

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
10 JUNE 2014, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Pope (Chairman)
Councillors D Abbott, W Ashley, R Beeching,
E Buckmaster, A Dearman, C Rowley,
G Williamson and B Wrangles.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors S Bull, P Moore and P Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Neil Adkins	- Community Safety Officer
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Gillian Field	- Engineering and Environment Manager
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Kylie Perrin	- Engineering Officer
George A Robertson	- Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services
Ian Sharratt	- Environmental Manager
Brian Simmonds	- Head of Community Safety and Health Services

44 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor R Beeching and seconded by Councillor E Buckmaster that Councillor C Rowley be appointed Vice-Chairman of Environment Scrutiny Committee for the 2014/15 civic year.

RESOLVED – that Councillor C Rowley be appointed Vice-Chairman of Environment Scrutiny Committee for the 2014/15 civic year.

45 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors P Ballam and C Woodward. It was noted that Councillor R Beeching was substituting for Councillor P Ballam.

46 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the civic year. He stated that any Member wishing to include an item on the agenda for scrutiny, should contact the Scrutiny Officer.

48 ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the future work programme for Environment Scrutiny Committee for 2014/15. The Chairman referred to the Crime and Policing Act which had gained Royal Assent in March 2014 and of the possible need to review the implications of the new Act at a future meeting of the Committee. The Head of Environmental Services confirmed that the changes would make a significant impact on the Council and that once further guidance had been received, Officers could move forward.

In regard to the issue of Anti-Social Behaviour, Councillor R Beeching asked whether there was the possibility of services such as licensing, enforcement and public health working together. The Head of Environmental Services confirmed that this was in hand. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that a review of the joined-up service response to the wider public health agenda was planned for consideration at the Health and Wellbeing Panel on 14 October 2014.

On the issue of grass verge and pavement parking, the Chairman confirmed that Officers were waiting to see whether any work on this issue was going to be carried out by Hertfordshire County Council before reviewing any local response.

RESOLVED – that the work programme be approved.

49 CONTRACT PERFORMANCE 2013/14

The Head of Environmental Services submitted a report on the current performance on Waste Services (refuse and recycling, street cleansing) and Grounds Maintenance. A presentation was provided outlining the highlights achieved over the last 12 months.

Councillor E Buckmaster congratulated Officers on the report and the positive results achieved. He queried what had been done to ensure the public knew what they could and could not recycle, especially in respect of the changes to soft plastics. The Head of Environmental Services outlined what steps had been taken to create public awareness including placing “stickers” on the blue lidded bins.

Councillor R Beeching said that he was pleased to see that the litter along the A414 had been removed before the grass verge had been cut. He also referred to the income achieved regarding commercial waste collection versus the issue of the cost of its disposal. He further referred to a recent dog chipping event he had attended and queried how the Council could work with other vets in the area to build on this work.

Finally, he also referred to the Rivers Orchard and asked whether the Council could cut the grass there.

The Head of Environmental Services agreed to write to Members regarding the costs of disposing of commercial waste and confirmed that the Council has made a “small surplus”. He confirmed that the Council worked with a number of vets and the Dogs Trust and was trying to get as many dogs chipped before the new law came into effect in 2016. The Head of Environmental Services outlined the background to the Rivers Orchard and confirmed that as this land was in private ownership, the Council could not cut the grass. Councillor E Buckmaster commented that he was sure that Sawbridgeworth Town Council would cover the costs of the grass cut once a year.

Councillor B Wrangles referred to increases in fly-tipping and the possibility there might be a knock on effect on East Hertfordshire, if the Hoddesdon Recycling Centre was to close. The Head of Environmental Services agreed that the increase in fly tipping was not “good news” and referred to the positive results of partnership working with the Police and other agencies, in terms of “Stop and Search” initiatives. In relation to the possible closure of Hoddesdon Recycling Centre, he stated that Hertfordshire County Council was only at the consultation stage and that Officers would respond at the appropriate time.

Councillor D Abbott referred to the fact that 800 properties could not accommodate blue lidded recycling bins. The Head of Environmental Services explained why this had not been possible, due to the terraced nature of the properties or being sited on a steep hill and that this number was separate to any issue with communal properties (flats). He added that the service was trying to roll out kerbside recycling to as wide a number of flats as possible. In response to a query from Councillor R Beeching about the possible use of red or yellow sacks for those properties without blue lidded bins, the Head of Environmental Services confirmed that these householders were happy to use a recycling box.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the current performance of the Council's main environment management term contracts be noted.

50 PARKS AND OPEN SPACES - PROGRESS REPORT ON HIGH LEVEL STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Head of Environmental Services submitted a report on the progress on the High Level Action Plan created as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2013-2018 reviewed and adopted by the Council in October 2013.

Councillor E Buckmaster suggested two initiatives in Sawbridgeworth, which would benefit from improvement; The Green and the toilet blocks. Councillor R Beeching also asked that any new signage in parks and open spaces be kept to a minimum. The Head of Environmental Services stated that negotiations were taking place with the Town Council in relation to the toilets and of the need to develop service level agreements. In relation to open spaces, there was no provision in the capital programme but the Council was keen to undertake measures to improve a number of open spaces. Reassurance was given that the new information boards and signage would be placed appropriately at the entrance points with minimal 'way markers' used within the natural setting.

In response to a query from Councillor R Beeching regarding planned circular walking routes, Officers confirmed that they would link up.

In response to a query from the Chairman, regarding the play audit, Officers confirmed that an audit in terms of equipment had been undertaken and they were now progressing matters to a higher level in terms of equipment for "natural play". It was anticipated that the audit would be completed by the end of 2015.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED - that the progress on the High Level Action Plan be received and noted.

51 TEMPORARY ROAD CLOSURES; ASSOCIATED
TIMESCALES AND THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report about the process used in effecting temporary road closures in East Hertfordshire.

Councillor J Wyllie thanked the Officers for the full and detailed report which had been submitted at his request. He raised the issues associated with Bishop's Stortford Carnival last year, the problems associated with poor communication and queried whether the process could be simplified. The Head of Community Safety and Health Services explained how the process worked in terms of the Council acting as a facilitator and its liaison with Hertfordshire Highways. The difficulties of applicants using out of date forms was discussed. He concurred with the Member regarding the need for better communication. Councillor J Wyllie suggested that all Town Clerks be forwarded new forms. This was supported.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and

(B) Officers be requested to forward new application forms to all Town Clerks.

52 FLOODING - WINTER 2013 AND THE LESSONS LEARNED

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an account of the steps taken by the Council in dealing with the flooding since November 2013 and the lessons subsequently learned.

By way of highlighting the complexities involved in terms of dealing with flooding, the Head of Community Safety and

Health Services explained that an area in Stanstead Abbots affected by flooding, had involved eight different owners or agencies, each responsible for different stretches of water or areas of management. Officers provided information regarding what grants were available to those affected by the flooding, including grants available to introduce resistance and resilience measures to vulnerable areas and the Business Support Scheme which offered up to £25,000 to businesses affected by the flooding. So far, eight grant applications had been received from residents although others were expected once the complex paperwork had been completed.

The Head of Community Safety and Health Services stated that as far as the “lessons learned” were concerned, there had been a very good response from staff who had been ready to assist up to 100 potential victims of flooding at Wodson Park.

Councillor G Williamson thanked the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services and staff for their support to residents. He acknowledged the complexities associated with multiple agencies being involved and stated that the public did not have an understanding of these facts and details.

Councillor P Ruffles stated that good communication was the key. He asked whether the Council knew what the effects might be in Hertford, of the sluice gates opening downstream particularly to residents of The Folly. The Chief Executive and Director of Community Services stated that the sluice gates were opened and closed by the Council only on the instruction of the Environment Agency.

Councillor R Beeching thanked Officers for the report and referred to the flood plains and the huge area it covered. He sought clarification on what Councillors could do in similar situations. The Head of Community Safety and Health Services explained the Council’s role in relation to the Hertford Resilience Planning Team and that Members would benefit from attending an Emergency Planning Training Course planned for 10th or 11th September 2014.

Councillor C Rowley also thanked the Officers for the report and in having the resources to help up to 100 people.

Officers explained that flood surgeries were also continuing in affected parts of the District. It was noted that at Puckeridge recently, people were queuing to speak to the Officer and particularly about the difficulties residents were having in trying to find contractors willing and able to quote.

Councillor D Abbott thanked Officers for the report and questioned what was being done at the bottom of Parsonage Lane, Bishop's Stortford which flooded regularly in heavy rains. Officers explained that discussions were continuing with Hertfordshire Highways on this matter.

The Chief Executive and Director of Community Services referred to the extraordinary circumstances of the flooding in February 2014 and that no one could prepare for every eventuality. He suggested that Members might wish to encourage the public to think about their own responsibilities in advance adding that the Authority's Emergency Planning response was, in the first instance, about looking at individuals' safety and people at risk.

Members thanked the Officers and in terms of the lessons learned, acknowledged the pressure a longer emergency event might have on the Council's resources and the services' ability to cope.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and

(B) in terms of the lessons learned, the pressure of a longer emergency event and the Council's resources and the services' ability to cope be acknowledged.

53 ENVIRONMENT HEALTHCHECK JANUARY 2014 - MARCH 2014 AND OUTTURNS FOR 2013/14

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and

Community Services submitted a report setting out the performance of key indicators relating to Environment Scrutiny for the period January to March 2014 and set out the 2013/14 Performance Indicator (PI) outturns.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services referred Members to the supporting Essential Reference Papers stating that overall, they indicated a “solid story” for this Committee adding that the vast number of PIs were green, two were amber (i.e. slightly below target) and two were red. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services provided a summary of why these targets had not been reached.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that performance for the period January 2014 to March 2014 and the 2013/14 performance indicator outturns be received.

54 SERVICE PLANS - END OF YEAR MONITORING: 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14

The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report on the 2013/14, 2012/13 and 2011/12 Service Plans End of Year Monitoring. The report provided a summary of the Council’s achievements against its priorities for 2013/14 and of the outstanding eight Service Plans’ actions from 2012/13 and 2011/12.

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services explained that the 2013/14 figures had already achieved 62% on items contained within the Service Plans, the majority of the actions with a revised completion date which supported the “Prosperity” priority. In summary, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services said that it was a “good news story”.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding the objective within Essential Reference Paper “B”, “Reduce Fuel

Poverty” and the “Affordable Warmth Strategy “ item within the Work Programme, the Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed that the latter would include the former when the report came to this Committee in September 2014.

Councillor R Beeching was happy to see the sum of £129,000 being given to the Citizens’ Advice Bureau. The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services stated that the Council had renegotiated with the CAB as part of their re-organisation. He provided background information about the possibility of providing more base funding to cope with the increase in demand for their services, adding that he believed the CAB in East Herts was one of the best in the County.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the progress made against the Council’s priorities and the status of the outstanding actions detailed against 2013/14, 2012/13 and 2011/12 Service Plan Actions be received.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chairman
Date