

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the County Council held at County Hall, Hertford, on Tuesday 16 February 1999.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

N E Agar	D J Drake	M H T Janes	J E Price
P M Aldis	J M Dwerryhouse-Spears	T G M Kent	G A G Pulman
T I Ambrose	R J M Ellis	D L Kerr	E A Rafferty
J E Anderson	K F Emsall	A Kilkerr	P Riches
D A Ashley	B C Engel	I H Laidlaw-Dickson	R Sanderson
M V Bayes	F J Escott	B J Lamb	A M R Searing
D Beatty	G L Francis	A Lee	R H Smith
J D Beesley	G D Game	N Lindop (Chairman)	R J Smith
H A Burningham	J Gipps	D B Lloyd	W A Storey
G Burrow	P V Goggins	R Mays	J Taunton
F Button	A K Gray	J T Metcalf	S H Tendeter
P T J Channell	M Green	R Mills	R A G Thomas
A R Choudhrey	B P Hall	S J Mills	J W A Usher
G R Churchard	B N W Hammond	M V Moore	P A Webb
R A Clark	N A D Haslam	J R Morton	G F Wenham
F W Clayton	R Hebborn	S R Munden	C J White
K J Coleman	D W Hills	M H O'Neill	M Wilson
M D Colne	J A Hobday	F G Peacock	B Wing
R N Copping	M J Hobday	J M Pitman	B A York

Upon consideration of the agenda for the meeting of the County Council held on 16 February 1999, as circulated, action was taken or decisions were reached as follows:-

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 24 November 1998 were confirmed.

2. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

2.1 Deaths of former County Councillors

The Chairman reported the deaths since the last meeting of former County Councillors R J F Tucker and L C Parker.

R J F Tucker had been a member of the Council from 1989 to 1997 representing Hertford Rural.

L C Parker had been a member from 1966 to 1981 and from 1983 to 1985, representing Cheshunt (Central).

The Council stood in their memory.

2.2 Death of Assistant Chief Executive Beth Wagstaff

The Chairman reported the death on 28 January 1999 of the Assistant Chief Executive, Beth Wagstaff.

Beth had joined Hertfordshire County Council in April 1992 as Director of Public Relations, becoming Assistant Chief Executive in 1995.

The Chairman announced that he had written to Beth's family who were to have a commemorative event in memory of Beth and in aid of the Lavender Trust, which the County Council would actively support.

J T Metcalf, R J M Ellis and C J White then paid tribute to her.

The Council then stood in her memory.

2.3 Officer Departures

The Chairman reported that two senior officers, namely Sue Reeder, Head of Libraries, and Kate Thompson, County Archivist, were leaving at the end of March 1999.

Sue Reeder had been with the County Council since 1987 and for 4 years she had led the Council's Library Service.

Kate Thompson had joined the County Council as County Archivist in 1990. During her time here she had re-shaped the way that the Record Office was run, merging it with Local Studies to create the Family History Centre.

The Council thanked both officers for their distinguished service and wished them both well for the future.

2.4 Awards

The Council congratulated:-

The Environment Department on being awarded a Charter Mark for 'Excellence in Public Service' for the second time;

Employment Direct and St Michael's Hostel on being awarded ISO 9002, an international quality award;

Staff in County Supplies and Contract Services on also achieving ISO 9002.

3. QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7(1)

(a) **N A D Haslam** asked the Chairman of the Environment Committee:-

"As the bid for assistance under the PFI in respect to Baldock Bypass has been turned down by the DETR, can the Chair of the Environment Committee assure the people of Baldock that their Bypass remains a priority for the Council, and what steps are being made to ensue that this priority is met?"

The **Chairman of the Environment Committee**, B A York replied:-

"Yes, the Baldock Bypass remains a priority for the Council.

So far, our application for PFI support for the Baldock Bypass has not been turned down; unfortunately, it has not been accepted either. In its letter (3 December 1998) the DETR stated 'your authority's proposal is not included in the list' (of approved projects). It goes on to say 'meanwhile we shall continue to consider the case which your authority has submitted', and 'there will be no need to resubmit your authority's proposal'. This would seem to give room for at least some hope.

However, more recently, the DETR has written with revised criteria for the allocation of PFI credits. A key point in this is: 'it is most unlikely that more than one major (transport) scheme will be approved for any one authority. If a local authority wishes to submit a major project bid it should therefore only bid for its highest priority scheme unless there are truly exceptional circumstances'.

This authority, as well as supporting the Baldock Bypass, has also resolved to submit a further bid for the Central Herts Passenger Transit System (CHPTS). This has therefore produced a dilemma for the County Council. Clearly DETR policy must be challenged, given the varying scale and needs of local authorities. Rutland's schemes are unlikely to be of the same scale as those in Hertfordshire. The Director of Environment has therefore prepared a briefing note to assist Parliament in lobbying DETR to seek a relaxation in this restriction as it clearly discriminates against a large authority like Hertfordshire with its large population and extensive traffic problems.

Should this lobbying be unsuccessful, we will seek to deliver the project through other means, possibly reverting to the more traditional approach of seeking Transport Supplementary Grant through the Local Transport Plan. In the event of an unsuccessful outcome to the lobbying we will be seeking DETR's advice, as it was their original advice that encouraged us along the PFI route.

I want to re-assure the people of Baldock that the County Council is acutely aware of the worsening environmental conditions in the town caused by traffic levels, principally on the A505, and will continue to seek resolution as quickly as resources, whatever their origins, can be made available."

(b) **M J Hobday** asked the Leader of the Council:-

"What assessment has been made of the value of the Question Time period at County Council meetings?"

The **Leader of the Council**, J T Metcalf replied:-

"I have not carried out a formal assessment. I had hoped members, particularly the Opposition, would use the procedure to scrutinise the Administration, but to date there has only been one question in two meetings. So the output has been low; but on the other hand the costs of the procedure have been negligible."

M J Hobday then asked, as a supplementary question, whether the Leader shared his surprise that the Opposition had failed to ask more questions and whether he would be asking the Chief Executive to arrange a training session for Opposition members?

The **Leader of the Council** replied that he had hoped for better, but was not surprised.

4. **QUESTIONS – HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE AUTHORITY – STANDING ORDER 7(2)**

M J Hobday asked the Vice-Chairman of the Police Authority:-

"Why do Audit Commission figures show that the average Hertfordshire uniformed constable spends only 41.4% of their working time outside the Police Station and in public, the lowest reported figure in England and Wales?"

The **Vice-Chairman of the Police Authority**, I H Laidlaw-Dickson replied:-

"In Hertfordshire, our style of policing focuses on targeting our limited resources to deal with the issues which are of most concern to the public. Our first priority is to provide an immediate response to incidents, the second priority is to prevent and investigate crime by using intelligence-led policing, including the use of targeted uniform patrol, and our third priority is to work with our partner agencies in the community to tackle the problems which lead to crime."

This style of policing may mean that uniformed police officers spend less of their working time outside the police station or in public, but its success is clearly highlighted by the low levels of crime countywide, and by the public's high level of satisfaction with policing in Hertfordshire.

Hertfordshire has the fourth lowest overall crime rate in the country at 58 per 1000 population compared with a national average of 78 and a level of 100 - 139 among the highest forces (not including Metropolitan forces). The level of violent crime is the lowest in England and Wales and only four forces in England and Wales have lower levels of burglary. Taking a proactive stance in both crime prevention and detection has also helped achieve the low overall crime rate in the County.

Latest figures show that public satisfaction with policing in Hertfordshire is over 90%. And whilst we acknowledge the reassurance value of seeing officers, it is reassurance for us to see that in Hertfordshire public satisfaction with visible patrol is higher than the national average.

It should also be noted that the Audit Commission figures are for the year ending April 1998 and the Constabulary is already making improvements on the results recorded for last year. A closer look at the detail of the Audit Commission report concerning the time spent outside the police station also reveals an enormous variance in the methods adopted by forces to collect the data. In Hertfordshire's case it does not take account of time spent policing Hertfordshire's roads (with 3 motorways and one of the highest levels of car ownership in the country, this is significant). Neither does it reflect the fact that Hertfordshire has a 24 hour armed response vehicle facility.

As our resources get tighter and the demand for our service increases, it will become more important than ever for the Constabulary to target its resources where they are most needed.

So in summary, although the Audit Commission figures indicate that Hertfordshire's uniformed constable spends 41.4% of their working time outside the police station and in public, the county's low crime levels show that the way our resources are deployed through targeted, intelligence-led policing is the most effective and efficient way of achieving our desired outcome - safer communities."

M J Hobday then asked, as a supplementary question, whether the Vice Chairman agreed that there was no cause for complacency and that the HPA should regularly review the Audit Commission figures to ensure standards are maintained?

The **Vice-Chairman of the Police Authority** replied that there was not necessarily any correlation between crime figures and police officers on the beat. The figures for Hertfordshire were a tribute to the police and to all the partner organisations, but there was no cause for complacency.

The aims of the Police Authority were to provide better policing and to reduce crime in Hertfordshire. They would continue to keep the Audit Commission figures under review.

5. PUBLIC PETITIONS

None were notified.

6. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

- 6.1 **Report of the Policy Committee - 17 December 1998**
(presented by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson**, Chairman of the Committee)

Item 3 - Annual Report on the work of Commissions

The following motion proposed by **J M Dwerryhouse-Spears** and duly seconded, was LOST:-

"That in view of doubts and delays in implementing many of the proposals in the White Paper 'Modern Local Government' and notwithstanding the work of the Member Reference Group currently considering Member structures, the Policy Committee, at their next meeting, should carry out the review of the effectiveness of the five Commissions which the Council at its July 1997 meeting determined should be carried out in July 1998."

- 6.2 The Report of the Policy Committee dated 17 December 1998 was received and adopted.

- 6.3 **Report of the Policy Committee - 27 January 1999**
(presented by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson**, Chairman of the Committee)

Item 1 - County Council Resource Budget 1999/00 - 2002/03

- (a) The **Chairman of the Committee (I H Laidlaw-Dickson)** moved the Recommendations as follows:-

"(1) That the current revenue budget funding for capital expenditure be reduced by £3 million and that the reduction be met from other capital resources and reflected in the 1999/00 budget and projection for future years."

- (2) *That £1.0 million be withdrawn from General Reserves to support the Council's Revenue Budget.*
- (3) *That the following 1999/00 revenue budgets be agreed and allocated as follows:*

	December Guideline	Additional Net Growth/ Reduction	Resultant Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<i>Community Services</i>	48,331	162	48,493
<i>Education</i>	436,691	2,500	439,191
<i>Environment</i>	58,711	1,307	60,018
<i>Policy</i>	8,877	150	9,027
<i>Social Services</i>	167,057	(169)	166,888
<i>Social Services Grants</i>	<u>(6,772)</u>	<u> </u>	<u>(6,772)</u>
	712,895	3,950	716,845
<i>Central Items</i>	<u>26,228</u>	<u>350</u>	<u>26,578</u>
	739,123	4,300	743,423
<i>Capitalisation of Maintenance</i>		(3,000)	(3,000)
<i>Use of Reserves</i>		(1,000)	(1,000)
<i>Council Tax Benefit</i>	<u>1,099</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>1,133</u>
<i>Budget for council tax purposes</i>	740,222	334	740,556

- (4) *That the provision for 1999/00 pay awards be made and delegated to service committees when the awards are known.*
- (5) *That the Capital Programme for Contractually Committed Schemes for 1999/00 – 2002/03 set out in Appendix 5 of the report be approved.*
- (6) *That, in future, 100% of capital receipts be made available to support the Council's capital priorities.*
- (7) *That £1 million be withdrawn from General Reserves in 1998/99 to create a specific reserve to meet the additional costs related to Year 2000.*
- (8) *That £1.8 million of the additional capital receipts in 1998/99 be applied to replace the Quantum Care reserve.*
- (9) *That £1.5 million of the additional capital receipts in 1998/99 be applied to create a specific reserve to support the Herts Connect project.*

- (10) *That the Chief Financial Officer be authorised to borrow on behalf of the County Council for the year ending 31 March 2000 such amounts as are required to meet approved capital expenditure within the limits of the basic and supplementary credit approvals received, such amounts to be borrowed for periods which will not result in the overall borrowing limit of £150 million being exceeded, and of which no more than £70 million shall be short term and 30% with variable interest rate terms.*
- (11) *That vehicles and equipment up to a value of £1.75 million be purchased by the County Council in the year ending 31 March 2000, the total cost of which to be financed by entering into operating lease agreements as defined by Regulation 20 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997, with the County Council acting as lessee.*
- (12) *That service committees, at their next meeting, present county funded capital programmes for new starts within the following figures for recommendation to Policy Committee.*

£'000	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02
Community Services			
<i>Fire & Rescue</i>	510	742	429
<i>Community Information</i>	416	432	431
Education	526	2,294	3,971
Environment	1,350	1,250	1,250
Policy	2,668	1,517	284
Social Services	450	1,034	1,135
TOTAL	5,920	7,269	7,500

- (13) *That, in the event of an urgent need to begin a scheme, the appropriate service chief officer be authorised to take the necessary action following consultation with policy and service committee spokespersons.*
- (14) *That, in addition to developing their three year capital programmes, committees present their longer term capital planning lists for all schemes regardless of potential funding source in order to inform the rolling annual review process of the capital programme.*
- (15) *That a standing Capital Panel of 3 members be established to conduct the annual review of the capital programme and to develop the county council's overall capital strategy."*

(b) The following amendments to Recommendations (2), (3) and (4), proposed by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson**, and duly seconded, were CARRIED:-

(i) *"Recommendation 3 to be amended so that it reads as follows:-*

That the following 1999/00 revenue budgets be agreed and allocated as follows:-

	£000
<i>Community Services</i>	48,557
<i>Education</i>	441,621
<i>Environment</i>	61,418
<i>Policy</i>	9,044
<i>Social Services</i>	168,260
<i>Social Services Grants</i>	(8,371)
<i>Central Items</i>	<u>25,133</u>
	745,662
<i>Capitalisation of Maintenance</i>	(3,000)
<i>Use of Reserves</i>	(1,100)
<i>Council Tax Benefit</i>	<u>1,164</u>
<i>Budget for Council Tax purposes</i>	742,726.'."

(ii) "Recommendation (2) to be amended, so that it reads as follows:-

'That £1.1 million be withdrawn from General Reserves to support the Council's Revenue budget'."

(iii) "Recommendation (4) to be amended so that it reads as follows:-

'That the budgets allocated to schools cover the 1999/00 teachers' and non-teaching staff awards and that the provision for other 1999/2000 pay awards be made and delegated to service committees when the awards are known'."

(c) The Recommendations were then ADOPTED as follows:-

"(1) *That the current revenue budget funding for capital expenditure be reduced by £3 million and that the reduction be met from other capital resources and reflected in the 1999/00 budget and projection for future years.*

(2) *That £1.1 million be withdrawn from General Reserves to support the Council's Revenue Budget.*

- (3) *That the following 1999/00 revenue budgets be agreed and allocated as follows:-*

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- (4) *That the budgets allocated to schools cover the 1999/00 teachers' and non-teaching staff awards and that the provision for other 1999/2000 pay awards be made and delegated to service committees when the awards are known.*
- (5) *That the Capital Programme for Contractually Committed Schemes for 1999/00 – 2002/03 set out in Appendix 5 of the report be approved.*
- (6) *That, in future, 100% of capital receipts be made available to support the Council's capital priorities.*
- (7) *That £1 million be withdrawn from General Reserves in 1998/99 to create a specific reserve to meet the additional costs related to Year 2000.*
- (8) *That £1.8 million of the additional capital receipts in 1998/99 be applied to replace the Quantum Care reserve.*
- (9) *That £1.5 million of the additional capital receipts in 1998/99 be applied to create a specific reserve to support the Herts Connect project.*

- (10) *That the Chief Financial Officer be authorised to borrow on behalf of the County Council for the year ending 31 March 2000 such amounts as are required to meet approved capital expenditure within the limits of the basic and supplementary credit approvals received, such amounts to be borrowed for periods which will not result in the overall borrowing limit of £150 million being exceeded, and of which no more than £70 million shall be short term and 30% with variable interest rate terms.*
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- (13) *That, in the event of an urgent need to begin a scheme, the appropriate service chief officer be authorised to take the necessary action following consultation with policy and service committee spokespersons.*
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- (15) *That a standing Capital Panel of 3 members be established to conduct the annual review of the capital programme and to develop the county council's overall capital strategy."*

- (d) The following motion, proposed as an additional resolution by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson** and duly seconded, was CARRIED:-

"That the Band D Council Tax for the County Council in 1999/00 be £581.40 and that the amount of tax calculated for all bands be as follows:-

	<u>£</u>
<i>Band A</i>	<i>387.60</i>
<i>Band B</i>	<i>452.20</i>
<i>Band C</i>	<i>516.80</i>
<i>Band D</i>	<i>581.40</i>
<i>Band E</i>	<i>710.60</i>
<i>Band F</i>	<i>839.80</i>
<i>Band G</i>	<i>969.00</i>
<i>Band H</i>	<i>1,162.80 "</i>

- (e) The following motion, proposed as an additional resolution by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson**, and duly seconded, was CARRIED:-

"That the precept amounts required from District Councils be as follows:-

	<u>£</u>
<i>Broxbourne Borough Council</i>	<i>19,190,973.29</i>
<i>Dacorum Borough Council</i>	<i>31,257,808.20</i>
<i>East Hertfordshire District Council</i>	<i>30,820,938.43</i>
<i>Hertsmere Borough Council</i>	<i>22,645,530.00</i>
<i>North Hertfordshire District Council</i>	<i>25,878,840.75</i>
<i>St Albans City & District Council</i>	<i>32,572,353.60</i>
<i>Stevenage Borough Council</i>	<i>15,372,274.14</i>
<i>Three Rivers District Council</i>	<i>20,959,435.12</i>
<i>Watford Borough Council</i>	<i>17,383,860.00</i>
<i>Welwyn Hatfield District Council</i>	<u><i>21,943,198.80</i></u>
<i>Total</i>	<i>238,025,212.33. "</i>

- (f) The following motion proposed as an additional resolution by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson**, and duly seconded, was CARRIED:-

"That £1.0m be withdrawn from general reserves to create a Special Maintenance and Contingency reserve, the process for allocation of which to be agreed at the next meeting of the Policy Committee."

- (g) The following motion proposed as an additional resolution by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson**, and duly seconded, was CARRIED:-

"That the Chief Executive be authorised to issue the County Report leaflets, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of the Policy Committee."

- (h) The following motion proposed by **R J M Ellis**, and duly seconded, was CARRIED:-

"That the Council recognises the difficulties faced by the Administration in framing a budget with inadequate funding from central government - as acknowledged by the Local Government Association."

- (i) The following motion proposed by **R J M Ellis**, and duly seconded, was LOST:-

"That the Council:

- *notes that the proposed Council Tax increase of up to 9.8% for 1999/2000 follows an increase in the current year of 12%;*
- *is concerned at the use of £13.5 million from reserves, capital receipts, capital diversion, 'efficiency savings' etc; and*
- *considers that any reduction in the level of services to the citizens of Hertfordshire - especially the vulnerable elderly, disabled and children - is unjustified."*

Item 2 - Scheme of Delegations to Officers

- (a) The Recommendation was **adopted** as follows:-

"That the Scheme of Delegation to Officers (attached) be adopted with effect from 17 February 1999."

- (b) The following motion proposed by **I H Laidlaw-Dickson**, and duly seconded, was CARRIED:-

"That Section 8.1(3) of the Council's Financial Regulations be amended to enable the Chief Financial Officer to approve virements between Committees, and between services within committee budgets, provided they do not exceed £75,000 in any one case and do not change County Council policy."

- 6.4** The Report of the Policy Committee dated 27 January 1999, and the Recommendations contained therein, as amended by minute 6.3, was received and adopted.

6.5 Report of the Education Committee - 13 January 1999
(presented by **R Mays**, Chairman of the Committee)

Item 1 - Secondary Transfer 2000 : Admission Rules

The following motion proposed by **K F Emsall**, and duly seconded, was LOST:-

"That the Council:

- (i) regrets that the Government is requiring consultation on arrangements for admission to secondary schools in September 2000 before the results of the controversial 1999 rules can be assessed by members or schools*
- (ii) deplores the decision not to include parents in the consultation about arrangements for admission to secondary schools in September 2000*
- (iii) is concerned at the inadequate period of consultation allowed by the Government*
- (iv) deplores the cumbersome system - and consequent additional bureaucracy - whereby ten local admission forums together with a county forum must be established, together with an unknown adjudicator (appointed by the Secretary of State) as the final decision maker in disputes between admitting authorities in the county."*

6.6 The Report of the Education Committee dated 13 January 1999 was received and adopted.

6.7 Report of the Community Services Committee - 14 January 1999
(presented by **P V Goggins**, Chairman of the Committee)

The Report of the Community Services Committee dated 14 January 1999 was received and adopted.

6.8 Report of the Social Services Committee - 7 January 1999
(presented by **P M Aldis**, Chairman of the Committee)

Item 1 - Quality Protects : Management Action Plan

The following motion proposed by **J E Price**, and duly seconded, was LOST:-

"That this Council regrets the knock-on effect of the 0.8% real terms reduction by the Government in the Social Services SSA on the grants we will receive under 'Quality Protects' and therefore the lack of funds to further the expansion to countywide of the Homestart service as recommended in the Joint Review report."

6.9 The Report of the Social Services Committee dated 7 January 1999 was received and adopted.

6.10 **Report of the Environment Committee - 12 January 1999**
(presented by **B A York**, Chairman of the Committee)

The Report of the Environment Committee dated 12 January 1999 was received and adopted.

7. NOTICES OF MOTION

None notified.

8. R J M Ellis sought leave to introduce a motion without leave. The Chairman determined that the matter was not urgent, but advised the Council that the Chief Executive had assured him that a report on the matter in question would be presented to the next Social Services Committee.

ANDREW LAYCOCK
County Secretary