

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 25 AUGUST 2015, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor P Phillips (Chairman).
Councillors M Allen, R Brunton, S Bull,
J Cartwright, M Casey, R Henson and
M Stevenson.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Alder, P Ballam, E Buckmaster,
M Freeman, J Goodeve and G Williamson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ryan Brock	- NGDP Graduate Trainee
Philip Gregory	- Head of Strategic Finance
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Ceri Pettit	- Corporate Planning and Performance Manager
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

235 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of
Councillor M Pope.

236 MINUTES – 14 JULY 2015

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held

on 14 July 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

237 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed the public present to the meeting. He apologised to Members for missing the meeting held on 14 July 2015 and reminded the Committee that the meeting scheduled for 20 October 2015 had been cancelled in favour of a budget and service planning training event.

238 MEMBER TRAINING – FINANCE AND DECISION MAKING: QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN MAKING THE 'BUSINESS CASE'

The Head of Strategic Finance gave a presentation in respect of the questions and issues Members should consider when assessing a business case. He responded to a number of questions from Members. Members were advised that the presentation would be uploaded to the Members' web pages.

RESOLVED – that the presentation be received.

239 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman submitted a report setting out the Committee's future work programme for 2015/16. The Scrutiny Officer advised that the results of the residents' survey would be reported to the first meeting of the Committee in the 2016/17 civic year as the results would not be available until March 2016.

Members were advised that the survey would go out later than usual as a result of the elections and the subsequent new Executive. The Committee approved the 2015/16 work programme, as now detailed.

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

240 QUARTERLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK – QUARTER 1
– JUNE 2015

The Director of Finance and Support Services submitted a report in respect of the finance and performance monitoring for East Herts Council for 2015/16 as at June 2015. Members were advised that the new version healthcheck report gave a lot more detail and a more complete suite of information.

The Head of Strategic Finance set out a number of minor non-material amendments to the report and referred to the supporting Essential Reference Papers. He provided a detailed breakdown of the revenue position of the Authority and referred to the new format of the recommendations that were more relevant to the body that was considering them.

The Director and the Head of Strategic Finance responded to a number of queries and comments from Members regarding salaries and earmarked reserves. Members were advised that monthly reports were received by the Corporate Management Team (CMT).

In response to a request for background information from Councillor M Stevenson, the Director confirmed that the budget for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) would be overspent by £19k as 4 posts were being funded rather than the budgeted 3 and this was being managed as a pressure within the service.

The Corporate Planning and Performance Manager and the Director responded to a number of Members' queries regarding East Herts Performance Indicators (EHPIs). The Director undertook to review if it was possible to further breakdown the information regarding the time taken to process housing benefit new claims and change events, following a request by Councillor M Stevenson.

The Committee commented that extra detail to explain staffing increases would be helpful in understanding why

it was happening. Also, the Committee requested that further details on the actions being taken to regularise over/underspends would also be helpful. These comments would be forwarded to the Executive.

Members received the report and supported the recommendations now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee (A) has no comments to make in respect of the following:

- (1) the revenue budget forecast overspend of £144k;
 - (2) proposed slippage on the following capital schemes:
 - ICT Funding for Applications, £40k ;
 - Disabled Facilities Grant £50k;
 - (3) the current explanation for long term trends:
 - EHPI 181 – Time taken to process Housing Benefit new claims and change events;
 - EHPI 9.5 - Percentage of ICT Calls Resolved at First Point of Contact; and
- (B) supports the approval of the following:
- (1) additional capital funding of £17k for the Grange Paddocks heat exchanger, and;
 - (2) carry forward requests from 2014/15 to 2015/16 of £139k; and
- (C) the comments now detailed be forwarded to the Executive.

introduced a draft of the Corporate Annual Report, and documented the key achievements of the Council in relation to the corporate priorities and challenges over the financial year.

The Graduate Management Trainee advised that this was a public facing report that provided a helpful tool for Members. He explained that the report was a live working document and he detailed the key sections of the report.

Councillor J Cartwright queried whether the 'Other' section in the pie chart on page 99 of the report could be more detailed given that it was such a significant proportion of the whole. The Director of Finance and Support Services confirmed that more detail would be included.

Following a brief debate, Members agreed that the wording of the 'what we have not done' example for each priority should be retained for transparency and the wording should be more constructive in its tone so as not to blame others for a lack of progress and to give a more realistic record.

The Committee supported the report and the comments now submitted to the Executive.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that,
(A) the 2014/15 Corporate Annual Report be supported;

(B) the 'Other' section in the pie chart on page 99 of the report be more detailed in respect of what it covers given that it was such a significant proportion of the whole; and

(C) the wording of the 'what we have not done' example for each priority should be retained for transparency, and to give a more realistic record, should be more constructive in its tone so as not to

blame others for a lack of progress.

242 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES CALCULATIONS AND LEVELS

The Executive Member for Finance and Support Services submitted a report that provided Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to review the current structure of fees and charges within the remit of the Committee. The views and comments of Members would be taken forward during the process to set next year's budget.

The Head of Strategic Finance confirmed to Councillor M Allen that some fees and charges were statutory and were set nationally. He suggested that Members should consider the position at neighbouring authorities and reminded the Committee that amending fees and charges was a Member decision. The Director of Finance and Support Services reminded Members that every Local Authority had to publish its fees and charges.

The Director and the Head of Strategic Finance responded to a number of questions and comments from Members regarding fees and charges. The Committee supported the fees and charges within its remit and asked for more detail in respect of usage data against the fees and charges where the Authority had discretion (e.g. hire of rooms).

Members also requested information to give them a better understanding of the full cost of the service for these items.

The Committee supported the recommendations now detailed.

RESOLVED – that (A) the fees and charges within the remit of Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee be supported;

(B) Members be given more detail in respect of usage data against the fees and charges where the Authority had discretion (e.g. hire of rooms); and

(C) Members be given information to give them a better understanding of the full service delivery costs of the fees and charges in (B) above.

243 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Leader of the Council submitted a report that presented the 2014/15 Annual Governance Statement and the 2015/16 Annual Governance Statement Action Plan as detailed in the report submitted.

Councillor M Casey sought and was given clarification as to the general nature of the enhancements to internal control arrangements. The Committee supported the Statement but suggested that the Action Plan be more detailed and SMART as set out in the best practice list quoted in the report.

RESOLVED – that the Executive and Audit Committee be advised that, (A) the 2014/15 Annual Governance Statement be supported; and

(B) the Action Plan be more detailed and SMART as set out in the best practice list quoted in the report.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Chairman
Date