

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on  
Thursday, 29 March 2012 at 2.00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Councillor James Hockney – Chairman  
Councillor Bridget Smith – Vice-Chairman

<b>Councillors:</b>	Richard Barrett	Val Barrett (substitute)
	Alison Elcox	Jose Hales
	Roger Hall	Lynda Harford (substitute)
	Liz Heazell	Charles Nightingale (substitute)
	Deborah Roberts (substitute)	Bunty Waters

Councillors Ray Manning was in attendance, by invitation.

<b>Officers:</b>	Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Gareth Bell	Communications Manager
	Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
	Mike Hill	Corporate Manager (Health and Environmental Services)
	Jean Hunter	Chief Executive
	Richard May	Policy and Performance Manager
	Jackie Sayers	Scrutiny Development Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tumi Hawkins, Mike Mason, Ted Ridgway Watt and David Whiteman-Downes.

### **52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Liz Heazell declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in agenda item 9, Scrutiny Work Programme, as her husband had been one of the consultation panel respondents. Notwithstanding this interest Councillor Heazell remained in the room and participated in the discussion.

### **53. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2012 were agreed as a correct record.

### **54. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

None.

### **55. LOCALISM**

The Chairman explained that the Committee had considered setting up a Task and Finish Group on localism, but as the Localism Act had now been passed it had been decided to invite the Leader to speak to the Committee on the opportunities that localism could present for the District.

#### **Implications**

The Leader explained that it would take time for the full implications of localism to be known and whilst he was in favour of decisions being taken by local communities he warned that it was unclear exactly how this would work in practice.

**Guidance**

In response to questioning, which referred to the County Council's publication *Taking Forward Localism*, the Leader stated that the Council had not produced its own guidance on localism, as the details had only just been released by the Government at the weekend. This was just after the pre-election period had started, making it difficult for the Council's Executive to respond. The Committee agreed that this authority needed to inform its communities what it was doing to promote localism and it was suggested that this could be achieved through sending a leaflet to all parish councils and by publishing an article in the South Cambs magazine.

The Leader explained that the Council was already doing many of the things that localism was supposed to encourage, such as liaising with parish councils through the parish forum and using our sheltered housing communal areas as community hubs. He concluded that the principles of localism were enshrined in the Council's Aims, Achievements and Actions (3As).

**Working in partnership**

It was agreed that localism should be encouraging a bottom-up decision making process, but concern was expressed that under the guise of localism, parish councils were being told that services, which had hitherto been carried out by the County Council, would now have to be paid for by the parish or District council. The Leader stated that it was for the County Council to decide what it wanted to fund, but he agreed it was unreasonable to expect other public bodies to fund services that had been previously carried out by the County Council.

It was suggested that the document *Taking Localism Forward* could be misinterpreted by parish councils and our residents. It was further suggested that a more complete picture could be provided if all three tiers of government: parish councils, District Council and County Council met to discuss the implications of localism for the District.

**Localism and development**

In response to questioning, the Leader stated that he did not share the concerns of those who feared that localism could be used by developers to gain approval for inappropriate planning applications as the Planning Committee would remain the decision making body. He doubted whether there would be many referenda on local planning issues and he rejected the proposal that a two-thirds majority should be required for approval, as in his view a 50% majority was appropriate.

It was noted that Local Development Plan needed to be agreed before communities could agree their neighbourhood plans. The Chief Executive agreed to ascertain why the funding of parish plans did not appear to be consistent.

**Supporting businesses**

The Leader explained that the Executive had made supporting local businesses one of its main priorities and in particular trying to encourage the provision of jobs for all people, not just those in the high-tech industry. He stated that in his view the current planning policy was wrongly skewed against some aspects of business; for example the Council's current policies prevented any national organisations from having their headquarters in the District and this should be changed.

**Risk assessment**

The Executive Director confirmed that the risks posed by localism had been assessed as part of the Council's Aims, Achievements and Actions (3As) and the authority's risk register would be discussed at the next meeting of Council on 26 April 2012.

**Localism and enforcement**

It was noted that whilst the majority wishes of local communities should prevail where possible, consultation with the proper authorities was imperative in order to prevent illegal actions. It was further noted that Councillor Sue Ellington, Environmental Services Portfolio Holder, had set up a task and finish group to look into enforcement and this would reflect localism.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and the Executive Director (Corporate Services) for their attendance and informative answers.

The Committee

**RECOMMENDED TO THE LEADER** That

- a) The Council offer to host a joint parish forum with Cambridgeshire County Council.
- b) The Council communicate with residents on how the authority is responding to the challenge of localism through a leaflet to parish councils and an article in South Cambs magazine.

**56. CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS: REPORT OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

The Chairman introduced this report, which detailed the work of the Corporate Communications Task and Finish Group and its recommendations to the Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder. The Portfolio Holder had sent his apologies and asked it to be recorded that he supported the report and recommendations.

**Communicating with residents**

It was suggested that South Cambs magazine appealed more to older residents. It was noted that the links on the frontpage of the Council's website should be to the issues of greatest importance to our residents.

The review of Learning from Feedback had found that the Council needed to improve the way in which feedback was acted upon.

**Internal communication**

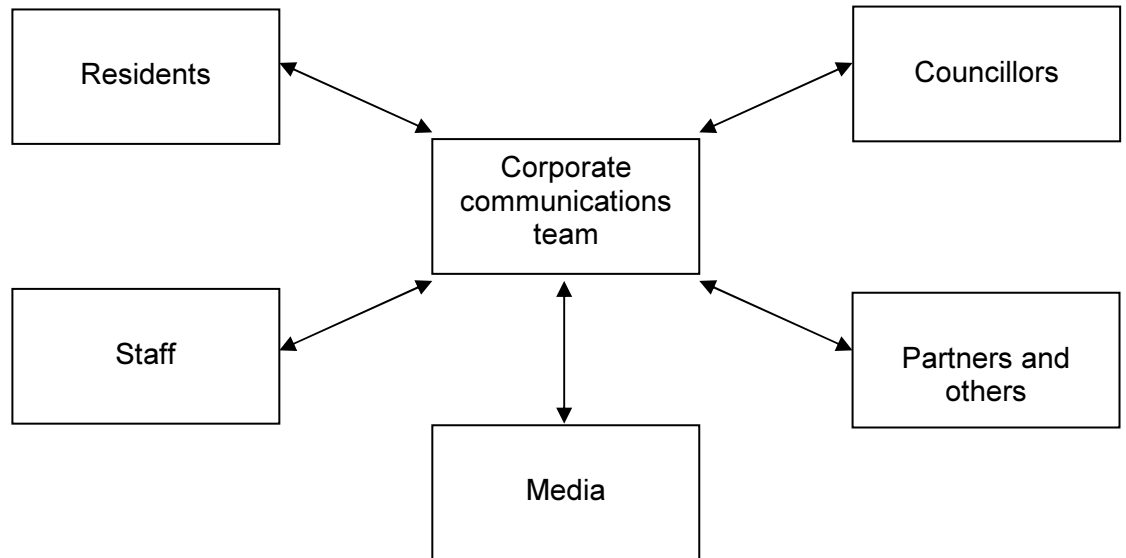
Concern was expressed that officers in the Council were not convinced that the feedback they provided in internal questionnaires was responded to.

It was generally agreed that the Committee should assess the progress made on the recommendations within the next 12 months.

The Committee

**RECOMMENDED TO THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

- a) To appoint communications champions in each service area, including the new contact team, to liaise with the communications team, helping to maintain a forward programme of newsworthy events, a customer-focused website and social media presence, and a two-way flow of communication with colleagues, councillors, residents, partners and others.
- b) The corporate communications strategy to address communication as a two-way process which may be expressed by the following diagram:



- c) To express the Council's strategy for internal communication in plain language, with an action plan to be regularly monitored.
- d) To provide regular training for members and officers in media skills, presentation skills and communications.
- e) To carry out a benchmarking exercise on the resources allocated to corporate communications; this to include councils where social media is adequately resourced.
- f) To develop a corporate communications strategy in plain language, and in a short leaflet format, setting out a clear aim for the document and supported by a separate action plan to be regularly monitored.
- g) All elements of the corporate communication strategy to be designed from the perspective of the customer, or other end user as established through broad consultation.
- h) To develop an off-the-shelf strategy for use during an unexpected episode of media interest, and this to be informed by lessons learned from previous episodes.

## 57. ANNUAL SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW REPORT

The Chairman introduced this item on the Committee's annual report for 2011/12.

It was agreed that wherever the report referred to community transport, the words "and public bus transport" should be included. Concern was expressed regarding communication from the County Council with this authority on public transport issues.

The Committee

**AGREED** The report, subject to amendments made by the Chairman at the three points highlighted in the report, where the detail had not been available at the time of the meeting.

**58. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE**

Reports were circulated on the Housing Portfolio Holder meetings of 15 February and 23 March 2012. A report was also circulated on the County Council's Adults well-being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting of 21 March 2012. These reports were noted.

**59. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman introduced this report on the Committee's work to date and future work programme for 2012/13.

It was agreed that the Committee should set up a task and finish group on street scene in the near future as this was a matter of concern to the District's residents. It was also agreed that the housing of vulnerable people should be included on the list of topics for possible scrutiny. It was further agreed that Councillor Sue Ellington should be invited to address the Committee on the work of the Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Board and its implications for our residents.

After a brief discussion the Chairman stated that the Committee had previously decided that if there was a matter of great local interest to residents of a particular parish, the meeting should be held in that village; otherwise meetings should be held at the Council's offices in Cambourne.

The Committee

**AGREED**

- a) That the draft programme at Appendix A be used as a starting point for 2012/13, subject to the inclusion of a task and finish group on street scene issues, the adding of the housing of vulnerable residents to the list of potential items and an invitation to Councillor Sue Ellington to inform the Committee on the work of the Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Board.
- b) That an informal workshop be arranged in early June to enable the 2012/13 Committee to draft a work programme for agreement on 5 July 2012.

**60. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chairman stated that Councillor Mike Mason had announced that he would be retiring as a Councillor in May. The Committee formally thanked Councillor Mason for all his work on the Committee and his chairing of the Planning Task and Finish Group.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for its work and the Committee joined the Vice-Chairman in thanking the Chairman for the way in which he had chaired the meetings over the past year.

The Committee **NOTED** that its next formal meeting would be held on 5 July 2012.

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**The Meeting ended at 3.40 p.m.**

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