

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 24 AUGUST 2010, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman)
Councillors R N Copping, J Hedley,
G E Lawrence, J Mayes, J O Ranger,
P A Ruffles and J P Warren

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Clark and N P Clark

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Ben Darrah	- Graduate Trainee
Lorna Georgiou	- Performance and Improvement Co-ordinator
Philip Hamberger	- Programme Director of Change
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Mekhola Ray	- Community Projects Team Manager

199 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Beeching, R Gilbert and M Wood. It was noted that Councillor

P A Ruffles was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor R Beeching.

200 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Ben Darrah, graduate trainee to the meeting. He was in attendance to present the East Herts Annual Report 2009/10.

RESOLVED ITEMS

201 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

202 MONTHLY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - JUNE 2010

The Leader of the Council submitted an exception report on finance and key performance indicators relating to the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee up to June 2010.

Councillor J O Ranger asked if the Council was taking an over cautious approach to investments and could achieve a better return. The Director of Internal Services assured Members that this had been considered and he was satisfied the Council was investing appropriately. Councillor Ranger asked that this be kept under review.

Councillor N P Clark referred to the surpluses the Council had achieved over a number of years when it had expected to overspend. The Director of Internal Services said the Council was constantly seeking to improve its financial forecasting. In the light of the Government's plans for spending cuts, he did not expect to see a large surplus in future years. He undertook to supply Councillor N P Clark with the commentary he had received from the Council's financial advisors.

Councillor D Clark asked why the numerous savings identified by services had not been included in the figures. The Director said these would be taken into account at a later stage of the

budget process.

In response to various questions, the Director gave further information on matters including interest rates used in calculations and calculations on the Causeway car park and public conveniences.

The Committee was asked to consider whether certain PIs that were not on target should be reported to Corporate Management Team.

Councillor J O Ranger pointed out that the Council had decided to do only the most important health and safety inspections because of staff shortages. He suggested the target for this PI could be lowered.

In response to a question, it was explained that the Directorate Management Teams considered figures for sick leave. This was also considered by the Human Resources Committee.

Councillor Ranger said the figures for dealing with complaints were not good and this was a matter of great importance to the public. He suggested a task and finish group should be set up to look at this.

The Committee decided to make the comments detailed below to the Executive.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee believes that the health and safety inspection target should be lowered to take account of the Council's decision to carry out fewer inspections; and

DIS

(B) consideration should be given to setting up a task and finish group on complaints and the speed of response.

203 CORPORATE ANNUAL REPORT

The Leader of the Council submitted the initial draft of the Council's Annual Report for 2009/10. The report documented the Council's significant achievements and actions for each of the corporate priorities over the financial year. It also contained financial information which provided an overview of the Council's financial position and performance and a statement on contracts. This was the second year the document had been produced.

Ben Darrah, graduate trainee asked the Committee for any suggestions or amendments which would help to demonstrate the work of the Council better.

The Committee suggested some drafting amendments on car parking and Bennington Wind Farm. Members commented on the usefulness and easy to read style of the report. They asked that their thanks to the Officers for their hard work on it be recorded.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers the East Herts Annual Report 2009/10 should be approved subject to the minor amendments now detailed; and DIS

(B) the Officers be thanked for their excellent work on the Annual Report.

204 MTFP SAVINGS

The Director of Internal Services reported on budget options identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2011/12 where the Committee had asked for more detail at a previous meeting. These options had yet to be adopted by the Authority.

The Committee expressed serious concern about reducing the support for the Chairman of the Council in the manner suggested. It believed that the Chairman played a major role

in public relations for the Council and would need more support than proposed as well as needing continuity in staffing.

On proposals for restructuring electoral services, Members asked if adequate staffing would be available as problems with elections, for example, could also affect the Council's reputation adversely. The Director of Internal Services assured Members that corporate resources would be found to ensure statutory electoral services functions were undertaken.

The Head of Democratic and Legal Support Services explained the basis of a proposed saving if Committee services no longer supported non-statutory (and possibly certain statutory meetings). Councillor N P Clark asked for reassurance that such meetings e.g. Local Strategic Partnership Board would still be documented. The Director of Internal Services assured him this would be the case.

In response to a question, the Director of Internal Services said fewer staff would be needed in Strategic Direction because the Comprehensive Area Assessment had been abolished. It also appeared that the Government would require less of this type of work from local authorities in future.

Councillor N P Clark asked if Business Process Improvement (BPI) procedures had been applied to these areas. The Programme Director of Change said that Democratic and Legal Support Services were among the next services to be subject to BPI. However, decisions could be and needed to be taken in advance of this using the judgement of the management for example if a planned retirement had left a vacant post, which could generate savings if left unfilled. Councillor D Clark expressed concern that BPI had not taken place first. The Programme Director of Change stressed that a BPI review would not be undertaken for every staffing decision that had to be made.

The Committee decided to make the comments now detailed to the Executive.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee notes the proposed savings but considers the proposed reduction in support for the Chairman of the Council would give inadequate time and continuity to the Chairman who has a major public relations role for the Council. DIS

205 UPDATED MTFP

The Director of Internal Services submitted a revision of the MTFP (Medium Term Financial Plan). This used revised planning assumptions and latest estimates for grants, impact of approved and projected savings and retained existing planning contingencies.

The Director explained some of the differences in the revised MTFP as well as the basis for some of the calculations. The MTFP would be used as the first stage in planning the budget.

Councillor N P Clark commented that the Council was taking a pessimistic view of its finances. In response, the Director emphasised the need to make as many savings as possible. There would be further work to do on what savings could be achieved.

The Committee decided to make the comments now detailed to the Executive.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee accepts the revised MTFP as a basis for the first stage of budget considerations but notes that it does not necessarily identify all savings which may be found. DIS

206 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 asked the Committee if it wanted to set

up a task and finish group on public engagement. Members had agreed the highest priority topics for review when planning the scrutiny programme had related to public engagement. The Committee agreed this group should be set up with the scoping document to be decided by the group members.

The Committee decided it was satisfied with the changes implemented following the report of the task and finish group on report writing and a further report was not needed.

Councillor D Clark asked that the Minutes record that she did not agree with this. She thought reports could be shorter and contain all the options available.

The Scrutiny Officer suggested that the item on Procurement Action Plan should be deferred until a Procurement Officer was appointed. The Committee agreed to this.

The Committee approved the work programme with the amendments detailed below and decided to set up a task and finish group on public engagement

RESOLVED – that (A) the work programme now submitted be amended as follows:

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- deletion of update from Report Writing Review task and finish group;
- deferment of Procurement Action Plan until a Procurement Officer is in post; and

(B) a task and finish group be set up to help shape the corporate strategy for public engagement.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chairman
Date