

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON  
TUESDAY 31 MAY 2011, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman).  
Councillors E Bedford, S Bull (as substitute  
for Councillor G Jones), W Mortimer, T Page,  
P Phillips, M Pope, J Ranger, G Williamson  
and J Wing.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors K Crofton, A Jackson, P Ruffles,  
M Tindale and C Woodward.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Simon Chancellor	- Head of Financial Support Services
Chris Cooper	-
Lorna Georgiou	- Performance and Improvement Co-ordinator
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

62 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor J Ranger proposed and Councillor E Bedford seconded that Councillor P Phillips be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee for the Civic Year.

RESOLVED - that Councillor P Phillips be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee for the Civic Year.

63 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor G Jones. It was noted that Councillor S Bull was present as his substitute.

64 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting and in particular, newly elected Members of the Council. He asked that all feel free to ask whatever questions they wished regarding the issues under discussion in order to aid the scrutiny process.

65 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

66 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS

The Director of Customer and Community Services introduced a report on Freedom of Information requests. The Audit Committee had asked that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee consider any issues arising from such requests.

The Director explained that there had been an exponential rise in the number of the requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act. This had led to delays in replying to some requests and the need to consider whether certain requests were vexatious and should be dealt with accordingly.

An action plan to address these problems had been agreed by the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT). The intention was to publish and make more information available through the Council's website and to streamline the

processes, in particular, for simple requests.

Members were given details of the topics covered by these requests, which were received from individuals, businesses and the media.

Councillor J Ranger asked for an approximate figure for the cost of dealing with Freedom of Information requests.

Councillor J Wing asked that information of the time spent and cost of dealing with requests be included in reports on these requests in future.

In response to comments from Members on vexatious requests, the Director assured Members that each request was considered individually.

The Committee decided to make the suggestions detailed below.

RESOLVED: that (A) the Freedom of Information Action Plan be approved;

(B) consideration should be given to estimating figures for each request in future showing resource implications, e.g. staff time and costs; and

(C) total cost for each category be collated and published.

## 67 2010/11 PERFORMANCE OUTTURNS WITH CURRENT HEALTHCHECK

The Leader of the Council submitted a report setting out the performance indicators which the Council monitored and published. The report advised Members of the outturns for 2010/11. An exception report on the finance, performance and risk monitoring for the current month was also submitted. In the light of central government policy, the Council had refined the list of indicators to reflect local priorities.

Councillor J Ranger commented that budgeting could not be

precise but it was important to keep variances to a minimum.

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support highlighted that part of the variances was due to excellent performance on recycling.

In response to a question from a Member, the Chief Executive said the Council was investigating sharing some building control services with another council.

The Performance and Improvement Co-ordinator explained that some targets were seasonal, e.g. swimming.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) the outturns for 2010/11 be noted;

(B) the performance indicator analysis contained in section 3 and 4 of the report, be noted;

(C) all outstanding outturn data and the dates where data will be available by as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report now submitted, be noted;

(D) the 2010/11 unit cost outturns being reported through the corporate healthcheck process, once the 2010/11 accounts are closed, be noted; and

(E) the Executive be advised that, when it comes to formulate the budget, it should be mindful and reflect on the outturn data, particularly where the base budget might be reset to minimise the underspend.

## 68 2010/11 END OF YEAR SERVICE PLANNING

The Leader of the Council submitted a report summarising the 2010/11 actions achieved through Service Planning which were relevant to the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee and those which required a revised completion date. Of these

75% (43) had been achieved; 11% (6) were on target; 2% (1) were off target and 12% (7) needed a revised completion date.

Members noted that a new platform lift had been installed in Wallfields in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

The Performance and Improvement Co-ordinator undertook to report on progress towards a county data sharing protocol after the next Hertfordshire Performance Network meeting, in response to a question from a Member.

The Committee decided to note the report as detailed below.

RESOLVED – that the summary of achievements against 2010/11 Service Plan actions be received and those actions requiring revised completion dates be noted.

## 69 FINAL REPORT ON PROGRESS AGAINST ALL SURVEY ACTION PLAN

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on progress on the Residents' Survey and the Place Survey. Details of progress on the Action Plan for these were given in Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report now submitted.

The next Residents' Survey was due to be undertaken in Autumn 2011 so it was suggested that this report would be the final one on these surveys.

Councillor J Ranger raised concerns over the time taken to deal with complaints and said this needed to be monitored closely. It was noted that a report on this topic was coming to the next meeting of this committee.

In response to a question, the Performance and Improvement Co-ordinator explained that the figures in the surveys were weighted to ensure they were representative of the local population. She gave the cost of the previous Residents' Survey, in response to a question and said Officers were

sending out tenders for the next one.

The Committee decided to note the report as detailed below.

RESOLVED – that progress against the All Survey Action Plan be noted and the Committee agrees that this be the final report on this Action Plan.

70 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12

The Chairman submitted a report inviting the Committee to review its work programme.

The Scrutiny Officer said the Executive had asked that the review of community and public engagement be postponed until November 2011.

The Committee decided to amend the work programme as now detailed.

RESOLVED – that the work programme now submitted be amended by postponing the review of community and public engagement until November 2011.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

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