

**To: All Members of the County Council
All Chief Officers**

**From: County Secretary's
Department**

Ask For: Nikki Patient

Ext: 25560

My Ref: np

Your Ref:

**COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 MARCH 2004**

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

N E Agar, P T J Channell, M D Colne, G D Game (Vice-Chairman),
B N W Hammond, J A Hobday (Chairman), M H O'Neill, P A Ruffles,
J W A Usher, P A Webb

Also present:

Executive Members: I E M Tarry (Community Services)

Other Members: K F Emsall

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Clare Kaye, Assistant Chief Executive

The Committee joined the Chairman in thanking Clare Kaye for her excellent contributions and support, which had made a real difference to the work of the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee wished Clare all the best for the future.

Clare Kaye announced that she had accepted the post of Brigade Commander for Bucks and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service. The Committee congratulated Clare on her good news.

(b) HESMIC Seminar

The Chairman congratulated officers on the success of the HESMIC Seminar, which was widely attended. Members had found the day very interesting and had enjoyed listening to the wide variety of international speakers. In particular, the Committee thanked Julia Houghton and the Emergency Planning team for organising the event, and Jim Farrier for his work on the exhibition and securing sponsorship.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 January 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PUBLIC PETITIONS

Mrs Diane Brendling presented a petition on behalf of supporters of the Jackmans Community Association and the Jackmans Improvement Group, Letchworth Garden City, requesting that the Council reconsider its decision to include Jackmans library in its plans for single staffing.

The petition was referred to officers for consideration and a written response.

QUESTIONS

- 1 **Nigel Agar** asked **Iris Tarry, Executive Member (Community Services)**, the following question:

'Single staffing of libraries. How much will the extra security engendered by single staffing of Libraries actually cost?'

The Executive Member replied:

'Approximately £70K.'

Nigel Agar asked the following supplementary question:

'What are the extra security measures, and are they in place?'

The Executive Member replied:

'No. Further risk assessments are currently taking place, and a host of security measures are being investigated. All will be implemented before 1 April 2004. I will provide members with a list of the security measures being employed at individual libraries.'

- 2 **Nigel Agar** asked **Iris Tarry, Executive Member (Community Services)**, the following question:

'Have funds been set aside for any compensation the Council may have to pay in the event of an incident in which an employee or a member of the public suffers as a result of single staffing in libraries?'

The Executive Member replied:

'No - our normal public and employer's liability arrangements apply.'

Nigel Agar asked the following supplementary question:

'Have funds been set aside for compensation?'

The Executive Member replied:

'No. The County Council has public employer's liability arrangements, which would cover any claim following an incident.'

- 3. Nigel Agar** asked **Iris Tarry, Executive Member (Community Services)**, the following question:

'Can the Executive Member guarantee the safety of employees and the public? (Health & Safety at Work Act 1975)'

The Executive Member replied:

'A comprehensive set of measures are being put in place to satisfy our obligations to staff and the public under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1975. I believe that acting upon the advice of our security advisers we will be providing a safe and secure environment for our staff to work in and for the public to visit. Management is well aware of their responsibilities under Health and Safety legislation and of their duty of care towards employees and I have received their assurance that they consider the proposed working arrangements to be consistent with these responsibilities. I am keeping the situation under review. A further assessment of security measures was carried out by our security advisers last week and I will be discussing this with management. The assessment (further to visits to the 14 libraries in question carried out with UNISON last week) will also be discussed at a Joint Staff meeting to be held on Wednesday of this week.'

Nigel Agar asked the following supplementary question:

'What about members of the public?'

The Executive Member replied:

'The answer given above applies equally to members of the public.'

PART 1 (OPEN) BUSINESS

As there were interested members of the public present, the Committee agreed to take item 7 – Single Staffing of Libraries, at the beginning of the agenda.

1 SINGLE STAFFING OF LIBRARIES

[Officer Contact: Glenda Wood, Head of Libraries
Tel: 01992 555610]

The Committee considered the report and noted that this issue would be included in a report on the Best Value Review of Libraries, which was due to be submitted to the meeting in June.

The Committee was advised that UNISON had declared a formal dispute over this matter but that following a special meeting of the Joint Staff Advisory Committee, the dispute was in abeyance pending a review of the security measures in place at libraries proposed for single staffing. The results of this review would be reported back to the Joint Staff Advisory Committee on Wednesday 24 March.

Members felt that there was a need to provide reassurance to residents, staff and the press about health and safety issues. In particular, it was felt that it would be useful to draw on the experiences of Hertfordshire's comparable authorities, many of which were already operating single staffing.

Officers provided assurances that single staffing was not linked to the closure of libraries, and that libraries included in the scheme would be double staffed at peak hours and when staff were involved in other activities, such as story telling.

Steve Thornley, UNISON Branch Secretary, was given an opportunity to express UNISON's concerns. These were centred on health and safety issues. Members expressed their hope that these issues would be resolved at the next Joint Staff Advisory Committee. The Vice-Chairman asked for it to be recorded that he objected to not being informed that Steve Thornley had been invited to participate at the Committee.

Members discussed when the appropriate time would be to scrutinise this issue. Opinion was divided about whether or not it was appropriate to scrutinise before the policy had been implemented. As consensus could not be reached, Members voted on the following proposal:

'That the Committee wishes to call-in the Cabinet decision to implement single staffing in named libraries, and that Cabinet should be presented with information on individual libraries in order to review its decision on a library-by-library basis.'

On being put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

Conclusions

The Committee agreed that, after a reasonable period of implementation, the Committee should scrutinise this matter and that the report should include the following issues:

- A comparison with the experiences of Hertfordshire's comparative authorities in their move to single staffing;
- How, and how effectively, health and safety issues have been addressed;
- Any changes in the usage, effectiveness or efficiency of libraries which have moved to single staffing.
- Any difficulties identified with individual libraries related to local circumstances, and;
- The views of library users and staff.

2 RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES

[Officer Contact: John Boulter, Head of Safety, Emergency and Risk Management Unit Tel: 01992 507500]

The Committee welcomed Linda Gibling of London Colney Parish Council, Tom Feather representing Little Hadham Parish Council, and Carina Helmn of Kimpton Parish Council and the Herts Association of Parish and Town Councils.

John Boulter introduced the report and explained to the Committee that Parish Councils had an important role to play in emergency response, particularly flooding, in terms of communication and local knowledge. He advised Members that SERMU would like to engage more with Parish Councils in the future.

Members discussed with the representatives a number of issues relating to emergency response, including:

- Support required from the County Council to encourage local residents to become Flood Wardens;
- Activities already undertaken by Parish Councils to raise awareness of flooding issues and encourage more local involvement, such as welcome packs for new residents;
- Issues surrounding the limited resources available to Parish Councils, particularly in relation to the supply and appropriate storage of sandbags;
- The benefits of localised planning, for example, the Kimpton Groundwater Management Plan.

The representatives also were keen to have greater clarity about the role that Parish Councils are expected to fulfil, and asked for guidance about data protection issues.

In relation to sandbags, the Committee noted that neither the County Council nor the District/Borough Councils had a legal responsibility to provide sandbags.

In response to a question from a member, John Boulter undertook to provide an update to members on the local support and activity in areas that did not have a Parish or Town Council, such as Bushey and Potters Bar.

Conclusions

1. The Committee welcomed the input from the Parish Council representatives and thanked them for attending the meeting and their work to improve flood response.
2. The Committee noted in particular:
 - (a) The need for Parish Councils and local people to have access to equipment such as sandbags and cones in order to manage flood situations;
 - (b) The importance of effective flood plans to co-ordinate response, which recognised that flooding does not always occur during working hours;
 - (c) That there has been a recent improvement in communication, flood response and flood alleviation.
2. The Committee recommended that the Executive Member and Chief Officers:
 - (a) Continue to urge the relevant organisations to work to improve the supply of sandbags;
 - (b) Consider giving support to Town and Parish Councils at the appropriate time so that they could organise local flood fairs.
3. The Committee agreed that it should issue a press release acknowledging the valuable work of Parish Councils in emergency response and thanking them for their work.

3 CIVIL FUNERALS

[Officer Contact: Tom Hawkyard, Head of Statutory Services
Tel: 01707 897375]

The Committee considered a report to enable them to review the progress of the Civil Funerals service. Tom Hawkyard introduced the report and advised members that a further five civil funerals had taken place since the report had been issued, which brought the total carried out to 50.

Conclusions

The Committee welcomed and noted the report.

4 NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CORONERS SERVICE

[Officer Contact: Steven Charteris, Head of Coroners Unit and Support Services Manager Tel: 01707 897400]

The Committee considered the report and Steven Charteris explained the benefits to the Coroners Service arising from its relocation to the Old Courthouse, Hatfield.

Conclusions

The Committee congratulated officers on the success of the new arrangements and noted the report.

Members requested that officers should provide a briefing note that summarised the recent report reconciling the findings of the Shipman report and the fundamental review of the Coroners Service.

5 HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICERS (PCSOs)

[Officer Contact: Jim Nicolson, Crime Reduction Manager
Tel: 01992 588737]

Committee considered a report which responded to concerns raised by members at the October Scrutiny Committee. Jim Nicolson reported that since the introduction of the PCSOs, the number of ward constables had risen by 40% and the overall size of the Constabulary had increased by 135 officers.

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny Committee spokesmen had met with Chief Superintendent Burden to discuss the withdrawal of the traffic warden service and all parties had concurred that County Council-funded PCSOs should not be used for traffic enforcement duties.

The Committee noted that the first PCSO performance reports would be available shortly and will be reported to the Crime Reduction Panel.

In response to a question from a Member, Jim Nicolson advised that performance indicators to enable the gauging of the success of PCSOs had yet to be finalised.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the report and requested a further report to the next Committee, which should include performance indicators to enable the Committee to measure the effectiveness of PCSOs.

**6 HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHIVES AND LOCAL STUDIES (HALS)
ACCOMMODATION – PROGRESS REPORT**

[Officer Contact: Christine Shearman, Heritage Services Manager
Tel: 01992 555100]

The Committee received a report that updated Members on the result of the bid for capital funding for the development of new storage facilities for HALS. Members had the opportunity to look at a display of plans and pictorial impressions of the proposed development.

Conclusions

The Committee expressed satisfaction at the success of the capital funding bid and noted the report.

**7 UPDATE ON PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN LIBRARIES**

[Officer Contact: Glenda Wood, Head of Libraries Tel: 01992 555610]

Glenda Wood introduced the report and the Committee noted a number of improvements in access to ICT in libraries in terms of PC numbers, bandwidth, future rural access and partnership working.

Members asked if there were any plans to extend the use of homework clubs. Glenda reported that the established homework clubs were very successful, but were dependent on SRB funding, which is time-limited. The establishment of homework clubs in libraries is also not considered if local schools offer the same service.

Conclusions

The Committee noted this report and was pleased to see the development of homework clubs. Members were concerned about ensuring continued funding of these clubs for when the SRB funding expired.

8 INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (IRMP)

[Officer Contact: Roy Wilsher, Deputy Chief Fire Officer Tel: 01992 507503]

The Committee received a report detailing the recommendations of the IRMP Topic Group in relation to part (a) of its remit, as set out by the January Committee. Roy Wilsher advised that the recommendations would be reported to the Fire Service Panel.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the report.

9 BUDGET MONITOR TO 31 DECEMBER 2003

[Officer Contact: Andrew Nightingale, Assistant Finance Director
Tel: 01992 555331]

The Committee considered the budget monitor to enable members to identify if there were any issues arising that they wished to scrutinise.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the report and requested that the report on Education Traded Services that was previously submitted to Resources Scrutiny Committee should be circulated to the group spokesmen.

10 TRAFFIC LIGHT MONITOR

[Officer Contact: Geoff Brown, Head of Performance Improvement
Tel: 01992 555370]

The Committee considered a report and the accompanying Traffic Light Monitor, which had been circulated to all members of the Council. The report included the latest data for the promise monitor 2003-04 to enable members to identify issues for scrutiny.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the report.

11 SCRUTINY UPDATE AND WORK PROGRAMME

[Officer: Nikki Patient, Committee Administrator Tel: 01992 555560]

The Committee received a report that updated members on recommendations made at the last meeting, informed them of the current status of scrutiny items and gave members an opportunity to add new items to the work programme.

Conclusions

The Committee:

1. Suggested that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Panel consider ways of using the County Council website to invite members of the public to suggest items for future scrutiny.

2. Requested that officers follow up whether or not Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Scrutiny Committee wish to undertake joint scrutiny of the Schools' Library Service, and raise with CSF Scrutiny Committee the issue of homework clubs.
3. Agreed that a report to scrutinise engaging Friends of the Library Service should be added to the work programme for June 2004.

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

The Opposition chose agenda item 7 - Single Staffing of Libraries, to be reported to Council on 18 May 2004.

(See also Minute 1.)

Andrew Laycock
County Secretary