

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON  
TUESDAY 20 JULY 2010, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman)  
Councillors R Beeching, R N Copping,  
R Gilbert, J Hedley, G E Lawrence, J Mayes,  
J O Ranger, J P Warren and M Wood.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A P Jackson and P A Ruffles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Assistant
Ceri Pettit	- Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Performance Manager
Neil Sloper	- Head of Customer Services and New Media

134 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman stated that Hertfordshire County Council had published a short scrutiny report relating to progress on Pathfinder initiatives. The document included a number of recommendations for consideration. Members should contact the Scrutiny Officer if they wished to have a copy of this document.

## RESOLVED ITEMS

### 135 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 May 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 136 DRAFT 2009/10 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on the draft 2009/10 Annual Governance Statement.

The Director of Internal Services advised that the report highlighted a number of measures that had been identified as part of required enhancements to internal control arrangements. The Committee was referred to pages 33 – 35 of the report now submitted.

The Director advised that an action plan had been produced following on from the previous year's action plan. The Committee was invited to consider any further items for the action plan.

Councillor R Gilbert commented on whether this action plan was part of the risk register. The Director advised that the action plan had been through the risk management process.

Councillor R H Beeching queried whether the action plan was associated with potential changes to Executive arrangements and the committee structure. The Leader replied that Grant Shapps MP had stated that there was an opportunity for Local Authorities to consider whether to revert back to the committee system. In response to a query from Councillor J Hedley, the Leader confirmed that most Local Authorities the size of East Herts Council used the system currently in place at this Authority.

Members agreed an amendment to the recommendation

in that the Committee has no changes or additions to make on the content of the document.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED – that the Audit Committee be advised that this Committee has no changes or additions to make on the content of the document.

137 REVIEW OF COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS APRIL 2009 TO MARCH 2010

The Head of Customer Services gave a presentation in respect of the GovMetric Customer Feedback System. He detailed how the system was used as a tool to capture customer comments at the point of service delivery. The system was capable of compiling feedback from a variety of sources into a database, which could then be utilised to extract reports and analysis.

The Committee was advised of the technology that was in place for the collection of data via GovMetric. Members were shown a demonstration of how the Council's website allowed customers to leave feedback for the Authority. The Head of Customer Services advised that GovMetric was available via all methods of contact available to the public.

Members were advised that once the telephone monitoring part of GovMetric had been rolled out to Customer Services, other teams would be able to use the system to collect customer feedback at no cost to the Service. The Head of Customer Services detailed the questions that were asked by the GovMetric system. He summarised how the system worked in analysing customer feedback. He also detailed some examples of actions that had been taken following customer feedback.

Councillor R H Beeching commented that the Council's website had been set up with someone in mind who already knew the answers to a given query. He queried

whether the webpage had been trialled on customers who might struggle to find the answers they sought.

The Head of Customer Services advised that the web team worked with services, as part of the Customer Service Improvement programme, to ensure that web pages were focussed on enabling customers to resolve queries. Members were advised that any information should be written in terms the customer would recognise. An example was given of a piece of work completed for the Housing Options team, in the form of a question and answer tool to replace pages of written information.

The Programme Director of Change advised that Planning Online was an example of a website function that allowed Officers to focus their efforts on processing applications and dealing with more complex queries. Members of the public could now find out information for themselves far more readily.

The Head of Customer Services submitted a report to provide a summary of comments, compliments and complaints received between April 2009 and March 2010. He reported that the 3Cs system had just completed a full year of operation. He advised that this system was used to manage formal comments, compliments and complaints.

Councillor R N Copping stated that the system might not give an accurate cross section of customers' views. The Head of Customer Services advised that if a response was not possible by the first deadline for responding to a complaint, a letter would be sent to update the customer on the progress of his complaint.

Councillor R Gilbert emphasised that the timescales on planning applications often dictated how long a customer had to wait for a response. He stressed that it was not possible for planning officers to acknowledge and respond to every letter that was received.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED - that the comments, compliments and complaints detailed in the report now submitted, be noted.

138 CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2011/12 - 2014/15

The Leader submitted a report that detailed the Council's four year Corporate Strategic Plan. The Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Performance Manager stated that the plan outlined what key outcomes the Authority hoped to achieve at a strategic level in the next four years.

The Committee was advised that the plan was supported by services and also influenced the drafting of medium term financial plans and service plans. Members were also advised that the plan placed a particular emphasis on sustaining performance, achieving efficiencies and enabling communities to influence service delivery.

The Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Performance Manager commented on whether the priority 'Pride in East Herts' should be merged with 'Caring about what is built and where'. Councillor R N Copping supported this suggestion.

The Committee was advised that the plan was reviewed annually and would be used in drafting the 2011/12 budget setting process. The Head of Strategic Direction summarised the recommendations detailed in the report now submitted.

Councillor M Wood stated that "processing planning applications in line with local expectations" was an objective that did not match up to reality. He also stated that training for new Members should be incorporated in light of the forthcoming District elections in 2011.

The Leader stated that he would consult with Officers in

respect of the wording of the outcome in relation to Member training.

Councillor J O Ranger stated that where the words 'long term' appeared in the plan, this should be changed to 'longer term'. He also believed that the Authority should articulate what was meant by the term affordable. The Leader stated that the meaning of the term affordable was relative, and that social housing suggested a lesser standard of property to some.

Councillor R H Beeching sought clarification on how wider community safety would be affected. The Leader stressed that it was a major challenge for the East Herts LSP to determine where best to allocate reduced level of reward grant. He stated that green issues had been a casualty at the expense of the harder issues of community safety. The Leader referred to the joint work with the police to protect the numbers of PCSOs.

The Committee noted the report.

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| <u>RESOLVED</u> - that the Executive be informed that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee believes that (A) the Corporate Strategic Plan for 2011/12 to 2014/15 be supported; | CE/<br>DIS |
| (B) the words 'long term' that appear throughout the document be replaced with 'longer term';   | CE         |
| (C) the priorities 'Pride in East Herts' and 'Caring about what's built and where' should be merged;  | CE         |
| (D) the service standard on planning applications be amended to 'Process planning applications in line with local targets'; and   | CE         |
| (E) training for local councillors should be included as a short and medium term outcome.   | CE         |

139 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/12 TO 2014/15

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The Director of Internal Services submitted a report inviting Members to consider the Medium Term Financial Strategy through to 2014/15. The Leader stated that this report was an integral part of the budget setting process and would provide a framework for assumptions as the strategy was finalised.

Councillor R Gilbert sought and was given clarification in respect of earmarked reserves. The Leader confirmed that the MTFP ensured that budgeting for the next financial year was carried out with a clear sense of direction for future years.

Councillor J O Ranger acknowledged that there might be a small increase in salary for the lowest paid. He also referred to the likelihood of some level of pay increase in 2012/13, and the fact that other local authorities had experienced staff reductions resulting from efficiency savings.

The Director stated that the MTFP identified year on year savings that could equate to staff reductions. Councillor R Gilbert commented on whether the pay grading system was dependent on the performance of Officers. He referred to the spinal pay system and commented on whether there was a risk that those who worked hardest might feel undervalued.

The Director stated that the Authority did have the power to withhold a pay award for an Officer who was underperforming. Councillor J O Ranger suggested that the word 'regradings' be removed from Essential Reference Paper 'C' in relation to pay allowances. This was supported by Members.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED - that (A) the amended Financial

DIS

Strategy and Policy on Reserves be recommended to the Executive for subsequent approval at Full Council;

(B) the Executive be advised that the proposed planning assumptions set out in this report be used to update the MTFP; and DIS

(C) the revised MTFP be reported back to the August 2010 meeting of this Committee. DIS

#### 140 CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK (C3W) PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Programme Director of Change submitted a report updating Members on the progress of the Council's C3W programme. The Committee was advised that C3W had been a key subject of presentations to Officers at the most recent staff briefings.

The Programme Director referred to the successful operation of the Customer Service Centre at Charringtons House. He reported that the centre had initially been staffed by Officers of East Herts Council and Circle Anglia. Members were advised that the Police, Job Centre Plus and the Credit Union might also have a presence at Charringtons House.

In relation to the Wallfields Reception, Members were advised that work was ongoing to improve the lower foyer and reception desk to provide better access to services. An instant payment machine was also due to be installed. The Programme Director stressed that there was a lot of good work being undertaken in support of the C3W process.

The Committee was advised that Business Improvements were allowing Officers to assist customers with more complex queries much earlier than was previously possible. This was being made possible by Planning Online, the introduction of self service for parking queries and improvements to Revenues and Benefits software.



The Programme Director advised that the Authority had received a £12,000 grant from Improvement East. The funds had been used to set up a Business Process Improvement (BPI) Team. The team was aiming to spend time with two key services every 3 months on the BPI process so that all of the larger services had been completed by the summer of 2011.

The Committee was advised that a very detailed specification for the building refurbishment work to Wallfields had been completed. The Programme Director stressed that the ground floor would be brought up to the same standard as the rest of Wallfields. He commented that services would be moved around the building to enable the works to be carried out.

The Programme Director stated that works to Wallfields would start in October and should be completed by April or May 2011. The project plan would be updated to reflect of the completion of Charringtons House and the Council Chamber improvements. Members were advised that the Council Chamber project had been delivered £20,000 under budget.

The Committee was advised that the C3W report for the next meeting would include updates in respect of the Electronic Document and Record Management System (EDRMS) and the implementation plan for the BPI process.

In response to a query from the Chairman, the Programme Director confirmed that the Authority was no longer paying rent on the Causeway Building. The Council was obliged to vacate the building to the same standard covered by the survey carried out when the property deal had been concluded.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED - that the progress of the Changing the Way We Work Programme (C3W) be noted.

141 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

The Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny

Committee submitted a report inviting the Committee to review its work programme.

The Scrutiny Officer mapped out the programme for considering the emergency budget reports. A report on the emergency budget had been added to the work programme for the 24 August 2010 meeting of the Committee.

Members were invited to consider the savings identified in the report now submitted. The Scrutiny Officer invited Members to identify any areas for concern so that Officers could provide more information at the next meeting.

The Chairman suggested that the Partnership Protocol report could be submitted to the 30 November 2010 meeting of the Committee, to make more room on the August agenda for discussion on the emergency budget item. The Committee approved this amendment to the work programme.

Councillor J O Ranger requested more detail in respect of savings identified in relation to restructuring within Strategic Direction. The Committee also requested more detail in relation to implications of the £56,000 saving from the restructuring of Electoral Services. Members sought clarification on the implications of reducing support for the Chairman and deleting support for non statutory meetings.

The Committee was advised that the proposals had been put forward by Heads of Service. The identified options had been considered by CMT and Council. The Leader of the Council stated that although some of the savings options would not be greeted with enthusiasm, they were necessary to keep the Council Tax at an acceptable level and to protect key services.

Members requested more information on the invest to save option for Revenues and Benefits. Councillor Ranger requested more detail around the justification for

£250,000 for a new financial management system.

The Director of Internal Services undertook to bring a report to the August meeting of this Committee, which clarified each of the budget items identified for further discussion and addressed the questions raised by Members.

The Committee decided to approve the work programme subject to the comments detailed.

RESOLVED – that the work programme now submitted be approved subject to the comments detailed.

The meeting closed at 9.13 pm

Chairman	.....
Date	.....