

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2012, AT 7.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor S Rutland-Barsby (Chairman)
Councillors D Abbott, M Alexander,
D Andrews, W Ashley, P Ballam, S Basra,
E Bedford, R Beeching, E Buckmaster,
S Bull, A Burlton, M Carver,
Mrs R Cheswright, K Crofton, A Dearman,
J Demonti, P Gray, L Haysey, Mrs D Hone,
A Jackson, G Lawrence, J Mayes,
G McAndrew, M McMullen, P Moore,
M Newman, T Page, P Phillips, M Pope,
N Poulton, R Radford, J Ranger, C Rowley,
P Ruffles, N Symonds, J Taylor, M Tindale,
A Warman, G Williamson, N Wilson, J Wing,
M Wood, C Woodward, B Wrangles and
J Wyllie.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

614 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members that the meeting was being webcast.

She reported with great sadness the passing of former Councillor Colin Harris. He had served on the District Council from 1995 until 2003, representing Hertford Castle ward. He was also the current Chairman of the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel. The Chairman advised that Members had been sent an e-mail detailing the funeral arrangements. Members stood and observed a minute's silence.

The Leader of the Council paid his respects to former Councillor Colin Harris. He referred to his standing in the local community and beyond and spoke of his graciousness, decency and gentleness. As Leader of the Labour Group, he had always provided a challenge in the chamber, but had always done so in a respectful way. He also referred to his charitable work, especially regarding Hertford Museum and his ability to obtain funding and investment for it.

Councillor M Wood also paid his respects to former Councillor Colin Harris. He referred to his major role during the time the Council was "hung" and also to his passion for the provision of social housing.

The Chairman reported that the Council would be represented by Councillor Dearman at a Royal Garden Party in 2012.

The Chairman highlighted some of the many events she had attended and expressed her gratitude to the Vice-Chairman and Honorary Aldermen for their continued support. She referred specifically to the High Sherriff's visit to Hertford Theatre.

Finally, she reminded Members of her willingness to attend events throughout the District and to contact her with invitations.

615 MINUTES

In relation to Minute 499 – Declarations of Interest, Council noted the following errors relating to declarations of personal interest recorded for Minutes 463 and 506 – Review of Discretionary Rate Relief:

- Substitute Councillor N Symonds for J Demonti.
- Delete Councillor T Page's declaration.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 December 2011, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the amendments now detailed.

616 MEMBERS' QUESTIONSQuestion 1

Councillor P Ruffles stated that a mill had been powered by the water flow of the River Lea at the site of Hertford Theatre for well over 1000 years. There had been a positive report about re-provision of water power (hydro power) to Hertford Theatre at the January meeting of the Council's Executive. The aim of the proposal was to cut the Theatre's energy bill; to reduce the national carbon expensive energy demand from the National Grid; and, to set a good example in the community locally and more widely. Some Hertford Members had consistently pushed for East Herts to take this initiative and develop a plan. He asked the Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment if he had a positive update for Members.

In reply, the Executive Member commented that Officers were working hard to progress this matter and had developed a detailed projected plan, which was updated on a weekly basis. He believed the situation looked more encouraging. The Executive Member referred to his visit to a similar project in Berkshire, which had taken five years of hard work to deliver.

The Executive Member reassured Members that the Council

retained its commitment to complete the project and that the business case remained robust. In respect of the timing, the Council was in the hands of the Environment Agency.

Question 2

Councillor J Ranger asked the Leader of the Council if he agreed that Members and Town/Parish Clerks should be advised of any enforcement action proposed to be taken or not to be taken in their Wards or Towns/Parishes.

The Leader agreed in essence with the question, but expressed caution, as in some cases Officers might be of the view that until an official investigation started, it might be better for the local Member not to know. He read an extract from a report submitted to the Environment Scrutiny Committee in September 2011, in which this matter had been looked at by a task and finish group.

He undertook to ask Officers to discuss the issue with Councillor J Ranger and to ensure that the enforcement process was updated as necessary.

Councillor J Ranger asked whether the Leader was aware that some Parish Councils did not appear to understand the distinction between a planning application and enforcement action and whether Officers could be asked to use their discretion, and where appropriate, to inform the local Member and the Town/Parish Council of proposed enforcement action.

In reply, the Leader undertook to refer this to Officers as requested.

Question 3

Councillor M Wood asked the Leader of the Council if he would be writing to the Communities Secretary of State, Eric Pickles MP, advising him that East Herts did not wish to revert to weekly waste collections and at the same time, advise him of the great success of the Council's ARC scheme.

In reply, the Leader commented that he was not aware of any approach to modify the Council's arrangements. If such an approach was received, then he would advise the Communities Secretary of State that residents in East Herts supported the current arrangements.

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment added that the ARC scheme had been a great success and referred to the recent Residents Survey, in which satisfaction levels had risen significantly.

617 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 10 JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 10 January 2012, be received.

618 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - NOVEMBER 2011

RESOLVED – that £132,000 of the Town Centre Environmental Enhancements capital budget be re-profiled from 2011/12 into 2012/13.

619 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 7 FEBRUARY 2012

In respect of Minutes 599 – 604, which were all items relating to the Council's budget, the Executive Member for Finance gave a presentation.

The Executive Member detailed the context for the proposed budget and the work undertaken in providing more realistic expenditure forecasts. He believed the Council had previously made tough spending decisions where seeds that had been sown were now being reaped. He elaborated on proposed savings on the capital programme and detailed uses for the New Homes Bonus. The Executive Member also highlighted new schemes, such as the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme and economic development initiatives for growth. He referred to the Council's investment income which remained a major challenge.

The Executive Member indicated that amendments to the budget proposals relating to car parking charges and Police and Community Support Officers (PCSOs) would be made (see Minute 624 below). He concluded by referring to the proposed council tax increase of 0% in 2012/13 and the undertaking to repeat this in 2013/14.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 7 February 2012, be received.

620 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2012/13 AND MINIMUM REVENUE POLICY PROVISION

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of Audit Committee be received;

(B) the 2012/13 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy and Prudential Indicators for East Herts Council be approved; and

(C) the Policy on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) be approved.

621 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2011/12 (REVISED) - 2014/15

In response to a question from Councillor M Wood, the Executive Member for Finance confirmed that support for social housing schemes would reduce to nil in 2014/15. The Council could not afford to continue this provision and it would be necessary to seek alternative funding, such as from section 106 agreements.

Councillor J Wing referred to the Town Centre Environmental Enhancement Programme and expressed concern, as a town councillor, that this had not been promoted sufficiently. He also referred to the mosaics scheme which had not been progressed and other schemes submitted by Ware Town Council which had been rejected as the criteria had been changed.

The Leader responded by commenting that it was up to Ware Town Council to progress the mosaics scheme. As for the other schemes, the world had changed. The Leader believed that the New Homes Bonus would provide funds for town councils to spend as they wished, which was localism in action. He invited all town and parish councils to utilise this funding to support economic development projects.

The Executive Member for Finance refuted Councillor Wing's suggestion that there had been a lack of communication and commented that £129k in this year's budget, remained uncommitted and was still available for bidding.

Councillor J Wing took on board the comments and accepted his personal responsibility as a Ware town councillor. He reminded Council that he was in a minority of one.

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of the Joint Scrutiny Committees of 17 January 2012, be received; and

(B) the new Capital Programme for the period 2011/12 (Revised) to 2014/15 as now submitted, be approved.

622 FEES AND CHARGES 2012/13

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of the Joint Scrutiny Committees of 17 January 2012, be received; and

(B) the increases in fees and charges as detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted, be approved.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) the comments of the Joint Scrutiny Committees of 17 January 2012 be received; and

(B) the probable Revenue Estimates for 2011/12 and the draft Revenue Estimates for 2012/13 be approved.

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

The Leader referred to proposed amendments as indicated by the Executive Member for Finance in his budget presentation (see Minute 619 above). These related to deleting the proposed saving on Police and Community Safety Officers (PCSOs) at a cost of £46k and extending the freeze on car parking charges until April 2013 at a cost of £39k. These proposals, if accepted, would require the planning contingency to be reduced by £85k as well requiring consequent adjustments to the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Councillor M Wood referred to leaf clearance and expressed concern that reductions would impact on the elderly in particular.

The Leader responded by referring to the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees which had recommended that Officers should explore partnership approaches to this issue. He believed this was the correct approach and that Officers should continue to monitor the situation.

Council approved the proposals as now amended.

RESOLVED - that (A) the comments and proposals of the Joint Scrutiny Committees of 17 January 2012, be received;

(B) the probable outturn for 2011/12 be approved and any variation at outturn showing an improved position against the £13k under spending reported be put to the interest equalisation reserve;

(C) the revenue budget for 2012/13 be approved as submitted, subject to the following adjustments:

- (1) the proposed saving in respect of PCSOs be deleted at a cost of £46,000;
 - (2) there be no increase in car parking fees before 1 April 2013 at a cost of £39,000;
 - (3) the planning contingency be reduced by an offsetting £85,000;
 - (4) the remaining planning contingency of £740,000 be taken to the interest equalisation reserve
- (D) the Medium Term Financial Plan to 2015/16, be approved as submitted, subject to adjustment in each year from 2013/14 – 2015/16 as follows:
- (1) expenditure be increased by £46,000 as a consequence of not making the PCSO savings;
 - (2) income be reduced by £79,000 as a consequence of not increasing car parking fees in 2012/13;
 - (3) planning contingency sums be reduced by £125,000 in each year; and
- (E) there be no increase in council tax for 2012/13 and, in the absence of government making currently unplanned reductions in local authority funding, there be no increase in 2013/14.

625 LOCAL AUTHORITY MORTGAGE SCHEME

RESOLVED - that (A) £1m be allocated to support the LAMS scheme in East Herts and that the following parameters be set:

- (1) the Scheme to apply to all post code areas within East Herts; and

(2) the maximum loan per property be set at £160,000;

(B) the Executive Member for Finance be authorised to determine the allocation of the £1m in (A) above to either a cash backed or guarantee scheme, in the light of confirmed interest from local and national mortgage providers;

(C) subject to the determination by the Executive Member of Finance in (B) above, approval be given in respect of Lloyds TSB Bank plc and Lloyds TSB Scotland plc for:

(1) a Scheme Indemnity Deed as set out at Essential Reference Paper 'E' of the report submitted; and

(2) an Officer's Indemnity Deed as set out at Essential Reference Paper 'F' of the report submitted.

626 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 4 JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 4 January 2012, be received.

627 HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 11 JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 11 January 2012, be received.

628 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2012/13

RESOLVED – that the Pay Policy Statement 2012 as now submitted, be approved.

629 JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES: MINUTES
- 17 JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees held on 17 January 2012, be received.

630 AUDIT COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 18 JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 18 January 2012, be received.

631 HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 19
JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 19 January 2012, be received.

632 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 1
FEBRUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 1 February 2012, be received.

633 JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES: MINUTES -
14 FEBRUARY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees held on 14 February 2012, be received.

634 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES 2012/13

The Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services submitted a report containing the recommendations of the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) following its review of Members Allowances.

It was noted that there were now two vacancies on the IRP.

Council approved the recommendations as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Members Allowances for 2011/12 be retained for 2012/13 (1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013), save for the mileage allowance being increased form 40p to 45p per mile; and

(B) the size of the Independent Remuneration Panel be decreased from 9 to 7 members with the existing appointees being retained.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman
Date