

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**Meeting held at the Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City on  
Tuesday, 1 November 2005 at 7.30 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** *Councillors: Martin Stears (Chairman), M. Paterson (Vice-Chairman), J.F. Barry, David Billing, D.J. Horrell, Sal Jarvis, Lorna Kercher and H.M. Marshall, M.R.M. Muir and M.E. Weeks.*

**ALSO PRESENT:** *Councillors Tricia Gibbs (Community Engagement & Rural Affairs Portfolio Holder) and R.E. Inwood.*

**IN ATTENDANCE** *Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services, Head of Community Development & Cultural Services, Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance, Scrutiny Officer and Senior Committee & Member Services Officer.*

**71. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.C.W. Burt, P. Clark, David Kearns and R.L. Shakespeare-Smith.

**72. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 October 2005 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

**73. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

No items were presented for consideration by the Committee.

**74. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DIRECTIONS)**

No declarations of interest were made and no notification of any party whip directions were given at the meeting.

**75. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No items were presented under public participation for consideration by the Committee.

**76. URGENT/GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS**

There were no urgent or general exception items to report to the Committee.

**77. CALLED-IN ITEMS**

No decisions had been called-in by the Scrutiny Committee since the meeting of the Committee held on 11 October 2005.

**78. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None.

## 79. QUESTIONS

### (a) Area Governance

A briefing note was tabled to update Members as a follow up to a question submitted by Councillor Billing to the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 October 2005 regarding Area Governance (Minute 65 refers).

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services outlined the content of the briefing note as follows:-

- A meeting of Area Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen was held on Monday, 31 October 2005, at which an update on the Area Governance Action Plan had been reported, and further comments made by Members.
- Area Governance issues would also be considered at the Member Workshops arranged to review the Service and Financial Planning process for 2006/07. Further comments could arise from these meetings.
- Thereafter, a report would be produced that introduces the Area Governance Action Plan to each Area Committee during the December 2005 cycle.
- The report would be included in the papers for the Area Committee pre-agenda meetings, the first of was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 22 November 2005.

### (b) Task and Finish Groups

The following statement and question was tabled by Councillor H.M. Marshall:-

"In view of the significant task before the Council of setting a budget for the coming civic year whereby the council tax increase should be restricted to a maximum of 4.9%. This will entail making savings of £1.8m if £500,000 of necessary growth items are to be accommodated. I therefore question the validity of the two Task and Finish subjects.

My question is:-

Will officers please provide me with an estimated cost to the Council of supporting Task and Finish Group studies?

I refer to two Task and Finish subjects under review.

#### (1) Engaging Young People

There have been two Fundamental Service Reviews (FSRs) on this matter which resulted in an action plan. Officers have been assigned to carry out the resulting recommendations of these FSRs. Are we repeating work already completed at a cost to the council?

#### (2) Provision of Affordable Housing in the District

The administration is committed to provide 500 affordable homes. As I understand it the purpose of this Task and Finish Group is to establish whether this figure should be 750 houses or whatever."

The Chairman stated that officers would be asked to provide a written response to this question, copies of which would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

**80. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE FORWARD PLAN: 1 NOVEMBER 2005 – 28 FEBRUARY 2006**

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee presented the Forward Plan to the Committee, which covered the period 1 November 2005 – 28 February 2006.

It was noted that the Forward Plan would require amendment to reflect the Committee's previous decision that an item be submitted to its January or February 2006 meeting on the Car Parking Zone Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The Chairman was reminded that he was to enter into discussions with the Local Development Framework Working Party and Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transport as to how best to scrutinise Local Development Framework policies and documents.

**RESOLVED:** That the Forward Plan, covering the period 1 November 2005 – 28 February 2006, be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure that the Scrutiny Committee could identify any matters it wished to consider prior to consideration by Cabinet.

**28.81. WORK PROGRAMME 2005/2006 – SCRUTINY COMMITTEE & SUB-GROUPS**

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report that updated the Committee on the progress being made on the various topics under scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the postponed meeting of the Residential Parking Task and Finish Group had been re-arranged to take place on 2 November 2005. The Group would be considering minor amendments to the scope of this review, and the revised scope would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

The Chairman commented that all of the Political Groups had nominated Members to serve on the Markets Task and Finish Group. However, the Conservative Group had nominated three Members of the Cabinet to serve on the Group.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the progress being made by past and existing sub-groups be noted;
- (2) That the Markets Task and Finish Group be held in abeyance, pending the receipt of advice as to the ability of Cabinet Members to serve on Sub-Groups established by the Scrutiny Committee.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Scrutiny Committee to plan and carry out its workload efficiently.

**82. ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TASK & FINISH GROUP – DRAFT SCOPE**

The Chairman of the Engaging Young People Task & Finish Group, assisted by the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services, presented a report detailing the draft scope and terms of reference for the Group.

The Committee made a number of additions to the "Process" Section of the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the draft scope and terms of reference for the Engaging Young People Task & Finish Group, as detailed in the report, be approved, subject to the following additions to the "Process" section of the report:-

- (a) The needs and aspirations of children and young people be reviewed by obtaining appropriate evidence through direct consultation with youths/youth groups.
- (b) Best/good practice should be obtained to inform the work of the Group.

- (c) Consideration should be given by the Group as to whether or not it wished to consult with Town/Parish Councils on the review.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Task & Finish Group to plan and carry out its work efficiently.

### **83. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS**

The Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance tabled a draft report she had prepared for submission to Cabinet on 15 November 2005 on Local Area Agreements, and gave an oral presentation on its contents.

The Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance advised that the development of Local Public Service Agreements and the overarching Local Area Agreements formed a major part of the 'Ten Year Vision for Local Government' policy document. It was intended that there would be at minimum a draft Local Area Agreement in place for every district in England by the end of 2008.

The Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance commented that a Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a package of four key aims, namely simplification of funding for Safer Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF); strengthened Public Service Agreements, such as PSA II delivered by the Authority in partnership with the Police; strengthened National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal; and stronger role for regional Government Officers to support local initiatives.

The Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance explained that the establishment of an LAA required the agreement of all key partners to deliver against 40 targets, which could include not only community safety, but all aspects of life within the local community - access to key services, affordable housing, community facilities, uptake of benefits, measures of economic viability, etc. The 40 targets were to be developed evenly across four theme blocks, comprising children and young people, safer stronger communities, healthier communities and older people and, the most recently added, economic development. The latter also encompassed issues around skills shortages, career development opportunities and key worker housing/facilities.

The Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance stated that the 10 Hertfordshire District Councils and the County Council were working in partnership and an initial LAA submission had been sent to the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East) on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2005. The Go-East response to the submission was outlined, and this response had been discussed at a meeting of the County Council and regional office held on 25 October 2005.

The Committee was informed that the next step was to negotiate further with individual partners and Local Authorities to determine achievable targets. Invitations to these meetings and workshops will be issued over the next three weeks, and will include invitees from all key partnerships involved.

**RESOLVED:** That the report of the Head of Policy, Partnerships & Performance be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To inform the Scrutiny Committee of proposals to be submitted to Cabinet regarding how the Council would contribute to the development of targets contained within Local Area Agreements and the monitoring of progress against those targets over a three year period.

### **84. ITEM REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FINANCE SUB-GROUP – 13 OCTOBER 2005**

The Scrutiny Committee considered a recommendation to Cabinet made by the Finance Sub-Group at its meeting held on 13 October 2005, in respect of Service and Financial Planning 2006 - 2011.

**RESOLVED:** That the recommendation to Cabinet made by the Finance Sub-Group at its meeting held on 13 October 2005, in respect of Service and Financial Planning 2006 – 2011, be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable Members to make informed decisions on service and financial planning processes.

**85. PRESENTATION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS**

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs, Councillor Tricia Gibbs, gave a presentation informing the Committee of matters relating to her portfolio. She listed a number of key areas of work facing the services covered by her portfolio, together with timescales and targets dates for their implementation. The key areas of work included:-

- Social Inclusion Policy;
- Community Development Strategy;
- Equalities;
- Area Visioning;
- Rural Strategy;
- Community Centre and Village Halls;
- Public Halls;
- Arts and Cultural Strategy;
- Older People Strategy;
- Children and Youth Services;
- Generation of an increase in Inward Investment;
- Review of grants and awards to the Voluntary Sector;
- New Community Facilities;
- Area Governance

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs, assisted by the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services, answered a number of questions raised by Members at the conclusion of the presentation.

**RESOLVED:** That the presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure that the Scrutiny Committee is kept informed of matters relating to the Community Engagement & Rural Affairs portfolio.

The meeting ended at 8.57pm.

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Chairman