

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE WAYTEMORE ROOM, THE
CAUSEWAY, BISHOP'S STORTFORD ON
TUESDAY 25 JANUARY 2011, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Woodward (Chairman)
Councillors P R Ballam, A D Dodd,
G McAndrew, J O Ranger, V Shaw and
J J Taylor

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors R Beeching, E Buckmaster,
L O Haysey

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Bennett	- Housing Strategy and Policy Officer
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Mark Kingsland	- Leisure Services Manager
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Mathew Nicolson - SLM Limited

522 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors P Grethe, D Hone and G E Lawrence. It was noted that Councillors G McAndrew and J O Ranger were substituting for

Councillors p Grethe and G E Lawrence respectively.

523 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

524 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that Hertford Theatre was now operational. There had been a sell out of tickets for the first showing of The King's Speech. It was anticipated that a full report would be presented to Members at a further meeting.

525 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL

In the absence of Councillor D Hone, the Committee Chairman read out a written update from her. Members noted that the last meeting of Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny had taken place on 14 December 2010. There had been a Scrutiny Café exercise on their budgets with Members split into groups and Councillor D Hone had taken part in the Group examining Performance Standards and Targets. The issue would be considered further at the meeting on 18 February.

It was noted that a review of the pilot urgent care centres in Hertford and Cheshunt was underway.

The Minutes of the Health Engagement Panel held on 19 October and 9 December 2010 were received.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Minutes of the Health Engagement Panel held on 19 October 2010 and 9 December 2010 be received; and

(B) the update from Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny be noted.

526 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE LEISURE CONTRACT -
PRESENTATION BY SLM LIMITED

The Chairman welcomed Mathew Nicolson from SLM to the meeting. It was noted that apologies had been submitted from Duncan Jefford. The Chairman referred Members to the agenda where further information concerning SLM's performance was set out in a number of Essential Reference Papers attached to the report now submitted.

Mathew Nicholson gave a presentation on the progress made so far. Members were reminded that the contract had commenced on 1 January 2009 following a £3.58M investment by the Council. Hartham Leisure Centre had been re-launched on 30 January and Grange Paddocks on 6 February 2010.

In terms of key performance indicators in relation to gym membership:-

Fanshawe (998) December 2009 compared to (850) December 2010

Grange Paddocks (1382) December 2009 compared to (2676) December 2010

Hartham (1920) December 2009 compared to (2328) December 2010

Leventhorpe (141) December 2009 compared to (150) December 2010.

In summary, there had been a total of 1563 new members overall with membership at all centres totalling 6004. Key performance indicators were provided in relation to the swim scheme.

Mathew Nicholson referred to the customer satisfaction surveys which had been carried out covering five key areas: swimming lessons, group exercise classes, fitness, reception and cleanliness. In summary, 80% + of respondents to the survey overall had rated the centres positively. The results were broken down on individual centre basis with issues of cleanliness being highlighted at Leventhorpe and Ward

Freman. It was suggested that, as these centres were used by a lot of school children and were not as aesthetically as up to date as the other fitness centres, this might contribute to the overall perception of the centres.

SLM managers would be monitoring the situation and take steps as necessary.

Updates were provided in relation to the Presdales development, a modular building comprising changing rooms, officials' room, toilet and shower rooms. The building was also DDA (Disabilities Discrimination Act) compliant. It was noted that a Clubhouse facility would be started once the lease agreements had been completed with Bury Rangers and Ware Cricket Club. Assurances were provided that local users would not be prejudiced by lease arrangements with other clubs.

Mathew Nicholson reported on the success of community events in 2010 including the Dance in the Park on Hartham Common and the community event in Jackson Square, Bishop's Stortford. The Chairman congratulated SLM on their achievements. He appreciated the openness and acknowledgement of any shortfalls. He stated that Grange Paddocks was excellent and welcomed the establishment of crèche facilities at more centres.

Councillor J J Taylor congratulated SLM on their achievements. She was pleased to see the high customer satisfaction rating in relation to Fanshawe and of the efforts which would be made by SLM to increase gym membership.

Councillor Mrs P R Ballam raised the issue of a fitness leaflet which she had received over Christmas. Mathew Nicholson agreed to look into the matter for her. She also raised the issue of the Presdales development and whether Ware teams would be disadvantaged in any way. Assurances were provided that no one would be disadvantaged by the proposal envisaged for the Presdales facility. The Head of Community and Cultural Services added that no users would be disadvantaged. He explained how and who would use the facility.

Councillor G A McAndrew stated that he was impressed with the statistics and to have doubled the gym figures at Grange Paddocks in the current economic climate was an achievement. He commented on the efforts made to keep Leventhorpe afloat and congratulated both staff and SLM on their achievements.

Councillor V Shaw referred to the cleanliness issue at Fanshawe. Mathew Nicolson stated that cleanliness issues could be notorious for getting low scores in a survey. He added that a new contact cleaning company had been employed. He stated that the issues might be around perceptions of cleanliness given the age of the buildings. He referred to the fact that a lot of school children used Leventhorpe and who could create the impression of the facility not being clean in moments. The Director of Customer and Community Services stated that the figures from the survey had collated using Gov.Metric adding that it was not a scientific method of assessment but was a useful indicator of areas which needed further investigation.

Councillor E Buckmaster stated that part of the issues about cleanliness might be because of the design of the area and of children passing through with dirty shoes. SLM accepted that the cleaners needed to get out there quicker to clean when needed.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked Mathew Nicolson for attending and giving the presentation. He stated that he appreciated the developments and improvements reported by both SLM and Officers and that plans for improvement outlined by SLM would be monitored.

RESOLVED – that (A) the presentation and update be received and noted,

(B) that SLM and officers be congratulated for achieving such positive outcomes and that future plans for improvement be monitored.

UPDATE

The Executive Member of Housing and Health submitted an update highlighting the successful performance on the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008-11. The report also sought support for a revision to the priorities to be incorporated within the new Housing Strategy due in October 2011 and which would cover the period 2011 to 2014. The aims and objectives of the current strategy were outlined in the report now submitted.

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager stated that the Council and its partners had made significant progress in the actions contained within the plan, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted. Of particular note:-

Action 1: the Council's success in increasing the supply of affordable housing including affordable rented housing and shared ownership and carrying out a strategic Housing market Assessment with partner local authorities.

Action 6: continuing to secure funding that provides an optimum mix of affordable housing in terms of type and tenure in the right location;

Action 16: Undertaking a comprehensive house condition survey in 2009/10.

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager explained that with help from Planning Policy and Private Sector housing the housing service has begun the process of developing the next Housing Strategy. The Government was also proposing significant changes to housing, planning laws and policies which would impact on the Council's housing strategy and planning policies. She referred to the recent agreement with the Housing and Communities Agency of a Local Investment Plan and their ability to provide grant funding for affordable housing and other powers relating to provision and explained the role of the Council's Local Investment Plan (LIP) in seeking funding from the HCA for affordable housing. The LIP had been developed from four overarching "Challenges" these were:

Challenge 1: to maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes whilst ensuring the best use of existing housing

Challenge 2: meeting the needs of a growing elderly populating

Challenge 3: meeting the needs of vulnerable people and stronger communities

Challenge 4: Economic Development, employment and skills

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager explained that the East Herts' LIP focussed on affordable housing developments and identified priorities for housing specific groups of people and vulnerable groups. Officers therefore felt that Challenges 1, 2 and 3 identified in the LIP be used to develop the next Housing Strategy and associated Action Plan.

Councillor G McAndrew referred to the £100m proposed by the Government to bring empty homes back into use and referred to a number of empty homes in Bishop's Stortford. The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager referred to the Government's Localism Bill which was proposing that more work be done around empty homes.

The Chairman suggested that Councillor McAndrew speak on the matter to Officers separately and referred to the 700 empty homes in around the county of which, 200 were in Bishop's Stortford. He referred to a previous request to the Executive for more housing Officers to progress the issue of empty homes. Councillor G McAndrew suggested that the Executive be reminded about this. Councillor J O Ranger said that the Council's target of bringing 10 empty homes back into use was being met.

In respect of the Choice Based Letting Scheme, Councillor J O Ranger referred to the fact that he was aware that individuals might bid for a property which was located some distance away from their child/childrens' town based school and of the impracticalities of this arrangement when moving

out to a rural location such as his ward.

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager explained the points system, how individuals bid for properties and the Council's ability to exclude certain persons from the housing register.

Councillor V Shaw queried the issue of homelessness and the Council's role and affordable homes and choice. She was particularly concerned at the lack of two bedroom houses as only flats had been built recently. The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager explained the process and the Council's role in securing affordable homes from developers.

Councillor J O Ranger suggested that more should be done to encourage people to downsize from their homes which might now be too big for them and that they should be helped with the costs. The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager explained the Council's incentive scheme to free up larger homes. She stated that in addition to financial incentives, many needed physical help with the process and some did not want to move. She reported that the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) were due to undertake an audit of occupation on their properties, with a view to identifying any under-occupation. Members asked that when this was completed, they would like to have a summary of the findings. She suggested that the Council and RSLs also needed to look at the way they were spending money on adaptations and review whether fully adapting larger property was cost effective when a move to a more appropriate property might mean far fewer or no changes were needed.

Members noted the progress on the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008–11 and supported the revised strategic priorities Challenges 1, 2 and 3 set out in the report now submitted for incorporation within the next Housing Strategy due in October 2011.

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress on the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008-11 be noted; and

(B) the revised strategic priorities, Challenges, 1, 2

and 3 as set out in the report now submitted, be supported and agreed for incorporation within the next Housing Strategy due in October 2011.

528 CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK SEPTEMBER –
NOVEMBER 2010

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted an exception report on the performance of key indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period ending November 2010. It was noted that all the performance indicators were “green” and had either met or exceeded the target for November.

Councillor G A McAndrew referred to EHPI3a (Usage: number of swims (under 16) and EHPI3b (Usage: number of swims (16 – under 60 year olds) and stated that it was good to see targets being exceeded. The Director of Customer and Community Services referred to the strong start in gym membership which had provided a foundation on which SLM could build.

The Committee received the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

529 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman invited Members to review the work programme of Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Officer drew attention to the Hertford Theatre which would be reported to a later meeting. She sought guidance on Members’ views for a crime report to the July meeting. Members supported a topic on CCTV usage. Guidance was sought in relation to annual reports by Housing Associations and the CAB.

Members were of the view that the last reports from Housing Associations and the CAB were too lengthy. The Director of Customer and Community Services referred to the fact that the CAB had worked hard to adjust its services in line with the

reduction in its revenue and it had been appropriate to hear from them during this period of change. He referred to new rules relating to localism which would be unfolding over the next 12 months. Members supported a suggestion that these agencies be invited back at a later in the year, as the Localism Bill progressed and it became clearer where changes need to be made.

The Committee supported this approach.

RESOLVED – that the work programme, as amended be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman
Date