

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
17 FEBRUARY 2015, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Pope (Chairman).
Councillors D Abbott, W Ashley, P Ballam,
E Buckmaster, C Rowley, G Williamson and
C Woodward.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Phillips.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Environmental Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
David Thorogood	- Environmental Co- Ordinator

530 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of
Councillor B Wrangles.

531 MINUTES – 11 NOVEMBER 2014

In respect of Minute 331 – Minutes – 9 September 2014,
the Environment Strategy and Development Manager
provided an update regarding the proposed Micro Hydro
Scheme at Hertford Theatre. He stated that Officers had

received detailed technical feedback from the Environment Agency in respect of flow data, flooding and the Eel pass. Members were advised that further updates would be provided to the Committee in due course.

In respect of Minute 333 – Environment Scrutiny Work Programme, the Head of Environmental Services confirmed to Councillor C Woodward that the Council's website had been updated with a statement covering the views of the Authority regarding the release of helium balloons and sky lanterns from the Council's land.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

532 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that this was the last meeting of the Committee during the 2014/15 civic year. He thanked Members and Officers for their hard work and assistance.

The Chairman advised there would be a briefing for Members at 6.00 pm on 4 March 2015 in the Council Chamber prior to the Council meeting. The presentation would cover the proposed joint working arrangements with North Herts Council on waste and street cleansing services.

533 UPDATE ON COMMUNITY ENERGY

The Executive Member for Community Safety and Environment submitted a report updating Members in respect of initial schemes that Officers were exploring in relation to facilitating community energy activities within the District.

The Environment Strategy and Development Manager stated that the Community Energy Saving Initiative was a form of collective action to reduce, purchase, manage and generate energy in the community. Members were

advised that there were clear linkages between this initiative and the national carbon reduction agenda, fuel poverty and energy efficiency initiatives.

The Committee was reminded that Collective Energy Switching was a relatively new initiative in the UK. This scheme had been set up to assist residents and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) with reducing energy bills. The Environment Strategy and Development Manager reported that this scheme was usually promoted through a council or some other trusted independent body such as a consumer group.

Members were provided with a detailed breakdown of how the scheme would operate as well as a summary of the background of this initiative. The main purpose was to encourage residents to group together and use their collective power to negotiate a better price for their energy.

The Environment Strategy and Development Manager reported that the Government had recently launched a Community Energy Saving Competition aimed at providing grants of up to £20,000 to encourage local project activity. However, the grant scheme had a very short open period of just a couple of weeks and it had not been possible to submit a specific bid for East Herts.

The Committee was reminded that community energy was about working in partnership with the community and as such East Herts had already been active in becoming one of two lead local Authority members in a Hertfordshire wide Community Energy Network. A conference and workshop was planned for the summer and this would be coordinated by the Herts Sustainability Forum and led by East Herts Council. Further update reports including details of other possible initiatives would be presented to the Committee at future meetings.

Councillor E Buckmaster commented on whether there was a critical mass that needed to be achieved to make

the tariff switching project worthwhile. Members were advised that the framework was owned by the Local Government Association but the procurement service was run by the North East Procurement Organisation and utilised a switching service operated by a company called iChoosr.

The Chairman commented on how the collective energy proposals could be promoted in East Herts. The Environment Strategy and Development Manager referred to the usual free publicity such as the Link publication and Members raising awareness via their contacts with local community groups.

Councillor Buckmaster commented that it was down to Members to utilise their contacts with residents in their respective District wards. Councillor C Woodward stressed the importance of not overlooking the e-mail, Twitter and Facebook links the Authority had with the community as these were the people most likely to use the internet when switching energy providers.

Councillor P Ballam queried whether residents who used pre-payment meters would be able to use iChoosr and the Collective Energy Switching scheme. The Environment Strategy and Development Manager confirmed that such residents could use the scheme so long as they were not in debt to their current provider.

The Committee received the report.

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

(B) the Environment Strategy and Development Manager submit an update report to the Committee on 23 February 2016.

534 ENVIRONMENT HEALTHCHECK OCTOBER TO
DECEMBER 2014

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and

Community Services submitted a report on the performance of key indicators for Environment Scrutiny Committee for the period October to December 2014.

In respect of EHPI 2.1e – Planning Enforcement: Service of formal notices, Councillor Woodward expressed concerns regarding planning enforcement in general. He referred in particular, to action regarding listed buildings, unauthorised signage and Article 4 directions regarding trees.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that a full time post in planning enforcement was currently going through the recruitment process. Members were advised that overall performance should improve once the post was filled. The Director stated that enforcement policy prioritised more serious matters such as the protection of listed buildings, with issues such as unauthorised advertisements being given a lesser priority.

Councillor Woodward commented that his general concerns regarding planning enforcement extended to when the team had been operating at full strength. He stressed that this was a fundamental issue that needed to be addressed.

The Chairman asked whether Members were happy to add EHPI 2.1e to the request from the joint meeting of Scrutiny that Environment Scrutiny Committee review EHPI2.1d with a view to raising the 2015/16 target from 75% to a higher figure regarding Planning Enforcement: Initial Site Inspections. This was supported.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the reported performance for the period October to December 2014 be received; and

(B) EHPI 2.1e (Planning Enforcement: Service of formal notices) be added to the request from the

joint meeting of Scrutiny that Environment Scrutiny Committee review EHPI2.1d (Planning Enforcement: Initial Site Inspections) at Environment Scrutiny Committee on 9 June 2015.

535 EVALUATION OF SCRUTINY 2014/15 AND WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The Chairman submitted a report reviewing 2014/15 and setting out the future work programme for Environment Scrutiny Committee for 2015/16.

Councillor C Woodward expressed concerns that the invitation for Ward Councillors to play a new role in monitoring the progress of management plans arising from Conservation Area Appraisals would take important duties away from Officers responsible for looking after important buildings in East Herts. The Chairman advised that this request had come from the Leader of the Council.

In response to a number of comments and queries from Members, the Chairman advised that more details regarding the make-up of the proposed reference groups would be presented to the Committee meeting on 9 June 2015, with the first 'annual report' being presented to Members at their final meeting of the 2015/16 civic year.

The Scrutiny Officer invited Councillors to evaluate the work of the Committee from a Member perspective to ensure that the overview and scrutiny function was a Member led process. Members were asked to pay particular attention to progress against headline actions and targets.

Members were reminded that there would have to be some prioritisation regarding the many items on the work programme in what would be a very busy year for the Committee. The Scrutiny Officer stressed that the work programme would be influenced by the new administration following the District Council elections in

May 2015. Members were requested to provide the Scrutiny Officer with feedback as soon as possible and not later than the 23 March 2015.

Members were advised that the scrutiny of EHPIs 2.1d and 2.1e would be added to the work programme for the meeting on 9 June 2015. The work programme would also be amended to include a review of fees and charges for the meeting on 8 September 2015. A report in respect of community energy would be considered at the meeting due to be held on 23 February 2016.

The Scrutiny Officer further advised that joint working with North Herts Council in respect of waste and street cleansing would have to be considered at the meeting on 9 June 2015 prior to Executive on the 7 July 2015. The car park management system had to be considered at the September 2015 meeting prior to Executive on the 6 October 2015. The review of changes to Environmental Crime policies had to be considered on 8 September 2015 to allow consultation to commence in the autumn.

The Committee was advised that the remaining items could be moved subject to the direction of the new administration and the views of the new Committee. The Chairman commented that the relevant Executive portfolio holders should be invited to contribute to the meetings in respect of a number of items on the work programme. This was supported.

The Committee approved the work programme, as now amended and detailed.

RESOLVED – that the work programme, as now amended, be approved.

The meeting closed at 7.46 pm