

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 5  
NOVEMBER 2019, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor J Wyllie (Chairman)  
Councillors S Bell, M Brady, S Bull,  
K Crofton, I Devonshire, H Drake,  
J Frecknall, M Goldspink, D Hollebon,  
D Snowdon and A Ward-Booth

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors G McAndrew

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Emma Cheesman	- Contract Manager - Urbaser
Mike Edley	- Interim Scrutiny Officer
Jess Khanom- Metaman	- Head of Operations
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Pulham	- Parking Manager
Simon Russell	- Strategic ICT Partnership Manager
Jamie Sells	- Joint Waste Services Manager
Helen Standen	- Deputy Chief Executive

Su Tarran

- Head of Revenues  
and Benefits  
Shared Service

211 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Ranger and M Stevenson. It was noted that Councillor S Bull was substituting for Councillor J Ranger.

212 MINUTES - 11 JUNE 2019

It was moved by Councillor I Devonshire and seconded by Councillor M Goldspink that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

213 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman said that the report on the ICT Joint Strategy was an issue that he had agreed to accept onto the Agenda on the grounds of urgency in order to facilitate the business of the Council.

The Chairman reminded Members that this meeting was the last to be attended by Mike Edley as the Interim Scrutiny Officer for East Hertfordshire District Council.

## 214 COUNCIL TAX LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability submitted a report in respect of proposed changes to the Council Tax long term empty homes premiums from April 2020 (option B as detailed in the report submitted).

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service used a PowerPoint presentation to present the report. She provided a definition of long term empty properties and referred to the exemption designations. Members were provided with data broken down by duration regarding the numbers of long term empty properties.

The Head of the Shared Service detailed the history before and since 2013 in respect of mandatory discounts and premium charges on properties that had been empty for more than 2 years. She referred to the Impact, Collectability and Avoidance (ICA) Review and summarised the percentage impact of the premium charged each month.

The Head of the Shared Service said that the preferred option was to introduce a maximum premium of 100%, increased from 50%, for properties that had been empty for more than 2 years. She confirmed to Councillor I Devonshire that there was another characterisation for properties that were empty as uninhabitable. She said there were no exemptions from the charge for these properties unless the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) agreed to remove them from banding. It was for the VOA to determine this not

the Council.

The Head of the Shared Service responded to queries from Councillors M Goldspink and K Crofton in respect of new homes bonus and whether there was any leeway in terms of properties that were being refurbished or rebuilt in the event of fire damage. She said that there was no appeals mechanism at the Council to decisions that had been made by the valuation office.

The Head of the Shared Service confirmed to Councillor J Frecknall that the proposed recommendation was not about raising money. She stated that it was more about encouraging changes in the usage of empty properties.

It was moved by Councillor K Crofton and seconded by Councillor M Goldspink that the Executive be advised that Option B be recommended to Council and Officers investigate the feasibility of an appeals process on the grounds of whether a house was habitable.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Executive be advised that Option B be recommended to Council for implementation from April 2020, with a review of its impact during 2021 to consider if further increases were appropriate in our local context;

(B) Officers investigate the feasibility of an appeals process on the grounds of whether a

house was habitable.

## 215 WASTE MANAGEMENT

The Head of Operations submitted a report providing an overview of the Waste Management Service in East Herts over the past year. The report also provided comparative data of nearest neighbours in respect of missed bin collections and recycling rates.

The Head of Operations introduced and welcomed the Joint Waste Services Manager and the Urbaser Contract Manager to the meeting. She reminded Members that the Joint Waste Services Contract had commenced in early May 2018. Members were advised of the layers of governance within the Waste Management Service, which included monthly performance management regime meetings.

The Head of Operations said that the performance indicators underpinned the performance regime. She commented on a number of performance indicators including the indicator in respect of missed bin collections. Members were advised that Officers were satisfied with the performance of Urbaser in East Herts and in particular, the rate of 30 missed bins per 100,000 collections was very good.

The Head of Operations commented on the recycling rate of 50% and the relevant European Union (EU) target. She said that an option in future was to reduce bin size from 240 litres to encourage an increase in the recycling rate across the District.

Councillor K Crofton commented on failed bin collection rates when collection days had changed with the new contract. The Head of Operations said that data available could be manipulated with the system available to Officers. She referred to the impacts of extreme weather, both hot and cold, on the bin collection process.

In response to a query from Councillor J Frecknall, the Head of Operations stated a percentage lead performance regime would allow a more thorough and effective measure of performance management.

The Head of Operations clarified to Councillor M Goldspink that the 17 complaints received to date about bins/waste amounted to 40% of the 42 complaints received across all services in 2019/20. Councillor S Bell commented on the performance of Three Rivers in respect of refuse collections and recycling.

The Joint Waste Services Manager confirmed that Officers were talking to Council partners. He said that Three Rivers used smaller 140 litre bins and Officers were talking to this Council and others in order to share best practice. Councillor K Crofton moved and Councillor I Devonshire seconded, a motion that the recommendation for the noting of the update report, be supported.

RESOLVED – that the update report be noted.

216 UPDATE - TASK AND FINISH GROUP (PARKING)

The Chairman of the Parking Task and Finish Group, Councillor H Drake, submitted a report on the work of the Member group that had looked into aspects of parking policy in East Herts. She said that the Members were due to meet twice more before a final report was submitted to the 10 December 2019 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor M Brady referred to a specific issue of commuter parking in Hertford and congestion. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group invited Councillor M Brady to identify the postcode and specific roads to the parking team at East Hertfordshire District Council.

Councillor M Goldspink referred to main recommendation vii as part of paragraph 2.7 on page 44 of the report. She believed that free parking was very useful for blue badge motorists and shoppers with disabilities. The Chairman reminded Members that a full discussion would take place at the 10 December 2019 meeting of the Committee.

The Task and Finish Group Support Officer commented on the qualifying thresholds for new resident permit schemes, which had to be individually designed, as this would promote a more efficient use of resources. He said that making changes to existing schemes was a very costly process and there were good reasons why all residents parking schemes operated on an individual basis.

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group commented on the significant legal and time implications of preparing a new residents parking zone. She reiterated the importance of schemes being tailored to address the problems of a specific area.

Councillor D Hollebon proposed and Councillor A Ward-Booth seconded, a motion that the work undertaken thus far by the Task and Finish Group be received and the Committee's comments be fed back to the Task and Finish Group. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the work undertaken thus far by the Task and Finish Group be received;  
and

(B) the Committee's comments be reported to the Task and Finish Group.

## 217 SCRUTINY OF SOCIAL HOUSING EVENT - AGREEMENT OF TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman of the Social Housing Task and Finish Group submitted a report that provided the basis for a discussion by the Committee for shaping the Terms of Reference and Membership of a Task and Finish Group to better understand the issues and challenges faced by residents and housing associations.

The Interim Scrutiny Officer said that the intention was that a scrutiny day or half day events could be set up to consider these issues and challenges. He stated



that key lines of enquiry could include input from a residents' forum or a tenants' representative group to pick up any concerns.

Members were advised that the Task and Finish Group could consider how the Council could work with providers to assist residents. Members should consider appropriate representatives to invite and the Task and Finish Group would need to work with the Head of Housing and Health in respect of the intended lines of enquiry.

The Committee was advised that an interim report would be submitted in February with a final report submitted by the end of the 2019/20 civic year. Councillor M Goldspink said that 2 events could be considered with 1 held in Hertford and the other in Bishop's Stortford. Members were advised that way forward could be a single provider event which would receive the input from 2 residents' events.

Councillor J Wyllie proposed and Councillor J Frecknall seconded, a motion that the Task and Finish Group would be formed of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillors M Goldspink, M Brady and N Symonds. The Group would explore how the Authority and Councillors could support tenants and improve service standards.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Task and Finish Group would be formed of the Chairman of the

Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillors M Goldspink, M Brady and N Symonds; and

(B) the Task and Finish Group would explore how the Authority and Councillors could support tenants and improve service standards.

## 218 URGENT ITEM - ICT JOINT STRATEGY

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report that presented Members with the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Joint Strategy. The Strategic ICT Partnership Manager gave a PowerPoint presentation on the proposals. He said that the report had already been before the Executive at Stevenage Borough Council and would be submitted to East Herts in December 2019.

The ICT Manager referred to ageing IT equipment and infrastructure and said that there had been underinvestment in IT. He said that there had been no oversight of applications and there was a need to reduce complexity in terms of hardware and the number of applications and devices in use.

The ICT Manager believed that there had been no oversight or clear governance of IT until 9 months ago and there had been an unsustainable capital underinvestment in IT for 10 years. He said that neither East Herts nor Stevenage was benefiting from the reduction in ICT costs that would be gained by partnership working. Members were advised that a 2 person team had been set up within the ICT service to

manage the security network and oversee email and web filtering. He emphasised that 90% of outgoing emails were now encrypted.

The ICT Manager detailed some key benefits of a shared ICT Service including less reliance on multiple passwords, more cloud based operations and replacement of storage solution equipment and switching equipment that was 13 years old. He detailed where investment would be made in key infrastructure including microwave solutions and a 24/7 web based solution.

The Members were presented with a slide as part of the presentation that displayed lifecycles for technology in use at the Council. He mentioned Office 365 and detailed the governance arrangements for ICT going forward. He said that the Leadership Teams at both Councils would be considering reports regarding capital and revenue budgets for the ICT Joint Strategy. Members were advised of a number of measures of success including empowering customers and benefits in respect of better security and preventing cyber-attacks.

Councillor D Hollebon was assured by the ICT Manager that both East Herts and Stevenage Officers had consulted the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (SOCITM) for advice. Councillor Hollebon said that Essential Reference Paper 'A' was missing any information regarding Health and Wellbeing – Issues and Impacts. The Deputy Chief Executive said that this would be altered before the Executive meeting.

Councillor D Snowdon commented on the use of 2 data centres. The ICT Manager said a move to cloud based solutions would reduce the reliance on 2 data centres and cost based decisions could be made as to how much was stored at these centres. The Deputy Chief Executive commented on laptops for Officers by the end of the 2019/20 financial year, subject to usage rules. She said that the budget was already in place to transform the ICT network and avoid future significant outages.

In response to a comment from Councillor S Bell regarding Microsoft Teams and potential savings, the ICT Manager said that Office 365 was a significant investment and, once installed, it should be championed and used extensively as this would reduce costs. Councillor S Bull commented on device speeds and difficulties with multiple passwords. The ICT Manager stated that Office 365 allowed single sign on which would reduce the need for multiple passwords for Officers and Members.

Councillor I Devonshire moved and Councillor H Drake seconded, a motion that the Executive be advised that delegated authority should be given to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Head of Strategic Finance and Property, to negotiate and agree a new ICT Shared Service Agreement with Stevenage Borough Council. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that

delegated authority should be given to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Head of Strategic Finance and Property, to negotiate and agree a new ICT Shared Service Agreement with Stevenage Borough Council.

## 219 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Interim Scrutiny Officer provided Members with a draft Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and Members' views sought in relation to the items on the work programme. He updated Members in respect of the Hertford Town Centre item as well as the issue regarding climate change and the new climate change forum.

The Interim Scrutiny Officer said that the cycle storage Task and Finish Group was subject to discussions with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Scrutiny Officer regarding the Terms of Reference. He confirmed to Councillor A Ward-Booth that 2 issues on each Overview and Scrutiny agenda was a good number.

The Chairman referred to the matter of public participation and the requirement for Full Council to amend the Council's Constitution in respect of public speaking. In reply to a comment from Councillor D Snowdon, Members were reminded that the 10 December 2019 meeting of the Committee would be held at 7 pm in Charringtons House.

It was moved by Councillor J Wyllie and seconded by Councillor H Drake that the draft Work Programme, as amended be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - that (A) the draft Work Programme as amended, be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.41 pm

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