

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 4 February 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Roger Hickford – Chairman
Councillor Kevin Cuffley – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: Henry Batchelor
Val Barrett
Graham Cone
Simon Edwards
Peter Topping

Philippa Hart
Anna Bradnam
Christopher Cross
Lynda Harford

Councillors Simon Edwards and Peter Topping were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Philip Bird
Alex Colyer
Dawn Graham
Mike Hill
Jean Hunter
Richard May
Victoria Wallace

Business Improvement & Efficiency Manager
Executive Director, Corporate Services
Benefits Manager
Director Health and Environmental Services
Chief Executive
Policy and Performance Manager
Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Bard, Grenville Chamberlain, Jose Hales, Bunty Waters and David Whiteman-Downes. Councillors Val Barrett, Anna Bradnam, Graham Cone, Christopher Cross and Lynda Harford were in attendance as substitutes.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5. BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME - COMMERCIALISATION

The Corporate Programme Manager presented the report providing the committee with an overview of the 'Commercialisation' Programme approach to service delivery, to generate income for the Council and identify further savings.

Discussion and questions ensued:

- Members thanked and congratulated officers for the work that had been undertaken on the Commercialisation Programme.

- Concern was expressed regarding the long term unavailability of Programme or Project Managers that had been identified as a risk. Mitigation against this was explained; the Programme Hub had been set up with representatives from each main service area. The role of the Hub was explained in terms of supporting officers with project and programme management. Members were assured that project and programme management skills were being spread across the Council with 14 officers qualified at Prince 2 practitioner level who were acting as Prince 2 champions across the organisation.
- The long term benefit of adoption Prince 2 principles was that projects would be consistent, structured and able to realise the benefits and lessons learned.
- Members suggested the Council look at Member development to enable them to usefully contribute to and support the Commercialisation Programme.
- Clarification was sought regarding the reference in the Trade Waste Expansion project, to customers who cost the Council money. The Director of Health and Environmental Services clarified that this referred to businesses who were signed up to the trade waste service based on an estimated weight of waste, but once signed up the weight of waste increased which resulted in the business being undercharged by the Council for disposal of the trade waste. The Council was identifying where this was happening.
- With regards to Ermine Street Housing, Members were informed that this had benefitted from Member Reference Group involvement.
- Members queried the reference to the 'emotional journey' experienced by staff involved in Ermine Street Housing. It was clarified that this captured both good and bad experiences and lessons learned from the development of Ermine Street Housing.
- Regarding the Equity Share Investment project, it was clarified that this referred to sheltered accommodation units restricted for residents aged over 50, which had buy-back clauses. These properties often came back to the Council in a tired state, therefore the Council would upgrade these properties to make them more attractive for over 50's buyers who were looking to downsize. This was being carried out by the Council rather than Ermine Street Housing. These properties once upgraded, would be re-sold as a lease.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the report and confirmed its support for the Commercialisation Programme.

6. CUSTOMER CONTACT SERVICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2015 - PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Benefits Manager presented the report which provided the committee with an update on performance for the Council's Customer Contact Centre and its annual performance for 2015.

Main points of discussion were:

- Members were assured that despite the move to Digital by Default, customers who could not access Council services online would still be supported. The Council recognised that some residents would always need to access services by telephone or in person. Those who could access services online however, were being encouraged to do so.
- The committee was informed that the service did have statistics for people visiting the Council's reception and their waiting times and that the reception would be reviewed. It was suggested that waiting times in reception be included in the next performance report for the service, alongside telephone waiting times.
- It was clarified that some residents who could not access self service options at

home, visited the Council offices in order to access self service options at the kiosks available here. Not all customers were able to use the self service facilities and where this was the case, were still receiving a personal service with officers providing help and support. The service recognised that some customers needed more support than others and the focus was to target resource effectively in order to deliver a high quality service.

- Concern was raised regarding the reference to reactive answerphone messages. The Benefits Manager informed Members that it had been found that this helped to manage customer expectations by keeping them informed of how long they could expect the processing of, for example a benefits application, to take.
- Members were informed that the Council's Web Officers Working Group, consisting of representatives from each service area, was providing feedback on the new website in order to improve this further.
- In the next annual performance report, members requested that data be included which showed how many different people telephone the Council.
- Members thanked the Benefits Manager for the report and requested a further update report in a year's time.

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

7. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2016/17 INCLUDING COUNCIL TAX SETTING), HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (INCLUDING HOUSING RENTS), CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2016/17-2020/21 AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder and Executive Director, Corporate Services presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which would be presented to Cabinet on 11 February 2016.

The Portfolio Holder recommended the Committee become involved in the development of the MTFS at an earlier stage in the process of its development, which began in November.

Clarification was sought regarding the Government's Autumn Statement announcement about the retention of business rates by Councils. The Portfolio Holder clarified that it was suspected that local government as a whole would eventually retain 100% of business rates, but not the Council as an individual.

The Chairman requested the Portfolio Holder make himself available to answer any questions committee members should have regarding the MTFS, ahead of the Cabinet meeting.

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

8. CORPORATE PLAN 2016-2021

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the Corporate Plan 2016-2021 which would be presented to Cabinet at its February 2016 meeting.

The following points were raised:

- It was requested that 'hidden crime' be included under 'Living Well'. Members were assured that these issues were identified priorities within the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership's Community Safety Plan through which agencies were brought together to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour through a balance of

- prevention and enforcement. .
- It was requested that reference to partnership working be included under 'connected communities'.
- It was acknowledged that the consultation response rate was low, but that this was not unexpected. The Portfolio Holder informed the committee of how the Youth Council had been involved in the development of the Corporate Plan, and undertook to consider additional ways in which the Council could consult proactively with its communities in future years .

EMT **NOTED** the report.

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

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the Quarterly Position Report on Finance, Performance and Risk.

The Strategic Risk Register was discussed:

- The Portfolio Holder drew the committee's attention to the increased risk relating to homelessness. Members were informed that an assessment had been carried out of national policy implications on homelessness. It was anticipated that new national policies relating to benefits and housing could increase homelessness and associated costs, while the Council had fewer ways of accommodating the homeless.
- £250k had been included in precautionary items within the Council's proposed 2016/17 budget to meet additional costs arising from increased homelessness.. The committee queried whether this amount would be enough and was assured that this would be monitored on a monthly basis.
- The Portfolio Holder suggested that all Members should monitor the homelessness situation in their own wards and feed this back to officers. Cllr Harford informed Members that the first rough sleepers had been found in Cottenham and supported the suggestion to make members more aware of the issue and risk of homelessness.
- It was requested that a briefing on homelessness be issued to Members before the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting. The Chairman requested the Chief Executive take this up with the Housing Portfolio Holder.
- With regard to risk STR05 (Lack of housing land supply), the Committee noted that the Inspector's timetable for taking forward work to put in place a Local Plan had been announced since the publication of the Agenda; as a consequence, it was unlikely that a new plan would be in place until the end of 2017.

The Director of Health and Environmental Services informed the committee that 'Primary Authority' arrangements were in place for the Council to provide regulatory support and advice to Aldi and John West Tuna. Members suggested that this success should be more widely advertised.

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

10. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee's work programme was noted. An item on the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators 2016/17 would be added to the 7 April 2016 meeting. The Chairman requested that an item on Planning Performance also be added to this meeting.

11. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Lynda Harford updated the committee on the Leader's Portfolio Holder meetings, informing Members that the Leader had had some difficult decisions to make regarding grant funding.

Councillor Kevin Cuffley updated the committee following his attendance at the Housing Portfolio Holder meeting.

12. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 7 April 2016 at 6pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.
