

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE

(Cadwell, Chesfield, Codicote, Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo, Kimpton and Knebworth Wards)

Minutes of the meeting held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City on Wednesday, 19 September 2007 at 7.30 p.m.

MINUTES

PRESENT: Councillor D.J. Barnard (Chairman), Tom Brindley (Vice-Chairman), A. Bardett, Sal Jarvis and D. Miller.

IN ATTENDANCE: Garry Gover – Community Development Officer, David Miley – Democratic Services Manager, Julie Williams – Electoral Services Manager and Ian Gourlay – Senior Committee and Member Services Officer.

2 members of the public.

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Bishop, Lee Downie, Tricia Gibbs, Jane Gray and Mrs C.P.A. Strong.

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2007 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

20. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman announced that a missing page of Appendix C to Item 7 – Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations – had been tabled at the meeting.

21. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received prior to, or at the meeting.

22. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No requests for public participation had been received.

23. THE SCOOTER AND CYCLE TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS PROJECT (SCooTS) – UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Ricky Moore (Two Wheels Co-ordinator for SCooTS) and Sarah Hazel (one of the clients from the Southern Rural area in the scheme).

Prior to the Committee's consideration of the update report, Members, Officers and the SCooTS representatives convened in the Council Reception Area in order that photographs could be taken, with one of the scooters operated by the project.

Upon returning to the Committee Room, the Community Development Officer presented the progress report of the SCooTS project, pursuant to the grant aid of £15,000 (over a three year period) donated to the project by the Committee. The initial grant of £5,000 had been released, with the remaining two tranches of £5,000 to be released in the 2008/09 and 2009/10 Financial Years, respectively.

The Community Development Officer advised that, at present, there were 11 clients on the scheme, and whilst they were all from the North Herts District, 8 of these came from the Southern Rural area. Once the scheme had 13 clients, it would be running at full capacity. In view of the success of the project, the fleet of scooters would be increased as more clients signed up to the scheme. The cost of additional scooters was included in the 2007/08 budget, and consideration was to be given to the replacement of some of the existing scooters with a more economical version.

The Chairman invited Ricky and Hazel to say a few words in support of the project and to answer a number of Members' questions on various aspects of the scheme.

The Committee was delighted with the progress of the project and congratulated Ricky, Sarah and the Community Development Officer on their achievements.

In debating the report, Members agreed that an article on the project should be included in the next edition of the Council's "Outlook" magazine, and that further publicity should be given in the local press. The Committee also agreed that a further progress report be submitted to its April 2008 meeting.

The Committee was concerned that the Baldock & District and Royston & District Committees had been prevented from supporting coverage by SCooTS of the remaining rural areas in North Hertfordshire, in view of the financial advice given that the de minimis threshold for capital budget requests from each Area Committee was £15,000. Members considered that this de minimis threshold should be applied District-wide on capital projects which involved more than one Area Committee area.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee's previous agreement for the Community Development Officer to release the remaining tranche payments to SCooTs of £5,000 in 2008/09 and £5,000 in 2009/10, be endorsed;
- (2) That the Committee's current unallocated Capital Visioning Budget of £32,700 be noted, should it be mindful of grant-aiding further support to the initiative;
- (3) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and wellbeing for rural communities be endorsed;
- (4) That an article on the SCooTs project should be included in the next edition of the Council's "Outlook" magazine, and that further publicity should be given in the local press;
- (5) That a further progress report be submitted to the Committee's April 2008 meeting;
- (6) That the Community Development Officer seeks further advice from the Head of Financial Services on the de minimis threshold for Area Committee capital projects, and responds to the views of the Committee on the matter detailed above.

REASON FOR DECISION: To continue to support this scheme to help overcome some of the transport obstacles faced by young people living in the rural area of the District

24. REVIEWS OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report seeking the Committee's views on any revisions which may be appropriate to the existing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations within the Southern Rural area.

The Democratic Services Manager answered a number of questions raised by Members on the report, and the Committee raised no suggestions for any revisions to the existing arrangements.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the current scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places within the area of the Committee be supported;
- (2) That the Returning officer be advised that Committee considers that the existing locations for Polling Stations within the Southern Rural area remain unchanged.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Council to review the Authority's Polling District's, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

25. PARKING BAYS IN RURAL AREAS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Vice-Chairman of the Committee presented an item seeking support for the introduction of a policy, together with a budget, for the installation of parking bays in rural areas for people with disabilities. It was suggested that Area Committee and North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership Joint Member Panel discretionary funding might be called upon to fund bays, should a need be identified.

The Committee noted that there were two types of bay, namely voluntary (which had no legal standing and no additional signage) and mandatory (supported by a Traffic Regulation Order, with both paint and signage). Voluntary bays were less preferable, but were cheaper to implement and, because they were unenforceable, carried no enforcement cost.

The Committee was supportive of the Vice-Chairman's proposal. The Chairman requested all Members of the Committee to identify what they considered to be suitable sites for disabled parking bays in their wards.

The Committee agreed to refer the matter to the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership Joint Member Panel's 15 October 2007 meeting, to request consideration of use of part of its discretionary funding for disabled parking bays in rural areas, as required, on the basis if match funding from the relevant Area Committee. The Committee further agreed to request the Head of Planning and Building Control to consult with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport on the matter, and prepare a report for submission to the 6 December 2007 Southern Rural Committee meeting on the potential for a policy, together with a budget, for the provision of disabled parking bays in rural areas.

RECOMMENDED TO NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS JOINT MEMBER PANEL: That consideration be given to use of part of the Panel's discretionary budget for the funding of disabled parking bays in rural areas, as required, on the basis of match funding from the relevant Area Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to consult with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport on the matter, and prepare a report for submission to the 6 December 2007 Southern Rural Committee meeting on the potential for a policy, together with a budget, for the provision of disabled parking bays in rural areas.

REASON FOR DECISION: To commence a process aimed at delivering a mechanism whereby improvements can be made to the provision of disabled parking bays in rural areas.

26. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer for the Southern Rural Area presented a report of the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services to the Committee, which advised them of the activities undertaken by the Community Development Officer for the Southern Rural Area since the meeting of the Committee held on 14 June 2007, and brought to their attention the important community based activities that would take place during the next few months.

Members commented on the content of a number of the future meetings of the Committee and the content of a proposed report to its next meeting regarding the law relating to fly-tipping.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report of the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services be noted;

- (2) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer for the Southern Rural Area to promote greater community capacity and well-being for the Southern Rural Area communities be endorsed;
- (3) That, instead of the proposed "rural conference" type event originally planned for the 4 October 2007 meeting, representatives of Parish Councils and Parish Plans Committees be invited to the February 2008 meeting, in lieu of the Community Safety event scheduled for that meeting;
- (4) That the offer of the Licensing & Enforcement Manager to submit a full report on the law relating to fly-tipping to the next meeting on 4 October 2007 be accepted, and that this report should contain as much information as possible on the various powers available to all agencies involved in the enforcement process.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To keep members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in the Southern Rural Area.

27. DEVELOPMENT AND AREA VISIONING BUDGETS 2007/2008

The Community Development Officer for the Southern Rural Area presented a report of the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services to the Committee, which set out the current expenditure and balances of the Area Committee delegated budgets for 2007/08.

The Committee was concerned with advice supplied to the Community Development Officer that Ward Member Budgets were allocated by Ward, rather than by Member, meaning that in multi-Member Wards all Councillors would need to agree to each proposed request for expenditure. The Committee, as one of the first to adopt Ward Member budgets, considered that the budget should be allocated per Member.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the current expenditure, balances and carry forwards of the Ward Development Budgets and the allocated Visioning Budgets, as set out in Appendix A of the report, be noted;
- (2) That the Committee will now consider its programme of awards to community organisations for this financial year 2007/08 on a meeting by meeting basis, in order to ensure that the management of grants is more manageable and to grant-aid all voluntary groups and organisations more effectively, in support of their project needs;
- (3) That the Community Development Officer seeks further advice regarding the allocation and approval of expenditure from Ward Member Budgets, cognisant of the Committee's view on the matter outlined above.

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.

The meeting closed at 9.15p.m.

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Chairman