

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 5 November 2009

PRESENT: Councillor John Batchelor – Chairman

Councillors:	Roger Hall	Liz Heazell
	Mike Mason	David Morgan (as substitute for Janice Guest)
	Bridget Smith	Bunty Waters

Councillors David Bard, Neil Davies, Simon Edwards and Mark Howell were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
	Kirsty Human	Corporate Project Officer
	Jo Mills	Corporate Manager, New Communities
	Jackie Sayers	Scrutiny Development Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Val Barrett, Janice Guest, James Hockney, Deborah Roberts and Julia Squier.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mason declared a prejudicial interest in item 6: Orchard Park Action Plan Review, as a former member of the Interim Council at Orchard Park. He gave evidence on this item, but did not participate in the discussion as a member of the Committee.

23. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

24. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chairman announced that the Committee had received four questions from Denis Payne, Chairman of Impington Parish Council. Two of these questions had been received on the day of the meeting and would receive written responses. Joseph Whelan, Head of New Communities for the County Council gave the following answers to the other two questions.

Are the changes being made to Stagecoach's schedule being factored into the whole process?

Stagecoach would be reviewing their service at the end of the month. They were liaising with the County Council, the Community Council and the developer Gallagher on the location of the bus stops, whilst the actual bus routes had been agreed.

Mr Whelan stated that since the publication of the North Corridor Area Transport Plan, Stagecoach had concluded that the services named in the Plan were not practical to serve Orchard Park, although the Citi 4 service would still be funded and continued to serve Orchard Park directly.

What has happened to the subsidy provided by the North Corridor Area Transport Plan (NCATP) of the two Citi services bus routes?

Mr Whelan explained that there were three elements to the subsidy provided by the

Section 106 Agreement:

- The Cambridgeshire Guided Bus
- North Corridor Area Transport Plan
- Rural Interchange Scheme

He stated that:

- The £2,000,000 pledged for the Cambridgeshire Guided Bus had been received
- The £2,000,000 pledged to improve transport in the north corridor had been received

It was noted that the funding was indexed linked and so over £4,000,000 had been received and a final payment of £2,000,000, which was also indexed linked, would be paid after the 300th market housing dwelling was occupied. It was understood that £3,580,365 of this money had been spent, leaving a balance of £561,409, which would be spent on the Real Time Bus Information Scheme.

The Chairman thanked Denis Payne for his questions and Mr Joseph Whelan for his informative answers.

25. ORCHARD PARK ACTION PLAN: REVIEW

Councillor David Bard presented a report on the progress made both on the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group in October 2008 and the progress made at Orchard Park since the last update in April 2009.

Orchard Park Community Primary School

Concern was expressed at the failure of the solar panels and wind turbines at the school to reduce energy costs. Hazel Belchamber agreed to ascertain whether any action had been taken against those who advised on the design of these renewable energy features. It was understood that although the design of the school was not the most energy efficient, it complied with national guidelines.

City and Parish Councillor Clare Blair, Chair of Governors for Orchard Park Community Primary School, explained that the school was a success and had been assessed as "good" by a recent Ofsted report. She explained that there were 78 pupils at the school and this was expected to increase and she asked the Committee to support the proposal to increase the additional number of pupils allowed for next year to 30. The Admissions Forum would make the final decision. It was noted that legally the school could not refuse applications from outside the catchment area if it had places available.

It was understood that the Primary Care Trust (PCT) was unable to honour its pledge to move into the school and whilst it was agreed that Partners needed to work together to deliver the facilities required in new developments it was noted that the decision taken by the PCT allowed the school to accommodate the increased number of school children. It was suggested that the experience at Cambourne indicated that birth rates were far higher than the national average in new settlements and so the new schools should be built large enough to accommodate this trend. However, when the new community became more established the birth rate would be expected to drop back down to the national average and the school design needed to be flexible enough to accommodate this.

Venue to host community events

There was some discussion on whether a school building was a suitable venue to host community events. It was understood that child protection issues meant that certain

areas of a school could not be used during term time, but it was noted that schools could host community events during the evening, as had been the case at Bar Hill. At new developments such as Orchard Park community rooms were adjoined to the school but part of a separate wing, linked by a controlled door to the school and so could be used at all times of the day by the public. It was suggested that the existing buildings at the site that would become Northstowe could be used by its first residents for community purposes as it was imperative that the Community Residents' Association had a place to meet from the outset.

Delivering targets

It was suggested that an extra column should be inserted in the table at Appendix 2 to show what dates or occupation numbers by which the various milestones should be have been completed, to indicate which facilities were delivered late and by how much. However, it was noted that there were different reasons for delays, including external factors such as an economic downturn, and so such a table could be misleading.

Entrance to Orchard Park

City and Parish Councillor Blair requested that the Committee added its voice to those requesting the altering of the entrance to the community, which was confusingly laid out and cluttered with signage, making it hazardous for pedestrians.

It was suggested that more should be done at Orchard Park by the developers to keep its streets clean and free of mud.

Ward Councillors' report

Councillor Mason introduced this report and expressed the hope that lessons could be learnt from Orchard Park regarding the setting up of Governance arrangements for new communities. Councillor Mark Howell explained that the community development section had merged with the new communities section and so the report, which claimed that the department was not being effectively led was inaccurate.

The Chairman of Orchard Park Community Council invited the Committee to review progress made at Orchard Park in a further 12 months time.

The Committee

RECOMMENDED

- A) That a policy review of governance and electoral arrangements for new or altered parishes/towns be carried out by Corporate Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committees in early course;
- B) That representations be made to the Department for Communities and Local Government concerning the legislation currently in force, which on the experience at Orchard Park, has been expensive, time consuming and clearly not fit for purpose;
- C) That in any large new development a central office/community facility be established on site prior to commencement of construction. This facility to make provision and provide services for planning and community development officers etc. and an office and meeting room for the new parish, community or town council;
- D) That financial arrangements should be made to service the provisions in (C) above, "up front" until such time as any new elected authority with permanent

facilities be in place. Any arrangements to include a method of precept determination where this is required before elections are held;

- E) That consultation procedures involving elected members of all authorities should be carefully devised, to ensure that all aspects of new development are covered concurrently and that all documents can be inspected and filed at one place locally and easily accessed by members of the public.

26. REVIEW OF MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Simon Edwards, the Finance and Staffing portfolio holder, introduced this item on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). He asserted that printed copies of the MTFS report, which had been agreed by Cabinet on Thursday 8 October 2009, should have been included in the agenda for this Committee meeting, instead of the link to the website, which had been provided. The report on the MTFS going to Cabinet's meeting on Thursday 12 November was circulated at the meeting.

Savings

Councillor Edwards praised staff for indentifying year on year savings of £582,000, which would rise to £599,000 next year. This was far in excess of the £325,000 target. However, due to the economic downturn further savings had to be made. The target was to achieve an additional saving of £1,600,000 in the next financial year.

It was noted that the Council had cut its budget four years ago after the authority was capped and the reduction of £1,600,000 next year would mean a net reduction of approximately 30-35% in the Council's budget since 2004.

Pensions

In response to questioning Councillor Edwards explained that the Local Government Pension Scheme was statutory and the Council was legally required to make the contribution set by the actuary. He asserted that the forthcoming increase in the employers' contribution to 29% was unsustainable and unless national changes were made the Council could be forced to make further redundancies to fund the scheme. The Executive Director for Corporate Services explained that whilst the next review of contributions made by the actuary would take place in 2010, mid-term reviews in the three-year cycle could also be made.

Redundancies

Councillor Edwards explained that whilst the Council expected to make 30 posts, funded by the General Fund, redundant, 10 of these were currently vacant and two were new posts and so only 18 job losses were planned. In response to concerns about inaccurate press reports Councillor Edwards assured the Committee that the Chief Executive was keeping staff fully informed of the process and the Communications Team always informed the press of any inaccuracies in their reports.

Gershon savings

Councillor Edwards explained that the last official Gershon savings were made in 2008/09 but due its financial situation, the Council had continued to identify savings after it had ceased to be a Government requirement, although it continued to be Government guidance.

Communication

The Committee asked whether communication to residents could include details of the proportion of the Council's income that was returned to the Government. Councillor Edwards said that he would investigate whether this could be done.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Simon Edwards and the Executive Director for Corporate Services for their attendance.

27. NEW COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRESENTATION

Councillor David Bard, New Communities Portfolio Holder, circulated a report updating the Committee on the achievements and challenges facing his portfolio.

The Committee noted that:

- The New Communities section was undergoing a significant restructuring.
- The Northstowe Design Brief was a work in progress.

Individual Members of the Committee expressed concern that:

- The funding from the Section 106 Agreement might not be sufficient to provide services for the 40% of the population in affordable housing at Orchard Park.
- Due to the budget cuts arts development targets would not be met.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

28. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Roger Hall gave a brief update on the meeting of the County Council's Health and Adult Social Care Committee held on 2 November 2009, where it had become apparent that the budget for Adult Social Care would be significantly overspent this year.

The Committee

AGREED to appoint

- A) Councillor Bridget Smith to the County Council's task and finish group, which is reviewing services for children and young people in the county's new communities;
- B) Councillor Liz Heazell to the County Council's task and finish group on Options for Expanding Affordable Housing Provision in Cambridge City, South Cambridgeshire and East Cambridgeshire.

The meeting became inquorate before the monitoring of portfolio meeting could be discussed.

29. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

This item was not discussed, as the meeting became inquorate during discussion of item 9, Monitoring of the Executive.

30. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

This item was not discussed, as the meeting became inquorate during discussion of item 9, Monitoring of the Executive.

The Meeting ended at 7.35 p.m.
