

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2014, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman).
Councillors D Abbott, P Ballam, E Bedford,
R Beeching, Mrs D Hollebon, G Jones,
J Jones, J Mayes, P Moore, M Pope,
C Rowley, R Sharma, N Symonds,
K Warnell, G Williamson and J Wing.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Phillips, P Ruffles, S Rutland-
Barsby and M Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

462 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor G Williamson and
seconded by Councillor J Mayes that Councillor D
Andrews be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

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

463 APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors W Ashley, E Buckmaster, S Bull, D Hone, T Page, J Ranger, M Wood, C Woodward, B Wrangles and J Wyllie.

464 MINUTES – 12 FEBRUARY 2013

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the joint meeting held on 12 February 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

465 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14 (REVISED) TO 2016/17

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report setting out proposals for the Council's Capital Programme for the period 2013/14 (Revised) to 2016/17. Members were provided with a detailed breakdown of the process whereby the reports referred to in Minutes 465 – 467 fed in to the Consolidated Budget Report and the Medium Term Financial Plan. These were integral to the budget setting process for 2014/15.

Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for the estimates for five new schemes relating to the essential works that were required to pools and offices in line with the property maintenance plan.

In relation to a query from Councillor G Williamson in respect of the resources detailed on page 10 of the report now submitted, the Director of Finance and Support Services advised that the table at paragraph 2.11 detailed the costs of the disinvestment or internal borrowing that was being used to fund the capital programme.

Councillor G Jones commented on the difference between the original and revised estimates in the capital programme. The Director of Finance and Support Services confirmed that figures changed throughout the year as additional funding or schemes were added to the

capital programme. Schemes included in the programme were also subject to slippage or amendment and budgets were therefore adjusted accordingly.

Councillor J Wing commented on whether there should be greater flexibility in the use of resources in the capital programme. He sought and was given clarification as to how the capital grants budget was allocated and often resulted in the award being spent across more than one year. Councillor J Wing was advised he might wish to discuss the matter with the relevant Executive portfolio holder.

Councillor J Wing believed that the capital programme allocation for the play area development programme at The Bourne in Ware would be better spent in the Priory play area, as this was where most young people in the town went for play activity.

The Director of Finance and Support Services stated that no works would take place until a full design scheme was completed and a business case was approved. She emphasised that, unless the funding was identified in the capital programme at the start of the year, the capital could not be spent.

Councillor R Beeching queried whether the £25,000 allocation for works to Leventhorpe Pool was the total estimate or East Herts Council's contribution. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that this was the full amount and a full business case would be submitted to CMT before any works were carried out.

In response to a query from Councillor P Ballam in respect of Fanshawe Pool in Ware, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services advised that Officers had been instructed that there should not be any additional expenditure regarding the joint use pools until negotiations with the schools and Hertfordshire County Council had been resolved.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees resolved to inform the Executive that the Capital Programme 2013/14 (revised) to 2016/17, as now submitted, should be approved.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees considered that the draft Capital Programme 2013/14 (Revised) to 2016/17, as now submitted, should be approved.

466 FEES AND CHARGES 2014/15

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 2014/15 for a variety of services. Members were referred to Essential Reference Paper 'B' for the detailed suggested increases to discretionary fees and charges.

In response to a query from Councillor J Wing as to whether the fees and charges covered the costs of service delivery and whether any fees and charges created a surplus for any particular service, the Director of Finance and Support Services stated that statutory rules meant that some Council services could only cover the commercial costs of delivering a service. Some services were able to make a surplus to be re-invested in other services.

Councillor P Moore sought and was given clarification regarding the fees and charges in respect of farmers' markets in East Herts. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed that the markets usually experienced a downturn at this time of year.

Councillors M Pope, J Mayes and P Ballam asked a number of questions relating to the suggested increased

in pest control concessionary charges from £10 to £15. Members were advised that the existing £10 charge had been in place for a considerable length of time.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees resolved 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 meeting of Scrutiny Committees considered that the 2014/15 fees and charges, as detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report now submitted, should be approved.

467 REVENUE ESTIMATES, SERVICES – 2013/14 PROBABLE, 2014/15 ESTIMATE

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report that set out proposals for the Council's Service Estimates for 2013/14 (Probable) and the 2014/15 Estimates. Members were referred to Essential Reference Papers 'B' and 'C' for the full details of the revenue budget and revenue estimates.

Councillor R Beeching stated that he had been out with Community Safety and Police Officers on Christmas Eve and New Years Eve and had observed that taxi marshalling had been non existent and this was a major community safety issue.

In response to a number of points made by Members in terms of whether East Herts Council should fund the provision of taxi marshals on these two key nights, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services suggested that Councillor R Beeching might wish to discuss the issue with the Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment. Members supported this suggestion.

Councillor G Jones queried why the expenditure on IT Services was showing as reducing to £674,680 for

2013/14 and to £489,620 for 2014/15. The Director of Finance and Support Services advised that these figures reflected the realisation of savings resulting from the new IT shared service arrangements.

Members resolved to inform the Executive that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees had supported the probable revenue budget for 2013/14 as well as the estimates for 2014/15.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees support the probable revenue budget for 2013/14 as well as the estimates for 2014/15.

468 **CONSOLIDATED BUDGET REPORT 2014/15 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report recommending the consolidated budget for 2014/15 and the 2017/18 Medium Term Financial Plan. The Director of Finance and Support Services apologised that it had not been possible to publish the report earlier as the key information had not arrived from central government until very close to Christmas.

Members were reminded that this information was central to the Council's budget setting process for 2014/15 and for future years. Members were also advised that all of the implications of the previous three reports on the Agenda were included in this report.

Members were further advised of a number of significant changes for local government finance in 2014/15, namely the cessation of Council Tax Benefit which had been replaced with a locally determined and managed Council Tax support scheme. The localisation of Business Rates had transferred the risks and rewards for increases and decreases in Business Rate yield to the Authority.

Members were also provided with a summary of the

arrangements associated with the 2013 pension fund triennial valuation. The Director of Finance and Support Services concluded that details of the treasury management strategy would be considered by the Audit Committee on 22 January 2014.

In response to query from Councillor M Pope regarding the new homes bonus, Members were advised that the known figures were considered secure until at least the next comprehensive spending review, although Brandon Lewis MP had advised that a review of new homes bonus would be undertaken in April. The Director of Finance and Support Services stressed that East Herts Council was not as reliant on the new homes bonus as some other Local Authorities.

Councillor N Symonds commented on what East Herts Council was doing in terms of bringing empty homes back in to use. Members were advised that there was an ongoing piece of work involving Officers in housing and revenues and benefits. Members were reminded that the Authority had a housing strategy for East Herts that covered empty homes.

In response to comments from Councillor J Wing regarding whether more resources needed to put into the pension fund, the Director of Finance and Support Services commented that the pension fund had performed somewhat better than originally expected.

Members were advised that Officers had sought advice in terms of what would be a sensible amount to put into the fund at the present time. Officers had been advised that, although the current position might change, as performance had been better than expected, the Authority might not have to invest in the fund in the near future.

In response to comments from Members relating to Reserves, the Director of Finance and Support Services advised that it was for the Authority to judge when it was prudent to allocate its Reserves and it was for Members

to make suggestions to Officers.

The Executive Member for Finance commented that consultant advice had been sought as part of an appraisal into property investment. He stated that Members should always be mindful of the appropriate levels of resources held in reserve.

The joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees resolved 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 meeting of Scrutiny Committees considered that the Consolidated Budget should be approved, as detailed in the report now submitted.

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

Chairman
Date