

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 10 February 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Roger Hickford – Chairman
Councillor Jose Hales – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard Alison Elcox
Lynda Harford David Morgan

Councillors Simon Edwards, Mark Howell, Ben Shelton and Robert Turner were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Alex Colyer Executive Director, Corporate Services
John Garnham Head of Finance, Policy & Performance
Dawn Graham Benefits Manager
Rachael Fox-Jackson Customer Contact Manager
Jean Hunter Chief Executive
Maggie Jennings Democratic Services Officer
Richard May Policy & Performance Manager

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Philippa Hart, Douglas de Lacey and Bunty Waters. Councillor Kevin Cuffley was in attendance as substitute for Bunty Waters and Councillor Janet Lockwood was in attendance as substitute for Philippa Hart. Councillor David Whiteman-Downes also gave his apologies as he had been expected to present the item relating to the Contact Centre Performance Review as the relevant Portfolio Holder.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

5. CONTACT CENTRE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2014 - PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Alex Colyer, Executive Director and Dawn Graham, Benefits Manager were in attendance for this item.

Initial results since the implementation of an improvement plan had indicated that there had been a significant decrease in waiting time for calls received by the Contact Centre. This had been achieved with help from back office staff during busy periods. Further reductions in waiting times was anticipated once recruitment to the two current vacancies had been achieved.

Councillor Lynda Harford queried whether there was capacity within the IT service to

deliver the Digital by Default project referred to in the report. In response, the Committee was informed that additional resources were planned to fund an assistant to the Web Officer for one year.

Overall, the Committee expressed its congratulations to officers on the progress made to date within the Contact Centre and looked forward to continued improvement within the service once all actions within the improvement plan had been completed.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee, having noted the comparative data provided in the appendix to the report, **REQUESTED** that an update on performance at the Contact Centre be brought back to the Committee in one year's time.

6. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2015-16 INCLUDING COUNCIL TAX SETTING), HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (INCLUDING HOUSING RENTS), CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/16-2019/20 AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (REVISED 2014/15 AND 2015/16)

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder, together with Councillor Mark Howell, Housing Portfolio Holder and Alex Colyer, Executive Director were in attendance for this item.

Councillor Howell addressed the Committee and made particular reference to appendices A (Capital Programme) and C (Housing Revenue Account) to the report as follows:

- Pooling of capital receipts – this Council, unlike many other Councils, was paying back interest only on the debt resulting from the Government's Housing Revenue Account (HRA), self financing reforms and therefore was able to use the capital receipts from Right to Buy sales to provide additional social housing for rent. It was confirmed that the Council was now permitted to keep the majority of the HRA receipts from Right to Buy sales with the remaining monies being paid into the Government Right to Buy pool
- It was confirmed that modelling had taken place in respect of the Council's 30-year plan, however, it was noted that there were many variables to consider, most notably the impact of inflation over time, which made dramatic differences to the forecast. It was anticipated that over time the assumptions would level out
- Councillor Howell explained that when calculating rent, councils were now expected to use the Consumer Price Index, plus 1% and unlike previous calculations using the Retail Price Index, plus 0.5%, they were no longer allowed to add an additional £2 to the final figure
- The average increase in social housing rent was 2.2%, making the average rent approximately £415 per month, compared with an average private rent of £600-800 per month
- It was confirmed that capital receipts would be utilised to build new houses; that approximately 15 houses were sold per annum under the Right to Buy process and that it was unlikely that the Government would withdraw the Right to Buy

Councillor Edwards addressed the Committee by giving an overview of the report and in particular highlighted the following:

- Inconsistencies had occurred in some of the figures quoted in the appendices; they were amended as follows:
 - Appendix B (General Fund Considerations), para 25 should read: *It is estimated that the balance at 31 March 2015 will be a surplus of £1,123,739*

of which 142,439 will be transferred to the District in 2015-16

- *Appendix B1 show the 2014-15 original estimate for Net District Council General Fund Expenditure of £16.215million **decreasing to £16,099 million in the 2015-16 estimate, a decrease of £0.116 million in cash terms (0.7%)***
 - *Appendix B1: Appropriation to/(from) General Fund Balance 2015/16 should read (473,110) (Surplus)/Deficit on Collection Fund re Council Tax should read 142,440*
- An overview was given in respect of the General Fund and Risk Management
 - In response to a question raised by Councillor Roger Hickford, Councillor Edwards advised the Committee that in the event that the Revenue Support Grant became negative, the Council would draw on its balances
 - It was confirmed that the proposed number of new domestic properties was based on the projections within the Local Development Framework and not the anticipated number of planning applications
 - The unspent Precautionary Items for 2014/15 would be transferred into the Balances for 2015-16

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** and **SUPPORTED** the recommendations contained within the report, due for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 12 February 2015.

7. CORPORATE PLAN 2015-2020

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Finance & Staffing Portfolio, together with Alex Colyer, Executive Director presented the Corporate Plan for 2015-2020.

Referring to the Plan attached to the covering report, the following was raised:

- Councillor Kevin Cuffley queried whether (a) tackling human trafficking/domestic abuse and (b) working in partnership with the Police should be included within the Plan? In response it was noted that those issues would be considered within a partnership agreement between this Council, the Police and Fire & Rescue and that a formal Plan would be presented to a future Leader's Portfolio Holder meeting
- Councillor David Morgan stated that as the Corporate Plan supported the Local Plan, he could not support certain elements of the Plan
- Councillor Alison Elcox expressed surprise that the 'Wing' (Cambridge East) application was included in the Plan as she had understood that it was not sustainable. In response, the Chief Executive stated that she had recently held discussions with the developer on the viability of the development and they were progressing well

As some dissent had been voiced to the Corporate Plan, the Chairman of the Committee requested that a show of hands be undertaken when considering the recommendation. The following outcome occurred:

For	6
Against	2

Councillors Alison Elcox and David Morgan recorded their votes against the recommendation.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** and **SUPPORTED** the

recommendations contained within the report, due for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 12 February 2015.

8. **QUARTERLY POSITION REPORT ON FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK**

Alex Colyer, Executive Director presented the Quarterly Position Statement on Finance, Performance and Risk and reported that suggestions made by Councillor Douglas de Lacey had been received too late to include in this particular quarter. They would, however, be taken into account, as appropriate, during preparation of the next quarterly report.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** and **SUPPORTED** the recommendations contained within the report, due for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 12 February 2015.

9. **ORCHARD PARK TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

Councillor Lynda Harford provided the Committee with an update on the Orchard Park Task and Finish Group.

- Evidence had shown in a case study of Cambourne that in the earlier days of the development, the cause of the highest number of deaths was suicide; those findings were in line with those from the majority of new developments
- There were outstanding issues arising from the Orchard Park Community Council meeting that were outside the remit of the Task and Finish Group to resolve. However, they were significant and had been appropriately referred on for resolution. They did also point to a future recommendation
- The Task and Finish Group would be meeting on 17 February 2015 to discuss the evidence and its implications
- Following the 17 February, a meeting would be held with the Planning Officers for Orchard Park and residents with a view to formulating draft recommendations for the next meeting of the Task and Finish Group

The Chairman thanked Councillor Harford and members of the Task and Finish Group for the work they had carried out so far which was much appreciated.

10. **WORK PROGRAMME 2015**

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee discussed the draft work programme for the remainder of the municipal year and queried the inclusion of the Tenant Scrutiny Group's Review of Grounds Maintenance' at the March meeting. Following a brief discussion, it was felt that no further value could be added to the review and **AGREED** that the item be removed.

Councillor David Morgan suggested the Growth Programme as an item for future discussion. The Chairman asked Councillor Morgan to contact the Democratic Services Team Leader to undertake a Scrutiny Work Programme Prioritisation scoping exercise on whether or not to include as an item for a future meeting.

11. **MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE**

It was **NOTED** that Councillors Roger Hickford, Lynda Harford, Kevin Cuffley and Dr David Bard had all attended Portfolio Holder meetings in their capacity as Scrutiny Monitors.

12. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that future meetings would be held on:

- Thursday, 26 March 2015 at 6pm
- Thursday, 30 April 2015 at 6pm

The Meeting ended at 7.32 p.m.
