

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 19 JULY 2011, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman)
Councillors E Bedford, G Jones, W Mortimer,
T Page, M Pope, J Ranger, G Williamson
and J Wing

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors S Bull and P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Neil Sloper	- Head of Customer Services and New Media

177 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor P Phillips.

178 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that the recent training session had been very useful and encouraged Members to attend future events.

179 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on

31 May 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

180 DRAFT 2010/11 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Leader of the Council submitted a report on the draft 2010/11 Annual Governance Statement. The Director of Internal Services explained that this report was being submitted, as part of a wider consultation process which would be submitted for final approval by Audit Committee on 21 September 2011. The Director of Internal Services drew attention to the six core principles governing the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements and referred to the enhancements to internal control arrangements which had been identified by Internal Audit. He asked that a minor adjustment be made to the recommendation in that it should read "2010/11" and not as shown.

The Director of Internal Services sought Members' comments concerning any further suggested areas for consideration and inclusion by Audit Committee. It was noted that the External Auditors had emphasised the fact that issues for inclusion should be key and strategic.

The Chairman suggested that the statement should make it clear that the Executive arrangement shown referred to the "Leader and four other Councillors". This was supported. Members also requested that the wording in relation to "operational risk" clarify the point that it was a "list of new operational risks" which had been developed rather than the wording shown in the report, attached as Essential Reference Paper "B".

Officers explained that the content of the statement needed to be comprehensive given that it was a document to be shared and made available to the public.

Clarification was sought in relation to various codes and protocols which governed both Member and Officer activities. Officers agreed to provide this information electronically.

Clarification was sought in relation to an issue about a complaint on “staff conduct” (elsewhere on the agenda) and the possibility that it might be considered in the context of required enhancements to internal control arrangements. The Head of Customer Services said that a complaint on “staff conduct” was wide and varied and might simply have been a failure to return a telephone call.

Members considered the issue of planning and complaints (elsewhere on the agenda) and supported a request that Audit Committee be informed that there should be clarity of information in terms of the use of the web and the publication of planning information, specifically that Officers should use plain English in what was published, notwithstanding the fact that this might need to be supplemented by legal terminology.

The Committee decided to forward Members’ comments as detailed above, to Audit Committee.

RESOLVED – that Audit Committee be advised of the Committee’s comments now detailed.

181 REVIEW OF COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS - APRIL 2010 TO MARCH 2011

The Head of Customer Services submitted a report detailing the comments, compliments and complaints received between April 2010 and March 2011 in terms of performance, volumes, sources and action taken. Key improvement actions were summarised by Directorate including what corrective action had been taken in response to complaints. It was noted that 10 complaints had been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman but that no cases of maladministration had been found.

The Head of Customer Services referred to Performance Indicator EHP15.1 (complaints resolved in 14 days or less) and the difficulties Officers faced in dealing with external agencies.

The Chairman referred to tensions which might exist when planning applicants sought pre-planning advice and then found that planning permission had been refused. Members requested further information on a breakdown of complaints. Officers agreed to email a breakdown of complaints by service.

Members discussed the complaints which were resolved in 14 days (73%) or less and the 27% which were not and the implications of this. The difficulties and delays in dealing with external agencies such as the Department of Works and Pensions and Planning Agencies were considered and how this impacted on targets. It was suggested that performance targets could be reviewed in the autumn and the wording of the indicator might be amended to allow for the 'waiting time' when having to refer to external agencies for information/confirmation of details.

Members again considered the use of the web and how it could be used in a customer friendly manner. In particular, how planning information was published and the way planning applications were handled, notwithstanding the fact that the Council was obliged to follow proscribed formats. It was suggested that this matter might be considered by the Task and Finish Group.

Members received the report and asked Officers to review performance targets for consideration by Members in the autumn.

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

(B) Officers report back to Members on performance targets in the autumn.

182 C3W UPDATE

The Programme Head for Change submitted a report updating Members a number of key issues on the Changing the Way We Work (C3W) Programme. It was noted that staff would be

moving from The Causeway on 20 August and the building would be handed over at the end of November 2011. He explained which staff would be based at the new Charrington's House, Bishop's Stortford office.

Clarification was sought in response to a query about the project being within budget. This was provided. Reference was made to the open plan nature of the office and the negative impact this might have on staff productivity. The Chairman referred to the physical nature of the space available and assurances were provided that health and safety audits would be undertaken including assessments on display screens and for home workers.

Clarification was provided in relation to the security of documents and home working.

Members suggested that they be offered a choice of tours of both the Wallfields and Charringtons House buildings when the project had been completed and once staff had settled in.

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

(B) Officers be requested to arrange a tour of both Wallfields and Charringtons House buildings on completion of the project and when staff had settled in.

183 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12

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

The Scrutiny Officer referred to the C3W programme and suggested that there be a Closure Report submitted to Members at its meeting on 29 November 2011, rather than the Evaluation Report on the scrutiny of C3W and that this latter report be submitted to Members on 20 March 2012. This was supported.

Members also agreed to the inclusion of a report on Shared

Service to its meeting on 4 October, 2011.

The Director of Internal Services drew Members' attention to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and asked Members to identify any issues, which fell within the remit of Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee that they might wish to review in terms of the 2012/13 financial year. Concerns were expressed that less funding might impinge on key priorities. The Director explained that in all areas, managers were having to do more with less funding.

A Member requested that the issue of Human Resources savings in terms of reduced HR support of £60,000 and Revenues and Benefits in terms of Invest to Save option of £64,000 be detailed. This was supported.

Members received the report.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report as amended be approved; and

(B) a report on the issue of Human Resources savings and Revenue and Benefits (Invest to Save) for 2012/13 be provided.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm

Chairman
Date