

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 17 JANUARY 2012, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman).
Councillors D Abbott, W Ashley, R Beeching,
E Buckmaster, S Bull, Mrs D Hollebon,
G Jones, G McAndrew, P Moore,
W Mortimer, M Newman, P Phillips, M Pope,
J Ranger, C Rowley, P Ruffles,
G Williamson, J Wing, C Woodward and
J Wyllie.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors L Haysey, A Jackson and
M Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Chancellor	- Head of Financial Support Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Lorna Georgiou	- Performance and Improvement Co-ordinator
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community

Services

563 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor D Hollebon and seconded by Councillor G McAndrew that Councillor D Andrews be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

RESOLVED - that Councillor D Andrews be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

564 APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors T Herbert, D Hone, T Page and N Symonds. It was noted that Councillor S Bull was substituting for Councillor Page.

565 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members that there was an Essential Reference Paper relating to the matters referred to at Minute 568 that was not for publication. Members were advised that should they wish to discuss these matters during the debate, the Committee should resolve to exclude the press and public.

566 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

567 RESIDENTS' SURVEY RESULTS

The Performance and Improvement Co-ordinator gave a presentation in respect of the raw data from the residents' survey. Members were advised that there had been a good response rate that was higher than usual. Residents had indicated that East Herts continued to feel like a safe place to live.

A full report containing the analysed data would be submitted to the next joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committees.

In response to a query from the Leader relating to the methodology of the survey, Members were advised that the methodology had not changed although the residents' survey was paper based where as smaller surveys conducted by individual teams had been done by telephone. The Leader commented that the data needed to be analysed geographically.

Members noted the raw data results of the residents survey.

RESOLVED – that (A) the presentation be noted;
and

(B) a full report and action plan be submitted to the next joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committees.

568 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2011/12 (REVISED) TO 2014/15

The Director of Internal Services provided a financial context for the reports included in the Agenda.

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report setting out proposals for the Council's Capital Programme for the period 2011/12 (Revised) to 2014/15. The Capital Programme had taken account of targets for reduced spend from 2014/15, whilst still ensuring that the programme could be delivered as approved last year.

The Capital Programme had been amended to take account of slippage and rephasing. Members were reminded that there had also been amendments approved as part of the Council's monthly healthcheck process.

The Director of Internal Services advised that a reduction in the call on capital receipts by a further £645,000 was anticipated to ensure that the Capital Programme was

limited to a £1,000,000 ceiling that could be met from the Council's resources. Members were advised that this was based on an assumption on the availability of a £100,000 government grant in 2014/15.

The full Capital Programme was included at Essential Reference Paper 'B' and Members were referred to the table at paragraph 2.4 on page 15 of the report now submitted, which showed the additional proposals to meet the £645,000 reduction. Members were reminded to consider the scope for local initiatives whereby Town and Parish Council could contribute to making up any shortfalls in grant funding.

In response to a query from Councillor G McAndrew, the Director stated that there had been a mixed take up of previous and current capital allocated grant funding. Councillor J Wing referred to the likely dispiriting impact of cuts in funding for local groups, such as Community and Voluntary Organisations.

The Executive Member for Finance reminded Members that the Medium Term Financial Plan reductions would be in place in 3 years as opposed to the current year. Councillor J Ranger highlighted the sensibility of reducing funding on a phased basis as opposed to making any sudden changes.

The Leader stated that a key benefit of a Medium Term Financial Plan was that the Council had time to work towards a strategy for helping local communities.

The Joint Scrutiny Committees decided to inform the Executive that the Capital Programme 2011/12 (revised) to 2014/15 should be approved as amended by paragraph 2.4 of the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the Joint Scrutiny Committees considered that the draft Capital Programme 2011/12 (Revised) to 2014/15, as amended by the proposals set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report submitted, should be

approved.

569 FEES AND CHARGES 2012/13

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report detailing the additional income to the Council that could be generated by increasing discretionary fees and charges in 2012/13 for a variety of services. Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for the detailed suggested increased to discretionary fees and charges.

The Director of Internal Services referred in particular to the proposal to activate two Council Tax penalties which could be levied on residents who failed to promptly notify the Council of changes to their circumstances. It was hoped that the threat of the penalties would result in residents remembering to inform the Council of such changes.

In response to a Member query, the Joint Scrutiny Committees were advised that Officers had the discretion to vary the hire charges in place for Hertford Theatre.

Councillor M Newman commented on the licensing costs for dangerous wild animals.

Councillor C Woodward suggested that the introduction of car park charging arrangements for Grange Paddocks should be deferred until September 2012 in line with the decision already made to delay changing the car parking fees across the District until September to enable consideration of the results of the parking strategy. The Director of Customer and Community Services stated that parking charges for Grange Paddocks were included in the Medium Term Financial Plan. Members were also reminded that the car park had been refurbished and there was also an advanced proposal for a permit scheme for Chantry Road residents.

Councillor C Woodward proposed and Councillor J Wyllie seconded, a motion that parking charges at Grange

Paddocks be deferred until September so that consideration could be given to the results of the parking strategy.

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

The Committees decided to inform the Executive that the fees and charges should be approved as detailed in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the Joint Scrutiny Committees consider that the fees and charges detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report now submitted, should be approved.

570 SERVICE ESTIMATES - PROBABLE OUTTURN 2011/12:
REVENUE BUDGET 2012/13

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report on the estimate of all general fund services. The report focussed on the revenue estimate process, which was due to conclude at the Council meeting on 7 March 2012 when a formal resolution setting the 2012/13 Council Tax would be approved.

Members were advised of an error in paragraph 2.13 in that the capital finance costs figure for 2011/12 should have read £4,442,000 and the figure for 2012/13 should have read £4,488,000.

In response to a query from Councillor J Wing in respect of paragraph 5.18 and the probable and estimated calls on the Local Authority Business Growth Grant, the Director of Internal Services advised that these figures would reduce to £0.

Councillor J Wing proposed and Councillor M Pope seconded, a motion that resources be made available from the savings indicated that had been made on the

street cleansing contract for more frequent street cleansing outside of town centres.

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

Members decided to inform the Executive that the Joint Scrutiny Committees had supported the probable revenue budget for 2011/12 as well as the estimates for 2012/13.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the Joint Scrutiny Committees support the probable revenue budget for 2011/12 as well as the estimates for 2012/13.

571 CONSOLIDATED BUDGET REPORT AND 2012/13 - 2015/16
MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report recommending the consolidated budget for 2012/13 and the 2015/16 Medium Term Financial Plan. The Executive Member invited the comments of the Joint Scrutiny Committees.

The budget for 2011/12 had been set in February 2011 and the final accounts had recorded a balance that had been £408,000 higher than expected. The budget for 2012/13 had been prepared in the light of a significantly constrained income forecast for the Authority.

Members were advised that it was anticipated that there would be two further years of pay restraint after which there might be increases at or about inflation. Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Essential Reference Paper 'C' was a new document that set out a stress testing of the MTFP which had considered different scenarios whereby the Council might be subject to unexpected financial pressures. The intention was to illustrate the capacity of the Council's finances to withstand a single or series of incidents.

The Joint Scrutiny Committees made a number of comments relating to government pay policy, predicted investment returns and the new homes bonus. The Director of Internal Services stated that every opportunity would be taken to top up the interest equalisation reserve. Members were also reminded that the new homes bonus provided an opportunity for the local economy in East Herts.

Councillor P Phillips commented that continuing cost pressures could make future increases in Council Tax a justifiable course of action moving forward.

The Committees decided to inform the Executive that the budget should be approved as detailed in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that the Joint Scrutiny Committees consider that the Consolidated Budget should be approved as detailed in the report now submitted.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chairman
Date