

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE
(Cadwell, Chesfield, Codicote, Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo, Kimpton
and Knebworth Wards)**

**Minutes of the meeting held at the Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth
Garden City on Thursday, 26 November 2009 at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: Councillors D.J. Barnard (Chairman), A. Bardett (Vice-Chairman), John Bishop, Tricia Cowley, Lee Downie, Jane Gray, Sal Jarvis, D. Miller and Mrs C.P.A. Strong.

IN ATTENDANCE: Andy Cavanagh (Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management), Mary Caldwell (Planning Control and Conservation Manager), Garry Gover (Community Development Officer) and Ian Gourlay (Senior Committee and Member Services Officer).

ALSO PRESENT: Claire Morgan (Community Development Officer), Sally Everett (Community Development Project Support Officer) and 7 members of the public.

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tom Brindley.

42. MINUTES – 1 OCTOBER 2009

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 October 2009 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 38 – Champion News and Finance Report – Rural Grants Fund – the end of the second sentence which read “....13 applications for capital funding with applications being considered by the Parish Challenge Board on 14 December 2009” should read “....12 applications for environmental improvements with applications being considered by the Parish Challenge Panel on 14 December 2009”.

The Chairman commented that, in respect of Minute 39 – Secondary School Transfer – the Committee had received an acknowledgement to the letter sent on its behalf to the HCC Director of Children, Schools and Families regarding this matter.

43. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed at the meeting.

44. CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting;
- (2) The Chairman announced that the next meeting of the Southern Rural Committee would be held at District Council Offices on 21 January 2010;
- (3) The Chairman reminded the Members that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda should be declared as either a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item.

45. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no items of public participation.

46. CHAMPION NEWS AND FINANCE REPORT

The Community Development Officer presented the report of the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Community Development regarding Champion News and the finances of the Committee, and drew Members' attention to the following:

- Grant Request – Offley Baby and Toddler Group – the request included in the agenda papers for a grant was now withdrawn, as the Local Hertfordshire County Councillor had agreed to the required funding being met from his discretionary locality budget scheme;
- Additional Service Level Agreement (SLA) / Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) – “The Village Voice” to support the rural village newsletter - £750 per year from 2009/10 to 2011/12 – the Committee supported this additional SLA/MoU, which would provide revenue support to the newsletter, including equipment and distribution costs, but which must not be used to support any costs of campaign issues which could directly conflict with Council policy. It was noted that there were no direct staffing costs, as the editorial and distribution team were volunteers.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed additional SLA/MoU for 2009-12, as set out in Section 5.1.4 of the report – Funding for Rural Newsletter, be approved, for an amount of £750 per year;
- (2) That the Committee's budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Ward Development Budgets and the allocated Visioning Budgets, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (3) That, in response to the request of the JMP meeting held on 26 June 2009, no further joint funded projects or schemes for inclusion on the 2009/10 JMP Works Programme, as attached at Appendix 2 to the report, be proposed at the current time;
- (4) That it be noted that the future commitment of any unallocated funds within the Committee's Development Budgets will be required prior to the end of the current financial year which ends 31 March 2010, and that it be further noted that the last Southern Rural Committee meeting in the 2009/10 Committee cycle to allocate the funds will be on 18 March 2010;
- (5) That, as part of the process outlined in (4) above, consideration be given to the possible reallocation of funds from any initiatives/projects that are approaching two years on the original date of commitment and/or where there is likely to be no foreseeable progress in the near future, should this be applicable, by 18 March 2010;
- (6) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well being for rural communities be endorsed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer; to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee; and to confirm the future strategic policy direction for the programme of financial assistance for the voluntary and community sector, through the negotiation of SLAs/MoUs.

47. SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS AND UNILATERAL UNDERTAKINGS

The Planning Control and Conservation Manager presented a report which provided the Committee with an update on the comprehensive details of the current Section 106 Agreements and Unilateral Undertakings in its area, as at 30 October 2009 for NHDC. Also supplied was information relating to the County Council in respect of highways (up to 11 September 2009), with the remaining contributions and obligations involving the County Council up to 30 June 2009.

The Planning Control and Conservation Manager referred to the chart set out at Paragraph 4.6 of the report, which showed the overall income levels associated with Section 106 monies for NHDC since 2001/02. The downward trend for 2009/10 was primarily due to the current national economic situation, which had also resulted in increased officer time spent in negotiations with developers over Section 106 contributions.

The Planning Control and Conservation Manager tabled some updated information concerning County Council Section 106 monies.

The Planning Control and Conservation Manager stated that a new NHDC Corporate Officer Group had been formed (comprising herself and officers from the NHDC departments most involved in Section 106 Agreements), which she hoped would be useful in moving forward appropriate schemes for expenditure of the Section 106 monies.

The Planning Control and Conservation Manager answered a number of Members' questions regarding the report, and explained that it would be expected that the use of Section 106 monies on leisure functions administered by parish councils would be items that provided "added value", such as childrens' play equipment or additional leisure-related equipment in village halls. She also undertook to do the following:

- To provide a written response to the Member (Cllr Lee Downie) who had asked for clarity as to the current status of the Section 106 monies identified for Great Ashby Community Centre and Great Ashby District Park, especially in the light of the recent decision of the Countryside Management Service to not relocate to the Park due to economic reasons;
- Arrange for the information in the appendices to the report to be regularly updated and made available on the NHDC website, as well as being submitted to the Committee on an annual basis; and
- To contact Hertfordshire County Council in an endeavour to ascertain a clear reply as to its where it had allocated (or where it was proposing to allocate) the significant Section 106 contributions for education facilities and youth provision across the District.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That a Section 106 Agreement/Unilateral Undertakings report be presented to the Committee on an annual basis;
- (3) That the Planning Control and Conservation Manager undertake the action detailed in the above preamble to this minute.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that there is a robust system for negotiating and managing Section 106 Agreements/Unilateral Undertakings; and to ensure that this is kept under constant review and that the risk associated with this activity is managed in an appropriate manner.

48. CORPORATE BUSINESS PLANNING 2010/11 – EFFICIENCY AND INVESTMENT PROPOSALS

The Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management presented a report of the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance in respect of the proposed Efficiency and Investment Items to be considered as part of the Corporate Business Planning process for 2010/11. These were as detailed in a number of appendices submitted with the report.

The Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management advised that the Council's Budget deficit for 2010/11 earlier in the year had stood at £1.3M, but that £905,000 of this deficit had been identified as a result of proposed efficiency and investments items identified in July 2009. Further efficiency proposals, including increased car parking charges, had been identified and, based on a Council Tax increase of 1.5%, the current Budget deficit for 2010/11 stood at £157,000. Work was underway to address the 2010/11 deficit, although the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management reminded Members that the Budget gaps for the next few years were in the region of £1M per annum.

In response to a question in respect of Efficiency Proposal E/13 – Withdraw funding for the Anchor Handyperson Scheme – the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management undertook to investigate and respond to the Member who had raised the question regarding the frequency of use of this service, split between the urban and rural areas of the District.

RESOLVED: That the Efficiency and Investment Items proposed as part of the Corporate Business Planning process for 2010/11, as contained in the report and its appendices, be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Southern Rural Committee to comment on the proposed Efficiency and Investment Items for 2010/11.

49. NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

The next meeting of the Southern Rural Committee will be held on Thursday, 21 January 2010 at District Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, starting at 7.30pm.

Prior to closing the meeting, the Chairman had the pleasure to congratulate Ickleford Parish Council, which had recently been awarded "Quality Parish Council" status, the first parish council in North Hertfordshire to have received such an award.

The meeting closed at 8.20p.m.

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Chairman