

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 16 January 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Roger Hickford – Chairman
Councillor Sue Ellington – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard Alison Elcox
Lynda Harford Bridget Smith
Andrew Fraser

Councillors Kevin Cuffley, David Whiteman-Downes, Mark Howell and Mick Martin were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Graham Aisthorpe-Watts Democratic Services Team Leader
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer
Alex Colyer Executive Director, Corporate Services
Rachael Fox-Jackson Customer Contact Manager
Dawn Graham Benefits Manager
Steve Rayment Head of ICT
Mike Hill Health and Environmental Services Director

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jose Hales and Douglas de Lacey and Buntly Waters. Councillor Andrew Fraser was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Waters.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

34. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2013 were **AGREED** and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

35. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

36. UPDATE ON WASTE AND RECYCLING

Councillor Mick Martin, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, provided an update on a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council, for the development of joint working in the provision of waste and recycling services at cross border developments. Councillor Martin explained the background regarding new developments around Cambridge City straddling local authority areas, and the reasons for agreeing shared working with the City Council in those areas. Councillor Martin informed Members that whole developments would either be serviced by the City Council or South Cambridgeshire District Council under this agreement and that separate Service Level Agreements would be put in place for each development.

Councillor Martin highlighted that the MoU reflected the long term aspirations to further develop shared working and procurement for waste and recycling.

Members were informed of negotiations taking place with Cambridge City Council for a joint waste facility at Waterbeach, which could provide opportunities for joint procurement and maintenance.

Members expressed concern that the report stated no consultation regarding the MoU had taken place. Following further discussion, Members were satisfied that consultation had in fact taken place with relevant stakeholders.

Total integration of waste and recycling services with Cambridge City was raised as an issue of public concern and Members were assured that significant stakeholder consultation regarding this would take place. Members advised that a high level of service, as already experienced by residents in South Cambridgeshire, should be maintained across South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City.

Councillor Martin informed the Committee that it was yet to be decided which local authority would operate the service at each development. However his understanding was that the Cambridge North West development would be managed by the City Council, as it was better equipped to manage the underground bin system being developed at this site.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee requested that in future, documents such as this MoU be brought to the Committee much further in advance, to allow Members the opportunity to influence their development.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee requested early sight of the Service Level Agreements that would underwrite this Memorandum of Understanding at each development.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the update.

37. MEARS - UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE AND COMPLAINTS

Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder for Housing, introduced an update on Mears' performance and complaints. Warren Gannaway, Regional Manager at Mears, provided an update and answered questions from Councillors, explaining Mears' definition of complaints and the process for dealing with complaints. Members were informed that Mears had a clear complaints process to which it adhered, in order to resolve formal complaints within ten working days. Mr Gannaway assured Members that Mears worked to resolve verbal expressions of dissatisfaction at the time of call.

Members raised a number of concerns around Mears' definition of complaints and sought further clarification around this. Discussion ensued, with Members expressing concern at the requirement for complaints to be submitted in writing. It was felt this may deter some clients from complaining. The reasons for this policy were explained and Members were assured that complaints could be submitted verbally to South Cambridgeshire District Council's Housing Team, who would submit the complaint in writing to Mears on the complainant's behalf. Members advised that the threshold for defining an expression of dissatisfaction as a complaint may be too high.

Members advised that a more prescriptive process in dealing with repeat calls regarding the same issues was needed, as well as a procedure to highlight these calls to Mears and the Housing Team. Councillor Howell confirmed that the Council would work with Mears on this, but asked Members to note that the policy for handling complaints was already in the contract with Mears.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the report.

38. UPDATE ON EMPTY COUNCIL PROPERTIES

Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder for Housing, invited questions regarding the report to the Committee on empty council properties.

Discussion ensued around why the Council could not purchase equity share properties that had not been sold. Councillor Howell explained that this was something South Cambridgeshire District Council was considering, with the Housing department looking at developing a business case.

Derelict properties were discussed and Councillor Howell was asked why some properties were considered too derelict for extensive works to be undertaken to make them habitable. Councillor Howell explained that the amount of investment required in order to make such properties habitable, could be such that it made more sense to sell the property and use the proceeds from the sale to purchase other smaller properties.

Members asked why properties were not being purchased from private sellers in some cases. Councillor Howell explained that it was often a case of private sellers simply asking too much for their properties.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the update.

39. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE

Councillor David Whiteman-Downes, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services, presented the Contact Centre's annual performance review and invited questions from Members.

Whilst it was recognised that the Contact Centre had been successful since its launch in December 2012, achieving predicted annual cost savings of £250,000 and 82% of calls resolved at first point of contact, it was recognised that there had been some problems which were discussed.

Concern was raised that the percentage of 'calls not answered' was worsening. Councillor Whiteman-Downes acknowledged this and advised that the policy of resolution at first point of contact would continue to be followed. Members were assured that this trend was unlikely to continue as staff absences had been a contributing factor, and four further staff members had been recruited and were working through a training programme.

Members were informed that short-staffing had been experienced. This was a result of recruitment of good quality staff to the centre who had then taken career opportunities within other Council departments. The Customer Contact Manager explained the Contact Centre staffing, which consisted of 19 members of staff. Since the Centre launched in December 2012, seven members of staff had been lost to internal and external moves.

High levels of staff sickness experienced in recent months was discussed. Members were assured that the Contact Centre management worked closely with staff and recognised the pressure of call handling and the impact of staff absence on the other staff within the contact centre having to deal with higher call volumes. The Contact Centre Manager explained that options were being discussed with the Benefit Manager, to use relevant staff within the Revenues and Benefits department to cover calls at times

of staff shortages and at peak times within the Contact Centre.

The call abandonment rate was discussed. Councillor Whiteman-Downes explained there could be a number of reasons for this and that BT would be able to provide some data to investigate the reasons for call abandonment further. This would be fed back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a later date.

The Customer Contact Manager explained that there had been problems recruiting staff to fill posts within the Contact Centre, and that the option of recruiting apprentices was being considered. It was hoped that apprentices would remain within the Contact Centre for two years.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the update and commended the Contact Centre for its achievements since its launch in December 2012.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **AGREED** the Contact Centre be reviewed again after six months.

40. SCDC WEBSITE - ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor David Whiteman-Downes, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services, presented the annual review of South Cambridgeshire District Council's website and invited questions from Members.

The Head of ICT/Facilities Management explained that a project plan was being developed, to review the full functionality of the website. Members were informed that discussions were taking place with partners regarding the identification of areas where resources could be shared. It was anticipated the review would be completed after six months (July 2014).

Discussion ensued around the situation which occurred when the Council's former web provider (Tagish) was bought by 'Orange Bus', and notice was served to the Council of Orange Bus' intention to cease service provision within 8 weeks. Members were assured that this situation would not occur again as the website was being provided in-house.

The Head of ICT/Facilities Management informed Members that more people were visiting the website from mobile devices, from which the old website had not been easily accessible.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the report.

41. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **AGREED** to defer this item to a later date. This was to allow for an informal meeting to take place to develop suggested areas for the Work Programme.

42. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Lynda Harford provided a verbal update from the Leaders Portfolio Holder Meeting held on 16 January 2014:

- The Green Deal remained a concern with low take up. South Cambridgeshire District Council officers were working with a company appointed to give local

groups and parishes support with the Green Deal. Concerns had been articulated by the Leader of the Council regarding the relationship between this commercial company and the Council's agenda.

- There was a presentation regarding grants from the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor David Bard provided a verbal update from the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder meeting held on 14 January 2014:

- There had been a discussion regarding houses of multiple occupancy, with complaints having been made regarding excessive numbers of bins outside such properties.

43. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting date of 11 February 2014 was on the same day as the Planning Portfolio Holder meeting. As such, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **AGREED** that an alternative meeting date would be investigated.

The Meeting ended at 7.35 p.m.
