

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ROYSTON & DISTRICT COMMITTEE

**(Royston and Ermine Ward – Parishes of Barkway, Barley, Kelshall, Nuthampstead,
Reed and Therfield)**

**Meeting held at Royston Leisure Centre, Woodcock Road, Royston
on 16 November 2005 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT: *Councillors W.M. Davidson (Chairman), Mrs F.R. Hill (Vice-Chairman), P.C.W. Burt, A.F. Hunter, R.E. Inwood, H.M. Marshall and F.J. Smith.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Head of Financial Services, Area Planning Officer, Community Development Officer and Committee and Member Services Officer.*

ALSO PRESENT: *Nicky Poulain (Royston, Buntingford & Bishops Stortford Primary Care Trust), Rebecca Thornley (Royston, Buntingford & Bishops Stortford Primary Care Trust), Roy Wilsher (Chief Fire Officer – Hertfordshire County Council), Mark Yates (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), David Lloyd (Executive Member for Adult Care & Community Safety – Hertfordshire County Council), Geraint Burnell (Royston Town Centre Manager).*

55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

Councillor A.F. Hunter had sent his apologies for late arrival. He arrived at the meeting at 7.57 p.m.

56. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

57. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was submitted for consideration by the Committee.

58. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor R.E. Inwood declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 – NHS Dental Services Provision for the Royston & District Area – as he was North Hertfordshire District Council's representative on the East Hertfordshire & Buntingford Primary Care Trust Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Inwood reserved his right to speak and vote in relation to this item.

Councillor R.E. Inwood declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 – Impact of Proposed Changes to Fire Service Provision for the Royston & District Area – as his mother was involved in the Fire Officers' campaign. He would also be joining the Fire Officers and their supporters when they made a presentation at the meeting of the Hertfordshire County Council on 29 November 2005. Councillor Inwood reserved his right to speak and vote in relation to this item.

Councillor R.E. Inwood declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 12 – Royston Market Improvements – as he had previously worked on the market. Councillor Inwood reserved the right to speak and vote in relation to this item.

59. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

60. NHS DENTAL SERVICES PROVISION FOR THE ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA

Nicky Poulain and Rebecca Thornley of the Royston, Buntingford and Bishops Stortford Primary Care Trust (PCT) addressed the Committee in relation to the issues raised about the continued lack of NHS dental services in the Royston area.

Ms Poulain made the following key points:

- The PCT were very aware of the problems in the Royston area, and had highlighted this area for key investment as soon as funds were available.
- No new NHS dental services contracts could be agreed until after release of monies from the Department of Health. This was expected by the end of November 2005.
- Many dentists, and potential dentists, were not willing to commit to any additional or new provision until the nationwide contracts had been agreed. This process had suffered a series of delays, but was scheduled to be completed by April 2006.
- The PCT had negotiated with the neighbouring Stevenage & North Herts PCT to allow Royston area residents to register and be treated at the dental surgery in Ashwell.

In response to questions from the Committee, Ms Poulain confirmed that the problems with lack of NHS dental services provision was repeated throughout both the county and the country, although the Royston area was one of the key areas of concern in Hertfordshire. The Board of the PCT had therefore agreed that any additional monies received would be invested in this area first. Ms Poulain also confirmed that the problems faced had been raised with the Government by representatives of this and other PCTs, to raise awareness of the difficulties faced, but that no response had yet been forthcoming.

The Committee informed Ms Poulain that the recent planning application to convert a residential property in the town into a new dental practice had not been refused on planning grounds, as she believed, but that it had actually been supported by the Council, who had been minded to grant it. The application had actually been withdrawn by the applicant, as the Highways Authority's objections could not be overcome, particularly in relation to the lack of parking provision on the site. The Committee further stated that this could have been eased by entering into formal agreements with nearby commercial businesses to utilise their car parks during the day.

The Committee expressed their continued disappointment and frustration at the lack of NHS dental services provision in the Royston area, and stated that there would be a lot of expenditure on behalf of the NHS in short course to put right problems with the teeth of people who were unable to see a dentist through lack of provision, particularly those less well of and on benefits or elderly, who would not have the option of being seen privately.

The Chairman thanked Ms Poulain and Ms Thornley for their attendance and presentation to the Committee.

61. PROPOSED CHANGES TO FIRE SERVICE PROVISION FOR THE ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA

Roy Wilsher, Chief Fire Officer for Hertfordshire, addressed the Committee in relation to the proposed changes to Fire Service provision in Hertfordshire, with particular reference to the Royston & District Area. His oral presentation was accompanied by a PowerPoint slideshow.

The Chief Fire Officer outlined the factors and statistics that had been considered when formulating the proposals, and made the following key points:

- The old standard of fire cover for Royston was 1 fire engine in 8-10 minutes, only ever measured at 10 minutes. Hertfordshire always sent two

fire engines to property fires but with no attendance standard for the second fire engine. The new standards would be 1 fire engine in 10 minutes and the second in 13 minutes on 90% of occasions.

- Changes had been made as a result of the introduction of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004, together with other policies and requirements such as the Government's National Framework Document and CPA expectations.
- 12 full-time firefighters from across Hertfordshire would be used to create a Community Safety Task Force, whose primary aim was to provide better fire-prevention information throughout the County, creating an increased emphasis on prevention of fires rather than reaction to them.
- The synchronisation of duty systems throughout the County by changing current shift systems would allow the Community Safety Task Force to operate in the evening and at weekends, provided increased flexibility and resilience in the management of the firefighters and stations, reduce the retained costs during peak periods, and better comply with legislation such as the European Working Time Regulations.
- Investment would be made in a better paging system for retained firefighters which would allow instant assessment of availability whenever required.
- The current shift system and coverage for Royston was:
Two appliances (fire engines) were available at the station, one of which was covered by retained firefighters.
Shift coverage for the primary engine:
 - 0830 – 1800 Monday to Saturday – full-time firefighters based at the Fire Station
 - 0830 – 1300 Sunday – full-time firefighters based at the Fire Station
 - 1300 – 1800 Sunday – full-time firefighters respond from home
 - 0000-0830 every day – full-time firefighters respond from home
 - 1800 – midnight – retained firefighter response only
- The proposed shift system and coverage was:
Two appliances (fire engines) would be available at the station, one of which would be covered by retained firefighters
Shift coverage for the primary engine:
 - 10 hours per day Monday to Friday (daytime) – full-time firefighters based at the Fire Station
 - 2 hours per day Monday to Friday (night) – full-time firefighters on call from home
 - All other hours – retained speed of response, full-time firefighters would also provide retained cover as appropriate

In summary, therefore, the Chief Fire Officer stated that the benefits of the proposal were better investment in community safety, more flexible use of resources, and synchronised shifts for easier management.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that, whilst the proposals had been drafted using data from Hertfordshire only, consultation had taken place with the neighbouring Cambridgeshire authority to ensure adequate provision would be made for those areas currently served by the Royston Fire Station. The risk assessment had also included all incidents such as road traffic accidents, not just fires. He also stated that, whilst there would be no requirement in the full-time firefighters' contracts to attend incidents outside of their contract hours, it was felt that many of them would continue to do so as retained firefighters. He went on to say that the cover at weekends would be exactly the same as it is now 6 p.m. to midnight every day.

With regard to chemical incidents or fires at the factories in and around Royston, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that retained firefighters were not trained or allowed to tackle such incidents. Full-time firefighters would therefore be encouraged to attend. Should no full-time firefighters be available from Royston Fire Station, others would be sent from neighbouring stations such as Baldock, Hitchin or Stevenage. The Chief Fire Officer stated that, rather than immediately contacting the full-time firefighters individually, the process would be to wait to see who mustered at the station, and then make contact with others as necessary. This would be the same at weekends as it is now 6 p.m. to midnight.

The Committee expressed their unease at the proposals, especially as the potential results could be serious fatalities. They also felt that not enough consideration had been given to the cross-border service provided to Cambridgeshire villages around Royston, the increased risk posed by chemical factories in Royston, such as the Johnson Matthey site, or to the amount of rural area coverage provided by the station. The Chairman thanked the Chief Fire Officer for his attendance and presentation to the Committee.

62. IMPACT OF PROPOSED CHANGES TO FIRE SERVICE PROVISION FOR THE ROYSTON & DISTRICT AREA

Mr Christopher Shipman of Royston Fire Station addressed the Committee on behalf of Fire Officers at the Royston Fire Station, who were concerned about the potential impact on the Royston area of the proposed Fire Service provision changes. His oral presentation was accompanied by a PowerPoint slideshow.

Mr Shipman outlined the key concerns which firefighters at the Royston Fire Station had with regard to the proposals. Key points raised were:

- The primary consideration of the Fire Authority when conducting risk assessment of Hertfordshire were dwelling numbers and population density. These figures had been collected then fed into a computer to come up with the proposals – no consideration had been given to the reality of the situation in the area.
- Response time standards had been reduced from the current 8-10 minutes to 13-15 minutes. This could make a major difference if the fire spread quickly or if people were trapped.
- Current coverage in rural areas was inadequate (as shown by a map in his presentation). The new proposals would extend that affected area, putting more lives and properties at risk.
- Highlighted the problems that the Authority had experienced in recruiting new retained firefighters, particularly in the North Herts area (including Royston), as many residents were commuters. However, there had never been a concerted, sustained drive to improve and maintain recruitment by the management of the Service.
- No real consideration had been made in the assessment to the increased risk of chemical fires and incidents, or to the increasing numbers of Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs), which caused many deaths. This was particularly pertinent as the area covered by the Fire Station included many major and treacherous roads.

Mr Shipman informed the Committee that, whilst many of the firefighters from the Station were on hand to provide fire safety information to the public (identified by their maroon shirts), they had been asked not to conduct the campaign and make the presentation whilst on duty. He also informed the Committee that a petition of more than 5,000 signatures had been gathered, coordinated by Mr Hutt, but that this could not be presented as Mr Hutt lived just over the border in South Cambridgeshire.

To conclude, Mr Shipman encouraged the Committee and those in the audience to demand consistency of the response standards throughout the County, reject the downgrading of Royston Fire Station, and ensure it is treated in the same manner as other small Fire Stations, such as Hitchin. He expressed concern about the likely

outcome of the proposals, and asked whether it would take fatalities before the Fire Service would realise the danger and error of the proposals.

The Chairman thanked Mr Shipman for his presentation to the Committee, and all the firefighters from Royston Fire Station for attending the meeting.

63. SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING – SAVINGS AND GROWTH 2006/1007 TO 2010/2011

The Head of Financial Services presented a report of the Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services to the Committee. The report gave the list of savings and growth items submitted by officers for 2006/2007, and sought the Committee's views on the provisional savings and growth items as part of the consultation process on Service & Financial Planning for 2006/2007 onwards.

Attached as part of the report were the following appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Savings – Hertfordshire County Council Subsidies
- Appendix 2 – Budget Forecast Over the Next 5 Years
- Appendix 3 – Savings – Service Options
- Appendix 4 – Savings – Income Increase Options
- Appendix 5 – Growth – Revenue Options
- Appendix 6 – Growth – Capital Options

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the following items raised by the Committee be passed to the Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services for consideration when producing the draft Budget for 2006/2007:
- CS1 – the Committee support this proposal as adequate service was not provided
 - CS2 – the Committee could not support the proposal to reduce the number of cuttings of verges as there were increasing numbers of complaints about such land becoming overgrown, which would be exacerbated by a reduction in cutting.
 - CS3 – the Committee supported this proposal as there was currently plenty of street furniture, and any future provision or minor maintenance could be funded through the Committee's delegated budgets.
 - CS4 – the Committee supported the proposal to defer making any decision in this area until after the Working Party as agreed by Cabinet on 15 November 2005 had been given time to review the situation.
 - SP9 – the Committee felt that the review and reduction of playscheme places was more appropriate than the complete removal of this service.
 - SP10 and SP11 – the Committee could not support these proposals as there was a clear need for better provision throughout the District.
 - SP12 – the Committee agreed that, whilst some reduction in provision was appropriate, provision for these services by other organisations should be reviewed to ensure no essential services were completely withdrawn.
 - SP14 – the Committee felt that it would be more appropriate to make contributions to general community transport schemes, such as the Lister Shuttle and the Royston & Community Transport scheme, rather than continuing to contribute to as limited a service as the Dial-a-Ride scheme.
 - SP16 – the Committee could not support this proposal as it was felt to be a key service which enables the Area Committees, and other areas of the Council, to continue to function effectively.
 - SP19 – the Committee felt that this proposal could not be implemented unless other measures were put into place to complement this, such as the provision of larger bins.
 - SP21 – the Committee could not support this proposal as it would result in the loss of a valuable community asset.

- SP22 – whilst the Committee could support a one-year freeze on the budget to evaluate the process and requirements, future years should not be frozen unless with the express agreement of the Committee.
- SP23 – the Committee could not support the proposal to reduce their budgets as it was felt this money is used for the benefits of the community, and with the proposals to make increasing provisions from these budgets for items such as street furniture, it would not be appropriate to reduce them.
- SP28 – the Committee felt this was a relatively small sum of money, and would therefore not justify the negative impact which would arise.
- SP29 – the Committee expressed concern at this proposal, and stressed the need to ensure that adequate provision was made to facilitate these changes, and a gradual introduction of changes to make community aware, rather than sudden change.
- SP37 – the Committee supported Cabinet's proposal to compare the current charges with other neighbouring and comparable authorities, and to make the increase more gradual.
- SP39-41 – the Committee felt that these charges should be reviewed in comparison to the charges imposed by other neighbouring and comparable authorities. However, the Committee supported the introduction of increases as soon as possible.
- SP42 – it was noted that there was no allotment provision by the Council in the Royston & District area.
- That the further assessments and requirements in relation to the proposed Information Technology projects were noted.

(2) That the report on recycling requirements and proposals, as considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 20 September 2005, be circulated to all Members for information.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that all Members were consulted on the proposed growth bids and afforded the opportunity to comment before Cabinet set the draft Budget in December 2005.

64. DISPOSAL OF COUNCIL-OWNED LAND AT GREENBURY CLOSE, BARLEY

The Head of Financial Services presented his report to the Committee, which sought their views on the proposal to dispose of Council land in Greenbury Close, Barley. This land, as shown on the location plan attached to the report as Appendix A, was to be disposed of to the Howard Cottage Society, for the construction of a further phase of affordable homes.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Head of Financial Services be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That the support of the Royston & District Committee for the proposed disposal of Council-owned land at Greenbury Close, Barley be noted when considering this matter.

REASON FOR DECISION: As part of the consultation process, the Committee was asked to give its views to Cabinet on the proposed disposal of the Council's remaining land in Greenbury Close, Barley to Howard Cottage Society for the provision of affordable housing.

65. DISPOSAL OF COUNCIL-OWNED LAND AT MEADOW WAY, THERFIELD

The Head of Financial Services presented his report to the Committee, which sought their views on the proposal to dispose of Council land in Meadow Way, Therfield. This land, as shown on the location plan attached to the report as Appendix A was to be disposed of to the Howard Cottage Society, for the provision of affordable housing.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Head of Financial Services be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That the support of the Royston & District Committee for the proposed disposal of Council-owned land at Meadow Way, Therfield be noted when considering this matter.

REASON FOR DECISION: As part of the consultation process, the Committee was asked to give its views to Cabinet on the proposed disposal of the Council's remaining land in Meadow Way, Therfield to the Howard Cottage Society at nil consideration for the provision of affordable housing.

66. ROYSTON MARKET IMPROVEMENTS

The Community Development Officer for Royston and the Town Centre Manager for Royston presented a report of the Head of Community Development to the Committee, which sought their agreement in principle for proposed improvements to Royston Market. The report was accompanied by a visual presentation.

Key problems with the market were identified as:

- The Market was not visible from the main road (A10) as larger vehicles belonging to the traders were parking at the top end of the site, obscuring the view of the market.
- Conflict existed between the market use of space and the parking use, with some traders leaving their vehicles parked amidst the stalls. This was allegedly to prevent public parking and to anchor stalls.
- Stalls gave a public perception of shabbiness and low quality.
- Problems had arisen as stallholders "crept" away from their allocated stalls to fill gaps, further contributing to the dishevelled appearance of the market.
- Perceived decline in quality and content of the market had resulted in a decline in customers, which in turn led to the market closing earlier and earlier.

Proposed measures to address these problems were:

- Site trading vehicles to be located at the lower end of the site to make a refurbished market visible from the main road and enable the market to promote itself
- Provide anchors to enable stall-holders to hold their stalls in position, preventing creeping – total cost of £1,000
- Installation of new market stalls of consistent appearance – estimated to be maximum of 27 stalls @ £1,000 each (could be funded through EEDA bid / external contributions)
- Installation of a temporary barrier between the Market and the street to define the Market area – bollards with total cost of £10,075
- Installation of a metered electricity supply to stalls to reduce pollution and illuminate the stalls during the winter months – total cost of £7,720
- Recruit new traders to fill existing gaps and replace any who can't adapt to a new regime

The Community Development Officer for Royston stated that, as the phasing was not critical for this project, it could be implemented over more than one financial year, and any funding the Committee might wish to commit could be spread over the life of the project. Some local organisations had also intimated a willingness to contribute to this project. Funding could also be found through the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), who were seeking bids by March 2006 for projects which yield a benefit the community and provide a financial return to the proposer. Other elements such as a marquee to cover the market area and permit other weather-critical events to take place could be added, to improve community benefit and income from the project, thus helping secure additional funding where required.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed approach to the East of England Development Agency to obtain a bursary be approved;
- (2) That the proposed project for the rejuvenation of Royston Market be endorsed;
- (3) That the opening of consultations with interested parties be endorsed.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: To facilitate the rejuvenation of Royston Market.

67. ROYSTON AREA VISIONING – ACTION PLAN

The Community Development Officer for Royston presented a report of the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services which updated the Committee about progress with visioning since the Action Plan of the Royston Visioning Group was received on 10 December 2004.

Attached as part of the report were the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Progress report on the implementation of actions led by NHDC
- Appendix B – Progress report on the implementation of actions influenced by NHDC
- Appendix C – List of completed projects

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the progress made on Area Visioning to date be noted;
- (2) That the priorities for implementation as indicated in the Action Plan for 2006/2007 be confirmed.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: This report was part of the implementation and review process for Area Visioning, in which Area Committees were informed of progress and asked for their comments.

68. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer for Royston presented a report of the Head of Community Development to the Committee. This report advised them of the activities undertaken by the Community Development Officer for Royston since the meeting of the Committee held on 5 October 2005, and brought to their attention some important community based activities that would be taking place during the next few months.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report of the Head of Community Development be noted;
- (2) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer for Royston to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Royston communities be endorsed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in Royston.

69. ANNUAL GRANTS AND DEVELOPMENT DISCRETIONARY BUDGET 2005/06

The Community Development Officer for Royston presented a report of the Head of Community Development to the Committee, which set out the budgetary situation for the Committee, together with 3 additional grant applications that had been received.

RESOLVED: That the current expenditure and balance of the Development Budget be noted.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) The report was intended to apprise Members of the financial resources available to this Committee. It drew attention to the current budgetary situation, assisted in the effective financial management of the Committee's budget and ensured

actions were performed within the Authority's Financial Regulations and the guidance contained in the Grants procedure;

- (2) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

70. GRANT APPLICATION – BARKWAY PARISH COUNCIL

RESOLVED: That the sum of £270 be awarded to Barkway Parish Council as a financial contribution toward the cost of additional safety grass tiles for installation on the parish play area.

REASON FOR DECISION: The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

71. GRANT APPLICATION – COMMUNITY CENTRES BOOKLET

RESOLVED: That the sum of £250 be granted as a financial contribution toward the production of a Community Centres booklet.

REASON FOR DECISION: The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

72. GRANT APPLICATION – REED PARISH COUNCIL

RESOLVED: That the sum of £500 be awarded to Reed Parish Council as a financial contribution toward the costs of repair of the Reed village bus shelter.

REASON FOR DECISION: The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

73. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

RESOLVED: To determine the applications as set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control as submitted to the Committee in the following schedule:

SCHEDULE

Reference Number	Description of Development and location	Decision
05/01178/1	Manor Farm, Kelshall Retention of re-developed former agricultural building in connection with continued use of land as a livery yard and horse grazing.	GRANTED (as per report)
05/01306/1HH	The Bungalow, Burrs Lane, Barkway Extensions and alterations, including a new roof, to facilitate the conversion of the bungalow into a one and a half storey, four bedroom dwellings and attached double garage.	GRANTED (as per report)

74. PLANNING APPEALS

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that no planning appeals had been lodged or determined since the meeting of the Committee held on 5 October 2005.

The meeting closed at 10.54 p.m.

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Chairman

