

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 4 JULY 2012, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor J Taylor (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, T Herbert, A Jackson,
G Jones, G Lawrence, J Mayes,
G McAndrew, M McMullen, P Moore,
W Mortimer, M Newman, T Page, M Pope,
N Poulton, R Radford, J Ranger, P Ruffles,
S Rutland-Barsby, N Symonds, M Tindale,
A Warman, N Wilson, J Wing, M Wood,
C Woodward 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	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services

124 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed the public to the meeting. She reminded Members and the public that the meeting was being webcast.

The Chairman advised that she had agreed to accept onto the agenda, an urgent item of business relating to the Code of Conduct. Copies of the report had been included in the second supplementary agenda.

The Chairman reported on Councillor B Wrangles' progress following her recent operation and undertook to send some flowers on behalf of Members. She further reported on her recent engagements and highlighted two in particular. On 13 June 2012, she had attended a Mass of Thanksgiving celebrating Reverend John Sherrington's 25 years of priesthood at Westminster Cathedral. On 14 June 2012, she had visited Hatfield House for a Diamond Jubilee celebration at which she had met Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The Chairman advised that her Civic Service would be held on 9 September 2012, at 3.00 pm, at the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Ware. The Civic Dinner would be held on 20 October 2012, at Fletcher's Lea, Ware Priory. All Members were invited to both events and to contribute raffle prizes.

Finally, the Chairman thanked the Vice-Chairman and Alderman K Barnes for their support in attending events she had been unable to.

125 MINUTES

Council noted two typographical errors within the Minutes of the Annual meeting held on 16 May 2012 as follows:

- Minute 21, Localism Act 2011, Recommendation (L) – delete the word “while” and replace with “whole”.
- Minute 24, Decision-making Structure, Recommendation (C) – delete “7” under “Revenues

and Benefits” and replace with “2”.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Annual meeting held on 16 May 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the typographical corrections now detailed.

126 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services advised Council on the new arrangements for disclosable pecuniary interests arising from the Localism Act 2011.

127 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Question 1

Councillor J Wing commented that The Department for Communities and Local Government had recently issued a consultation document titled ‘Localising Support for Council Tax Funding arrangements consultation’. This document proposed changes to the funding of Council Tax benefit that would throw a considerable extra burden from Government to local authorities. The language of the document was extremely difficult to understand and had caused great anxiety when discussed by Ware Town Council. He asked the Executive Member for Finance what the implications of the change in Council Tax Benefit funding would be for East Herts Council Tax payers. He also asked whether the change of funding had been accounted for within the Medium Term Financial Plan. Finally, he asked what effect the new arrangements would have on the Council Tax raised by East Herts Parish and Town Councils.

In reply, the Executive Member expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to update Members on this important issue. He stated that Officers had been doing a lot of work on this and that a report would be submitted to the Executive in due course. He referred to ongoing meetings with colleagues in neighbouring Authorities to ascertain whether a common position could be achieved. The implications were that the

burden would increase if the Council did nothing.

The Executive Member referred to the Medium Term Financial Plan in which this issue had been highlighted as a key risk leading to a potential shortfall. The impact of the changes would depend on the mitigating measures the Council took, all of which would need to be considered by Members.

128 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 22 MAY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 22 May 2012, be received.

129 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2012

RESOLVED – that (A) the underspending of £44k on property budgets be set aside and carried forward to 2012/13 to be applied to a programme of refurbishment of toilets at Wallfields, as detailed at paragraph 2.9 of the report submitted;

(B) £9k of the £50k funding for business improvement be set aside and carried forward to 2012/13 to be applied to the following projects:

- (1) Self service
- (2) Voice recognition phone service
- (3) Freedom of information request

as detailed at paragraph 2.10 of the report submitted;

(C) £50k of the £107k underspend on ICT licences be set aside and carried forward to 2012/13 to be applied to improvements to ICT resilience and business continuity and roll out of the new telephone system, as detailed at paragraph 2.11 of the report submitted; and

(D) in accordance with Financial Regulation 4.7.3, the carry forward of the capital budgets not spent in 2011/12, as set out in Essential Reference Paper 'D'

and summarised at paragraph 2.27 of the report submitted, be approved, and that these sums be added to the 2012/13 capital estimates.

130 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 19 JUNE 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the inquorate Executive meeting held on 19 June 2012, be received.

131 PARKING AND TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Leader outlined the background to the formulation of the policy statements that would shape the development of the Parking Service and the Council's wider approach to transportation issues across the District. He referred to the Executive's consideration of this matter and suggested that an additional statement relating to sustainable transport be included. He proposed the following:

- We will seek to maintain car parking income at current levels in real terms.
- We will seek to ensure that users pay for the parking service rather than the council tax payer.
- We will promote existing and explore new technologies to improve the overall convenience of parking in East Herts.
- We will seek where possible and appropriate to match parking capacity with demand.
- We will seek to develop and implement parking solutions that reflect local needs.
- We will make the economic vitality of East Herts a core consideration when developing parking services.
- We will continue to work with other partners to look at what additional sustainable transport services may be appropriate and deliverable.

In response to various comments and questions, the Leader referred to the Executive Member for Economic Development's proposed consultation with stakeholders and requested Officers to provide the information requested on the "Ringo" system via the Members' Information Bulletin.

Council approved the policy statements as now revised.

RESOLVED – that the policy statements as now detailed, be approved.

132 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY REVISIONS

Various Members commented on the current economic situation and the difficulties faced by town centre retailers. The Leader referred to the challenges faced by the Council and the need for a more proactive approach towards economic development.

In response to a question by Councillor M Wood, the Leader stated that the possibility of bidding for "Portas funds" in the second tranche could be revisited.

Councillor J Wing commented on the pressures for retailers caused by the inflexible lease arrangements of commercial landlords. The Leader agreed that this was a problem and that whilst the Council had little direct influence, Members could make a wider appeal, perhaps involving local MPs.

Council approved the revised Strategy as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) a revision of the Economic Development Strategy to incorporate amended strategic themes that will extend the timeframe of the strategy for another five years, be approved;

(B) the proposed key activities be noted; and

(C) the projects to be supported be funded by priority spend from the New Homes Bonus.

133 JOINT MEETING OF EXECUTIVE, COMMITTEES, ETC:
MINUTES - 16 MAY 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the joint meeting of the Executive, Committees, etc, held on 16 May 2012, be received.

134 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 23
MAY 2012

In respect of Minute 39 – Applications 3/11/2209/FP and 3/11/2210/LB, on a point of information, Councillor Mrs R Cheswright referred to her comment relating to weight restrictions of heavy goods vehicles in the 10th paragraph and advised that the actual restriction in force was 7.5 and not 4.5 tons as she had stated then.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 23 May 2012, be received.

135 CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
MINUTES - 29 MAY 2012

In respect of Minute 57 – Review of Comments, Compliments and Complaints April 2011 to March 2012, the Committee Chairman referred to Councillor J Wing's comment alleging a lack of grant support for bringing the Great Bed back to Ware. He stated that this comment had been accepted at the time as he did not have the full facts to hand. As a point of information, he read from an e-mail, a copy of which had been passed to Councillor J Wing. In view of the information set out in this e-mail, he invited Councillor J Wing to distance himself from his original comment. Councillor J Wing stated that he would consider and give a full response later.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29 May 2012, be received.

136 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 12
JUNE 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 June 2012, be received.

137 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 20
JUNE 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 20 June 2012, be received.

138 ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: MINUTES - 26
JUNE 2012

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 26 June 2012, be received.

139 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12

Council received and considered the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2011/12 as now submitted. On behalf of the Scrutiny Chairmen, Councillor D Andrews thanked all Scrutiny Members for their contributions throughout the year. In particular, he thanked the Scrutiny Officer for her superb support.

RESOLVED - that the Annual Report on the work of the East Herts Scrutiny Committees and Health Engagement Panel during 2011/12 be received.

140 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report seeking changes to the Council's Investment Strategy. He provided Members with the background to the current position that had been reached since Council had approved the Treasury Management Strategy in February 2012 (Minute 620

refers).

Councillor D Andrews referred to the informal investment board meetings and suggested that the Chairman of Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee should be invited to attend as an observer. The Executive Member had no objections to this suggestion and referred to the expertise that was available.

Councillor T Page asked whether in view of the Royal Bank of Scotland being implicated in the LIBOR rate-fixing scandal, it was appropriate for the Council to increase its investments with its banks. He asked whether the reward of investing with "A" rated banks instead of "AA" rated banks balanced the risk. He also asked whether it was more appropriate for the informal board meetings to be formalised. He further asked what role Sector, the Council's advisers played in respect of the investment board. Finally, he asked whether the Officer with overall responsibility for the Council's investments was employed full-time.

In reply, the Executive Member stated that the LIBOR scandal was a regulatory issue and therefore had no impact on his proposal. He commented that the ratings of the banks had changed, but that he was not proposing changing banks for investment purposes. In respect of the investment board, he believed that the current arrangements worked well and that it would not be appropriate for highly confidential discussions to be minuted. The board received professional advice from Sector, who attended the meetings. Finally, the Executive Member confirmed that the Council's Section 151 Officer was a full-time employee.

Council approved the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) counterparty investment limits for Lloyds and Nat West be increased to £20m with immediate effect;

(B) a minimum credit rating of "A" be applied for investments of up to 2 years with UK banks; and

(C) the Executive Member for Finance be given delegated authority to vary the Council’s investment strategy (as a matter of urgency) in agreement with the Leader, the Chairman of the Audit Committee and the Director of Internal Services and to report the changes to the Council.

141 CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report seeking adoption of an updated Code of Conduct. He apologised for its late production, but advised that the regulations had only just been issued by the Government.

In response to Members’ comments and questions, the Monitoring Officer undertook to provide further written advice on Disclosable Pecuniary Interests to Members and to arrange training.

Council approved the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that the Member Code of Conduct, as detailed at Essential Reference Paper ‘B’ of the report submitted, be adopted and the decision made on 16 May 2012 concerning arrangements for dealing with complaints be reaffirmed.

The meeting closed at 8.18 pm

Chairman
Date