

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
17 OCTOBER 2017, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Allen (Chairman)
Councillors D Abbott, M Casey, G Cutting,
B Deering, I Devonshire, H Drake,
M Freeman, Mrs D Hollebon, P Kenealy and
M Stevenson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Alder, E Buckmaster, P Ruffles
and T Stowe

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Nathan Bookbinder	- Policy Officer
Isabel Brittain	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Fiona Corcoran	- Scrutiny Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Liz Watts	- Chief Executive
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

208 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Goodeve, P Moore and N Symonds. It was noted that Councillor P Kenealy was substituting for Councillor Goodeve.

209 MINUTES - 12 SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

210 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Committee Chairman stated that he had attended a training session for Chairmen recently which he had found very useful.

The session had included training on debating techniques which encouraged him to consider limiting the time spent on debating a topic and to ensure that sufficient time was spent on distilling the comments made before coming to a recommendation. Councillor Mrs D Hollebon, whilst acknowledging his viewpoint, stated that if the agenda was heavy then Members needed to be encouraged to summarise their concerns and avoid repetition. She commented that any debate should not be stifled by a time limitation.

211 UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING - SUMMARY BRIEFING

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing provided a summary of his Portfolio including updates on:

- Affordable Housing
- Private Empty Homes
- Community grants and other funding
- Arts, Leisure and Culture
- Community Development, Public Health and the District Health Offer

The summary was further enhanced by a presentation on how the Executive Member's Portfolio focussed on community development and the prevention of ill-health. He explained how this could be achieved with a joined up approach, working with partners from various sectors to help achieve not

only the Council's corporate priorities, but to enhance peoples' lives, targeting inequalities and contributing to the local economy.

The Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing explained the aim of Social Prescribing in helping to identify ill health early and what could be achieved by early intervention and through physical activity. The Executive Member explained that the Community Grants Policy had been revised with a greater focus on those in most need. He referred to the important role of the District and Housing Associations in ensuring the right mix of housing to assist with mobility and to address under occupancy issues.

The Executive Member summarised the function of the Community Wellbeing Forum and the roles of Members in supporting the Forum's aims and future aims of the Health and wellbeing Strategy.

In response to a query from Councillor G Cutting, the Executive Member provided clarification on the issue of district community databases and the need to refresh this information. Councillor Cutting referred to the issue of affordable housing and the need for developers to build more bungalows. It was acknowledged that such properties had a bigger footprint. The role of the District Plan in this process was discussed.

Councillor Mrs D Hollebon referred to difficulties she was experiencing with the Home Improvement Agency.

Councillor B Deering sought and was provided with clarification in relation to private empty homes and bringing them back into use. The Executive Member explained the action that could be taken in getting empty properties back into use. The Head of Housing and Health provided a summary of the successful action taken by the Council in addressing this issue.

The Committee Chairman, on behalf of Members thanked the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing for the summary

of his portfolio and of current developments.

RESOLVED – that the summary on the Portfolio held by Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing and current developments, be noted.

212 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Executive Member for Economic Development submitted a report on the progress made in relation to economic development up to the period 30 September 2017 and the Council's vision for the future.

The Head of Communications, Policy and Strategy provided a context of the local economy and what was happening nationally following Brexit. He provided an overview of the Council's vision to stimulate economic development and growth and how this was being driven forward referring Members to the progress made as detailed.

The Committee Chairman sought and was provided with clarification in relation to a query on the Priority Theme (Lobbying for the right infrastructure) and how effective the Council was in lobbying for change.

Councillor I Devonshire was pleased to hear of the interest shown in Launchpad. He referred to the limited availability of industrial parks. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy acknowledged the limited availability of industrial parks adding that the District Plan had identified that 11 hectares of land was needed in Bishop's Stortford, Ware and Gilston.

Councillor B Deering agreed that land for industrial uses was critical. He referred to rural areas and the problems associated with weak broadband and suggested that this problem should be fed into the planning process. He questioned and was provided with clarification on Town Centre retail vacancy rates. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy agreed to write to Members regarding the figures shown for Hertford under the theme (supporting the visitor economy).

Councillor H Drake praised the introduction of business incubators in Bishop's Stortford and suggested that this should be incorporated as a condition in the planning negotiation process. She sought and was provided with clarification on the jobs created with the help of European funding and the need to continue to lobby heavily for the right to infrastructure, particularly in the light of the additional homes in Bishop's Stortford. The Committee Chairman assured Members that Mark Prisk MP was actively lobbying for the right infrastructure for the District.

In response to a question from Councillor M Stevenson, the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy agreed to write to her with more information on the Hertford and Ware land study. Councillor Stevenson referred to the fact that landowners were running down industrial land and turning them into residential.

Councillor P Kenealy expressed concern about the loss of commercial units to residential. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy referred to the development guidance set out within the District Plan (currently under examination).

Councillor M Freeman was encouraged by the way that Council Officers were working with their counterparts at HCC to accelerate development. He stated that it was up to local MPs to apply pressure on the Rail Minister to get funding approved.

It was acknowledged that in progressing matters in relation to Network Rail to achieve an additional platform at Stevenage, Mark Prisk MP was behind the push to secure 12 train carriages and four tracks.

In relation to funding and grants, Councillor G Cutting felt that financially, the allocation was not unreasonable given the fact that Bishop's Stortford was getting the lion's share of housing development. He asked Officers to look at farms in relation to small business development proposals.

Members noted the progress made on developing an economic development agenda.

RESOLVED – that the progress made in developing an economic development agenda and vision, be noted.

213 FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICY AND ASSOCIATED PILOT PROJECTS

The Executive Member for Finance and Support Services submitted a report on the efforts made to create a financial sustainability strategy to deliver more and higher quality services as central Government grants reduced and in order to address the current budget gap. The Head of Strategic Finance and Property provided a summary of the report.

Councillor P Kenealy supported the need for the Council to be financially sustainable and sought assurances that the Council would not use its position to gain an unfair competitive advantage.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property explained that the Policy, when agreed, would be developed ethically and sensitively with each proposal supported by a thoroughly developed Business Case.

Councillor M Casey referred to the borrowing opportunities available to the Council in terms of investing in property. Councillor B Deering urged a cautionary approach when interacting with the private sector on proposed projects. Councillor T Stowe referred to opportunities to work in partnership to develop financial sustainability.

Councillor I Devonshire stated that the Council should review its fees and charges which he believed were 15% lower than in some neighbouring districts. The Head of Strategic Finance and Property explained that the Council aimed to achieve full cost recovery on its fees and charges and agreed to review this further.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs D Hollebon regarding the Project Manager, the Policy Officer explained by example, how internet advertising would be managed.

Members debated at length the ethical and moral implications of including as a pilot project, a Community Benefit Lottery. The Head of Strategic Finance and Property explained that those interested would be signed up via a Direct Debit and a limit could be imposed. The Committee Chairman suggested that any such decision on any of the pilot projects should be handled ethically and with sensitivity. This was supported.

Councillor M Casey referred to the Business Case templates attached as Essential Reference Papers and sought assurances that these would be thoroughly researched and completed with due regard to market conditions.

Members noted the update and recommended that the Executive be advised that Overview and Scrutiny Committee support, in principle, the need to adopt a financial sustainability policy and full financial sustainability strategy, including the creation of a self-funding post to drive the projects identified forward.

RESOLVED –that the Executive be advised that (A) the need to adopt the financial sustainability policy, as detailed in Essential Reference Paper “B” of the report submitted, be supported;

(B) the development of a full financial sustainability strategy be supported;

(C) the creation of a self-funding post within Finance and Support Services be supported to drive financial sustainability forward within the pilot projects identified namely:

- Community Benefit Lottery
- Exploration of cost recovery approach to fees and charges
- Physical Advertising

- Advertising on the Council's website; and

(D) the pilot projects as detailed, be supported by thoroughly researched business cases developed ethically, sensitively and with due regard to market conditions.

214 WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report detailing the Committee's future work programme. The Scrutiny Officer provided an update of the report.

It was proposed that the Climate Change Task and Finish Group and the Fuel Poverty items be rescheduled for Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2018 in order to provide sufficient time for the Task and Finish Group to meet and report back. A briefing note would be presented to Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2017.

Councillor G Cutting referred to Scrutiny Proposals he had submitted in relation to Manchester Airport Group (Parking) and Residents' Parking Zones and queried why these had not been included on the agenda. The Scrutiny Officer explained that Officers were working on scoping proposals to find the most appropriate way of reporting on both issues.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that in future, she would add any scrutiny proposals received to the Draft Work Programme so that Members were reassured that the items were not lost.

Members approved the draft Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – that the draft Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as now detailed, be approved.

The meeting closed at 9.08 pm