy and that this should include long term sustainability in respect of any grants that were given out.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that in terms of priorities, she was looking for more smaller projects as opposed to spending all the money on some of the larger projects. She said that a priority was distribution and doing as much as we could with the money that was available.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that with all the projects being considered, these needed to contribute something to the local community and consider what revenue it might generate but also whether there would be additional costs involved. She explained that it was about choosing the right project for the right community and if there were 10 projects at £25k each, then these might be taken forward in place of one larger project at £250k.

Following a question from Councillor Boylan, the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy talked about the possible levels of flexibility in rolling forward UKSPF funding beyond 31 March 2025. He said that there might be some flexibility as had been the case previously.

Councillor Nicholls talked about the delegation of funding decisions to Heads of Service in terms of the success rate of applications for funding. She asked if there were any major difficulties or common errors that had been identified that had meant that funding was unable to be allocated and whether briefing or training could have mitigated this.

Councillor Nicholls mentioned the low levels of reserves for parish councils and the impact of this on their ability to repair community assets to build the community for the future.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that it was standard for Officers to take decisions in consultation with Executive Members. He explained, in detail, the community grant application process.

Councillor Andrews said that he would hope that Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be allowed a reasonable amount of time after this meeting, to come forward with suggestions for the lead Executive Member in respect of the allocation of UKSPF resources. He said that towns of a size may well have individuals (officers) whose task it is to find funds and grants.

Councillor Andrews that parishes did not have the same resources to do that. He asked that some thought be given as to how parishes could be assisted with these processes to secure available funding.

Councillor Boylan proposed and Councillor Cox seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress to date and that Members' comments regarding investment and allocation of UKSPF

resources in 2024/25, be forwarded to the lead Executive Members for consideration, with the caveat that Overview and Scrutiny Committee be allowed a reasonable amount of time after this meeting to come forward with suggestions for the lead Executive Member in respect of the allocation of UKSPF resources.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress to date; and

(B) Members' comments regarding investment and allocation of UKSPF resources in 2024/25 be forwarded to the lead Executive Members for consideration, with the caveat that Overview and Scrutiny Committee be allowed a reasonable amount of time after this meeting to come forward with suggestions for the lead Executive Member in respect of the allocation of UKSPF resources.

With the consent of Members, an update item on the Overview and Scrutiny work programme was brought forward on East Herts Run Markets and others in the district to facilitate better use of time and to allow the Executive Member for Planning and Growth to give a presentation and provide an update on the work being currently being undertaken in respect of the East Herts Run Markets. She responded to a number of comments and questions from Members of Overview and Scrutiny. Members received the presentation.

RESOLVED – that the presentation be received.

367 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted the work programme report and sought Members' comments on items for

inclusion on the agenda for the future meetings in 2024/25. She drew Members' attention to the Appendix to the report and provided an update on the programme.

The Scrutiny Officer said that in relation to Parks, Officers had provided Councillors with potential dates in respect of a site visit to review the district's parks. This date has yet to be confirmed.

Members were advised that a first of a kind playground for children with disabilities opened in the London Borough of Barnet. The Scrutiny Officer said that the cost of the park was £500,000 with £400,000 obtained from private funding and a £100,000 contribution from the London Borough of Barnet.

Members were advised that the award of the waste, recycling and street cleansing contract would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny on 11 June and then to the Executive.

The Chairman said that a number of questions had been asked of the three key registered social landlords. Only one had responded. In the absence of other responses, he asked Members for their views on how to progress this further. Councillor Boylan referred to the recently agreed Housing Strategy and Action Plan which might provide a better platform to identify issues for scrutiny.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services suggested that Members might wish to debate this further at a Work Programme Workshop on a date to be agreed. This approach was supported.

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the summary bulletin in respect of climate change had been finalised and would be circulated as soon as possible.

In relation to neighbourhood policing and financial support given by Parish and Town Councils, the Scrutiny Officer provided an update to that already stated in the report

adding that that 14 Parish Councils and one Town Council had so far responded and that she would provide updates as and when received.

The Chairman said that he was content for neighbourhood policing to be removed from the work programme. This was supported.

The Scrutiny Officer said that a summary bulletin in respect of the Anti-Racism Charter had been drafted and would be circulated to Members shortly.

On the issue of the use of herbicides and particularly Glyphosate, Officers had confirmed that Glyphosate was being used across East Herts. She sought Members' views on whether they wanted to progress this issue further.

Councillor Buckmaster said that Hertfordshire Highways still used Glyphosate and he wondered whether a paper or summary bulletin could come before the Committee that covered the pros and cons of Glyphosate for controlling weeds. This was supported.

Members suggested that the summary bulletin should include background information on the Pros vs Cons of its use, frequency, how and where and its impact on the Biosphere and Eco System. Members also asked if the bulletin could include an update on the Class Action in the USA in terms of the impact on human health and also refer to alternative methods.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the corporate plan had been agreed at Council on 28 February 2024 and it was hoped that this would help Overview and Scrutiny populate the work programme based upon the Council's now agreed priorities.

Members were reminded that the matter of water risk supply was debated at Council on 28 February and the Scrutiny Officer said that she would be guided by

Members as to whether they considered this to be a suitable topic for scrutiny.

Councillor Cox said that he had discussed this Councillor Buckmaster and they considered that it should come up at a later date. Councillor Andrews said that he received a monthly update from Affinity Water, and this covered in a positive way the challenges of water supply.

Councillor Buckmaster referred to the motion debated at council on 28 February in respect of water supply. He referred to future reviews of the District Plan by the District Plan Executive Panel as being the best forum to ensure safeguards were in place.

The Chairman talked about the challenges in water cycle and expressed a concern that the committee could dedicate time to this in the work programme and get nowhere other than being better informed.

Councillor Andrews said that recommendations (B) and (C) of the work programme could be removed as these would be covered in the planned workshop. He suggested that the word “agreed” be replaced with “noted” in recommendation (D). This was supported.

Councillor Nicholls proposed and Councillor Cox seconded a motion that, subject to the above changes, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme in Appendix 1 for 2023-24, be agreed.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) the update be agreed and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme, as amended, be agreed;

(B) an Overview and Scrutiny Workshop be convened to discuss items for inclusion on the Work Programme for scrutiny in the civic year;

(C) Officers prepare a summary bulletin on the use of Glyphosate in the District including information referred to above; and

(D) Neighbourhood Policing be removed from the Work Programme.

368 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chairman
Date