

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
14 JUNE 2011, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor G McAndrew (Chairman)
Councillors E Buckmaster, T Herbert,
Mrs D Hone, Mrs J Mayes, P Moore,
P Ruffles, N Symonds and C Woodward

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Ballam, L Haysey, G Jones,
P Phillips, J Ranger and J Wing

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Ben Cannell	- Front of House Manager
Karl Chui	- Performance Office (Strategic Direction)
Mark Kingsland	- Leisure Services Manager
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Jenny Pierce	- Senior Planning Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
Mekhola Ray	- Community Projects Team Manager
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Rhys Thomas	- Arts and Entertainment

Programme
Director

81 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor S Bull.

82 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor Mrs D Hone and seconded by Councillor P Ruffles that Councillor S Bull be appointed as Vice Chairman for the Civic Year.

RESOLVED – that Councillor S Bull be appointed Vice Chairman for the Civic Year.

83 MINUTES

Councillor P Ruffles asked whether Registered Social Landlords had undertaken an audit of occupation on their properties in order to establish under-occupation. The Scrutiny Officer advised that a formal audit had not yet been undertaken but an update on the issue would be sent out to Members as soon as possible.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

84 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed new Members of Community Scrutiny Committee and explained the role of the Committee. He urged Members to question whenever they wished and reminded all that, first and foremost, they were Councillors of East Herts and not just representatives of their wards. He referred to the urban and rural mix of areas covered by some Members.

The Chairman thanked Councillor C Woodward for his valuable contribution as Chairman last year.

The Chairman referred to the fact that future meetings of Community Scrutiny Committee would be webcast.

Finally, the Chairman stated that at Environment Scrutiny Committee, Members had agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to review the transportation and parking strategy for East Herts. He asked Members to contact Councillor D Hollebon if they were interested in serving on the Task and Finish Group.

85 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor P Ruffles declared a personal interest in Minute 87 (Hertford Theatre – Review of the Launch of the new Theatre and performance against the Business Plan) in that he was a Member of the HDOS (Hertford Dramatic and Operatic Society).

86 HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL

Councillor D Hone, Chairman of the Health Engagement Panel provided a summary of the work of the Panel, its strategy for the future and its interaction with Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – that the update be noted.

87 HERTFORD THEATRE - REVIEW OF THE LAUNCH OF THE NEW THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE BUSINESS PLAN

The Head of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report on the operational and financial information relating to the new Hertford Theatre. The Artistic Director gave a short presentation on the refurbishment of the Theatre. He explained that the new access, directly from the street, encouraged increased footfall. He said that people were now coming to the venue to share cultural experiences and have a coffee. Before and after photographs were shown of the main entrance, the River Room and the kitchen.

The Artistic Director provided Members with an update on what events had taken place recently, including a highly successful live broadcast from Covent Garden Opera House of Macbeth. Updates were provided on revenues generated. He explained the work currently underway promoting the theatre with schools and how the theatre might provide a forum for presenting performances of examination set texts at both GCSE and A level.

In response to a query from Councillor E Buckmaster concerning new users, The Artistic Director said that from the figures on the database, 85% were new users.

Councillor P Ruffles congratulated Officers and Hertford Theatre staff on what he considered a tremendous transformation. He referred to the difficulties of the HDOS (Hertford Dramatic and Operatic Society) now in competition with the Theatre's professional dramatic performances. The Artistic Director acknowledged the important role and function of the HDOS and its community relationship with Hertford. He referred to the conversations which had taken place with the HDOS with a view to their integration and development at Hertford Theatre.

The Head of Community and Cultural Services referred to the Council's dissatisfaction with some of the furniture and of ongoing conversations with the supplier. Councillor J Mayes referred to the PA system. Reassurances were provided that this issue was in hand. Members' concerns regarding the "pre show" food would be referred to the supplier.

Councillor T Herbert referred to the absence of information and directions on the website. He also sought clarification on the type of films which would be shown in the cinema. The Artistic Director explained that the theatre would not be able to compete with the multiplexes in terms of blockbuster films, as the theatre could not screen them for long enough. It was anticipated that the film programme would be diverse and that new markets would be explored.

Councillor N Symonds queried whether there could be liaison between the Rhodes in Bishop's Stortford to share expensive

performances. The Artistic Director said that there was regular liaison with the Rhodes with a view that the two venues could try to find a complementary programme of work for a season, rather than sharing the costs of an individual artist.

Councillor P Ruffles queried the progress of the installation of the Micro Hydro Plant alongside the Theatre. The Director of Customer and Community Services provided an overview. He agreed to write to Members with a more detailed response.

The Chairman referred to the favourable variance of £61,113 set out in the report now submitted.

In response to a query regarding the cultural offer at the theatre in other languages, The Artistic Director explained that occasionally French films were being shown. He had also been working with Disability Arts regarding a new play and exploring working with other communities. It was acknowledged that the stage was not accessible to wheelchairs and this was being reviewed.

Councillor J Mayes raised the issue of childcare fees and credit card fees. The Director of Customer and Community Services clarified the position.

Councillor P Moore queried the statement that there were no shows on a Sunday and the consequences of that. The Artistic Director explained the position.

In response to a question regarding the use of volunteers, the Front of House Manager was able to report that a training programme was underway and a team of volunteers would be operating at the Theatre soon.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members thanked the Artistic Director and the Front of House Manager and praised them for their hard work in what he referred to as a success story.

The Committee received the presentation and noted the report.

RESOLVED – that the presentation be received and the report be noted.

88 ASSESSMENT OF EAST HERTS SPORTS FACILITIES

The Head of Community and Customer Services submitted a draft assessment of East Herts sports facilities and recommendations in terms of long term aspirations. It was noted that the intention was that the recommendations contained within the report now submitted, would be delivered by a number of agencies.

Councillor J Ranger queried the issue of indoor bowls and stated that many villages had indoor bowls facilities. Councillor J Mayes referred to the different types of bowls facilities within the District adding that there were not many full length ones.

Councillor C Woodward sought clarification on how facilities in towns had been taken into account. The Head of Community and Customer Services stated that the report endeavoured to provide a snap-shot of what facilities existed at the moment.

Councillor P Ruffles queried the aspirational desire to have an additional 2.5 sports halls. He referred to the shortage of sports halls at primary school level and of the need to have continuous dialogue with the County Council's planning officers. The Officer acknowledged that there was a shortage in relation to one or two forms of entry at primary school level and any development work at these proposed sites would be assessed over the coming months against competing demands.

Councillor C Woodward queried whether the assessment of swimming pools in the district took account of anticipated demand. He referred to the poor quality of the pool at Grange Paddocks. Councillor N Symonds referred to the steps at Grange Paddocks which caused difficulties for people with disabilities. She queried whether a tiered form of steps could be provided. The Head of Community and Cultural Services agreed to refer this issue to SLM, the leisure providers.

The Planning Officer assured Members that full consultation on the proposals would be undertaken.

The Committee received the draft assessment and recommended its use as planning guidance.

RESOLVED – that the draft assessment be received and that its use be recommended as planning guidance.

89 2010 - 2011 END OF YEAR SERVICE PLANNING REPORT

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted a report summarising the 2010/11 Service Plan actions relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee. For the benefit of new Members, the Director explained the financial and service planning process.

It was noted that there were 37 actions relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee and 34 (92%) had been achieved. Two were on target and one had had its completion date revised.

Councillor P Ruffles requested further information in relation to the Air Quality Management Area and the Director of Customer and Community Services undertook to write to Members.

Councillor L Haysey provided an update regarding proposals for the new style Youth Conference and of the need to work more closely with schools.

The Committee received the summary of achievements against the 2010/11 Service Plan and noted the action requiring a revised completion date.

RESOLVED – that (A) the summary of achievements against the 2011/11 Service Plan action be received; and

(B) the action requiring a revised completion date be noted.

90 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK
FEBRUARY - MARCH 2011

The Director of Customer and Community Services submitted an exception report on performance indicators relating to Community Scrutiny Committee for the period February to March 2011.

The Performance Officer provided updates on indicators grouped by corporate priority. Councillor N Symonds complimented the work of revenues and benefits and requested that the Head of Revenues and Benefits and staff be thanked for their excellent service.

The Chairman referred to the decline in usage of swimming for those 60 years and over and queried whether this was a result of the withdrawal of the subsidy. He asked Officers to seek further information from SLM as to whether those swimmers had been lost completely or were just not visiting as frequently. Officers undertook to ask SLM to include a discussion on this issue at their annual visit to this committee.

The Committee noted the report and asked Officers to request SLM to consider the issue of swimming within their Annual Report, specifically whether those swimmers (i.e. the over 60s) had been lost or were just not visiting as frequently.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be noted; and

(B) SLM be requested to consider the issue of swimming in their Annual Report in terms of those swimmers lost, i.e. the over 60s, or whether they were just not visiting as frequently.

91 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

The Scrutiny Officer outlined how the work programme had been developed. The Director of Customer and Community Services explained the process for setting the budget and

service plans and explained the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) extract attached as Essential Reference Paper “C” and the 2012/13 Capital Programme proposals attached as Essential Reference Paper “D”. He encouraged Members to contact him should they require further information.

Councillor J Ranger suggested that it might be helpful if Members were advised what percentage of the budget was reflected in any proposed savings. The Director of Customer and Community Services agreed to speak with the Head of Finance.

Councillor N Symonds expressed concern at the use of acronyms throughout the financial papers.

Councillor P Ruffles suggested an amendment to the work programme to reflect ongoing work within museums and the arts. The Scrutiny Officer referred to the criteria for selecting issues for scrutiny.

The Committee supported the work programme as presented.

RESOLVED – that the report be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Chairman
Date