

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

**Meeting held at the Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City on
Tuesday, 21 March 2006 at 7.30p.m.**

PRESENT: *Councillors: Martin Stears (Chairman), M. Paterson (Vice-Chairman), J.F. Barry, David Billing, Paul Clark, David Kearns, Lorna Kercher and H.M. Marshall.*

ALSO PRESENT: *Councillor R.E. Inwood.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Strategic Director of Financial & Regulatory Services, Head of Community Development, Community Development Manager, Children's Service Development Manager, Senior Community Development Officer, Scrutiny Officer and Senior Committee & Member Services Officer.*

116. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.C.W. Burt, D.J. Horrell, Sal Jarvis and M.R.M. Muir.

117. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 21 February 2006 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

118. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No items were presented for consideration by the Committee.

119. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DIRECTIONS)

Councillor Paul Clark declared personal interests in respect of the following matters:-

Item 12 (Minute 127 below) – Review of Engaging Children and Young People – as a member of his family was involved in the Voice of Hitchin Youth Group.

Item 15 (Minute 130 below) – Summer Playscheme Programme 2006/07 – in view of his role as Vice-Chairman of the Caldicott Centre Management Committee.

120. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

121. URGENT/GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

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

122. CALLED-IN ITEMS

No decisions had been called-in by the Scrutiny Committee since the meeting of the Committee held on 21 February 2006.

123. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that Item 16 – North Hertfordshire District Council's Public Conveniences – had been withdrawn from the agenda.

It was with sadness that the Chairman reported that County Councillor Robert Ellis, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, had passed away earlier in the day.

124. QUESTIONS

(a) Emergency call out procedures outside normal office hours

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Michael Weeks:-

"What emergency call out procedure/contact information is available, if any, for Members outside normal office hours?"

By way of background I would add the following. I am not referring to major incidents as hopefully there is a procedure in place for mustering appropriate officers/departments, although perhaps we should all be acquainted with the same. My question relates to lesser incidents/emergencies which relate to dangerous situations or risk to property or the like. From personal experience some months ago, a Councillor Colleague and I encountered a situation where our inability to obtain an appropriate Officer contact very nearly resulted in considerable damage to a number of properties. Whilst we have a Call Centre they were unable to provide any pertinent contacts. A similar position was encountered with the other agencies including the Police and Herts County Council."

The following response had been provided by the Risk Manager:-

"In the event of an incident happening out of hours where a Councillor needs the District Council to respond to an incident, the following numbers are applicable:-

For North Hertfordshire Housing repairs, Homelessness, Environmental Health and Building Control:- 01462 459368.

For Highways, Gritting, Street Lighting and Dangerous Trees:- 01438 737320.

For Street Cleansing, Parks, Public Buildings and Public Car Parks:- 01462 480662.

The Officer on call answering these phones would get the appropriate officers/contractors to respond. These numbers are left on the main switchboard answer phone which cuts in out of office hours."

(b) Closure of Pavilions

The following question had been submitted by Councillor Paul Clark:-

"In deciding to recommend that the 5 football changing pavilions in Hitchin be shut as a money saving exercise, what consultation did this Council undertake with the Clubs affected prior to recommending this proposal? Since the decision what action has the Council taken in advising the Clubs affected as to what is happening.

Also In recommending the closure was any account taken of the effect this would have on the ability the Clubs would have in competing in County Cups?"

In view of the fact that this question had been submitted the day before the meeting, it was agreed that a written reply be made to Councillor Clark.

(c) No Cold Calling Zones – Distraction Burglary

The following response from the Strategy Officer for Community Safety to a follow up question from Councillor Paul Clark, made at the 21 February 2006 Scrutiny Committee meeting (Minute 109(b) refers), in respect of No Cold Calling Zones – Distraction Burglary, was tabled:-

“Artifice (also known as ‘Distraction’) Burglary is a serious issue and it is a particularly unpleasant crime. These offences *are* taking place in North Herts and it was never implied that ‘such burglary was ceasing to be a problem’. The previous response did specify that although a potential area (Mill Road, Royston) had been identified as a potential site for a no cold calling zone (due to the suitability of the street layout) the crime data *at that time* did not support the use of a zone and this was why Trading Standards did not proceed with a trial.

Since the initial response there have been a number of these types of crime and we are actively working with Herts Constabulary in order to protect the public. The residents of Wratten Close are currently being consulted with regards to the creation of a zone in their area. It is a requirement that a substantial majority of residents are in favour of the zone before it can be implemented. The site at Mill Road is also being revisited as, although these types of crime have not been experienced in that area recently, it does meet other necessary criteria such as the population of older residents.

Actions by the partnership to tackle this type of crime include an article in the 50+ newsletter from NHDC, a full page article in the NHDC Outlook Community Safety supplement due out in Spring '06 providing advice, dissemination of information through the Neighbourhood Watch network, Operation Saturnalia (prevention advice) and talks to groups in sheltered housing by the Crime Prevention Panel and PCSOs plus the potential implementation of cold calling zones in Wratten Close and Mill Road. The panel have also distributed several thousand door stickers advising that doorstep callers must produce identification. We are also working with Herts Constabulary to consider the promotion of an informal 'adopt a granny ' scheme, where a neighbour will undertake to provide a kindly watch and support to an elderly neighbour. This is alongside the continuing work of Herts Constabulary in tackling all burglary in the district, which has seen a reduction of 27% in dwelling burglary compared to the same period last year.

The Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership is heavily reliant on the vigilance of individual members of the public to prevent this type of crime. A No Cold Calling Zone is not a panacea, which will put a halt to these crimes but merely a further weapon in our armoury. It is hoped that such a zone will serve to increase the resolve of residents and make them feel more comfortable in saying no to doorstep callers.”

**125. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT FORWARD PLAN:
1 APRIL 2006 – 31 JULY 2006**

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee presented the Draft Forward Plan to the Committee, which covered the period 1 April 2006 – 31 July 2006.

RESOLVED: That the Draft Forward Plan, covering the period 1 April 2006 – 31 July 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.

28.126. 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.

RESOLVED: That the progress being made by past and existing sub-groups be noted.

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

127. REVIEW OF ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Chairman of the Engaging Children and Young People Task & Finish Group, Councillor R.E. Inwood, introduced the report of the review carried out by the Group in 2005/06, attached as Appendix 1 to the report. He drew attention to paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 of the report, which highlighted the new and existing initiatives to improve services to children and young people and to improve how councillors engaged with children and young people.

The Senior Community Development Officer gave a presentation, identical to that given to local schools, on the Citizenship and Local Democracy Education Programme. It was hoped that a number of Members would volunteer to accompany officers on their visits to schools, in order to assist and participate in the presentation. The Chairman of the Task & Finish Group referred to an IT based package of local democracy games that would be useful in engaging 9-11 year olds in the process.

In noting the report, Members were not convinced that the Task & Finish Group had challenged sufficiently a number of the areas contained in the Action Plan, and considered that the Group should continue in order to investigate these areas.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the work carried out by the Engaging Children and Young People Task and Finish Group be noted;
- (2) That the wide range of actions that are presently being undertaken by the Council to engage with children and young people with regard to providing services for them be endorsed;
- (3) That the future plans and strategies to work in partnership with other agencies and children and young people themselves to promote their well being and safeguarding be endorsed;
- (4) That the Task and Finish Group be continued, in order to undertake the following work:
 - To further challenge the areas of the Action Plan which, for financial reasons, have been sidelined.
 - To participate in the formulation of a District Council Young People's Plan to reflect the agreed priorities of the Countywide Young People's Plan.
 - To consider co-opting a member of the Voice of Hitchin Youth onto the Group to assist in this further work;
- (5) That the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs considers the recommendations and reports back to the Scrutiny Committee on the approaches to be taken.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Scrutiny Committee to carry out its work efficiently.

128. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – REVIEW OF 2005/06

The Chairman of the Committee presented a report highlighting the Committee's achievements in 2005/06, and revealing its plans for 2006/07, as a basis for the 2005/06 Annual Report to Council.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the achievements for May and June 2005 detailed in Appendix 1 of the report also appearing in the table detailed in paragraph 2.4 of the report, the report be approved as a basis for the Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report to Council.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable continued development of the effectiveness of the Scrutiny Committee.

129. SPORTS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Children's Services Development Manager presented the report that was to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 28 March 2006, in respect of the proposed adoption of a Sports Development Strategy. The Executive Summary to the Strategy was attached as Appendix 1 to the report, and the Strategy itself had been made available electronically and in the Members' Room.

The Children's Services Development Manager commented that the Strategy would be a replacement for the Council's Youth Sport Development Plan, and would link with many other Council Strategies, as well as regional strategies and plans.

The Committee was supportive of the Strategy, but Members expressed their concern with balancing its aims and objectives with the current proposals to close a number of pavilions across the District. A number of queries were made with regard to the timescales and targets/outcomes contained in the Strategy. Members were interested in the concessionary rates scheme for disadvantaged groups using the Council's Sports Programmes that was to be adopted as part of the 2006/07 Fees and Charges regime.

RESOLVED: That a report be submitted to a future meeting on the performance of the new concessionary rates available for users of the Council's Easter Sports Programme for Children.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the Sports Development Strategy be supported;
- (2) That officers give consideration to firming up some of the timescales contained in the Sports Development Strategy, and ensuring that as many of the targets/outcomes as possible are able to be SMART measured;
- (3) That consideration be given to the concerns of the Committee that, if means are not found to safeguard the Council's Pavilions, the Sports Development Strategy may be compromised.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Sports Development Strategy helps the Council to meet its strategic objectives to promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens; and to target resources at areas of disadvantage in the District to reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for everyone.

130. SUMMER PLAYScheme PROGRAMME 2006/07

The Community Development Manager presented a report advising the Committee of the proposed Summer Playscheme Programme for 2006/07. It was noted that the decision upon this matter would not be made by Cabinet, but by the Strategic Director of Customer Services under delegated powers.

In answer to a number of questions, the Community Development Manager explained a number of the changes to the Programme compared to 2005/06, including the use of the Voluntary Sector to provide some services, and confirmed the arrangements for advertising the Playschemes, especially in rural areas.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed changes to the Summer Playscheme Programme for 2006/07 be noted;
- (2) That a report be submitted to the Committee in Autumn 2006 on the results of the Summer Playscheme User Satisfaction Survey; the performance of the Voluntary Sector providers of children's services; and the success or otherwise of the provision of activities for 11-14 year olds.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Summer Playscheme Programme helps the Council to meet its strategic objectives to promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens.

131. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

This item had been withdrawn.

132. ITEMS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FINANCE SUB-GROUP – 23 FEBRUARY 2006

The Scrutiny Committee was informed that the Finance Sub-Group, at its meeting held on 23 February 2006, had considered reports of the Head of Financial Services in respect of Capital Programme; 3rd Quarterly Revenue Monitoring Report; and External Funding of NHDC Services.

RESOLVED: That the recommendation to Cabinet made by the Finance Sub-Group at its meeting held on 23 February 2006, in respect of the Capital Programme, be noted.

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

The meeting ended at 9.20pm.

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Chairman