

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 5 July 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Orgee – Chairman
Councillor Grenville Chamberlain – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard Henry Batchelor
Grenville Chamberlain Graham Cone
Jose Hales Philippa Hart
Andrew Fraser

Councillors Mick Martin and Robert Turner were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Julie Baird Head of Development Management
Alex Colyer Executive Director, Corporate Services
Stephen Kelly Joint Director of Planning and Economic
Development
Richard May Policy and Performance Manager
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer
Alex Colyer Executive Director, Corporate Services
Richard May Policy and Performance Manager

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bunty Waters. Councillor Andrew Fraser was present as a substitute.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Regarding agenda item 6, Councillor Tony Orgee reminded members that he was also a County Councillor and Councillor Andrew Fraser made members aware that he was a Director of Ermine Street Housing.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising were:

- The Executive Director (Corporate Services) provided a verbal update on shared services:
 - Members were informed that a head of the shared legal service had been appointed and would be in post from August 2016.
 - Interviews were taking place for legal officers in the two tiers below the head of service. In the meantime, locum lawyers were filling the vacant posts.
 - A Building Control manager had been appointed and would be in post from August 2016. An interim head of service was in place until then.
 - A series of recruitment campaigns had been held for the remaining Building Control posts, however these had not had as much success as hoped and posts were being covered by interim officers. A restructure of the service was being considered, to enable more senior posts to be created with salaries more in line with the market.

- All second tier posts for the ICT shared service had been filled.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS IN SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

The Planning Portfolio Holder, Head of Development Management and Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, presented an update on planning performance and service improvements.

A structure chart had been circulated to members, which would be updated as staff changes occurred.

The Planning Portfolio Holder brought to the committee's attention a number of improvements that had been made in the service since the last update to the committee in April 2016. Since the last update, a staff away day had taken place during which a Development Management Charter had been produced, outlining what staff wanted to achieve. Hard copies of this were circulated to the committee during the meeting.

Main points of discussion were:

- Members requested to know how many backlog applications went to appeal over non-determination. This information was not available during the meeting but could be presented at the September 2016 committee meeting. The committee requested the answer be provided to the Democratic Services Officer in the meantime, for circulation to the committee.
- Members queried whether the target set for clearing backlog applications was overly ambitious. The Head of Development Management said that an ambitious target needed to be set and informed the committee that agency staff were dealing with the backlog. It was acknowledged that due to the nature of agency working, this made the availability of staff potentially more volatile, however weekly meetings monitored this.
- The committee felt the report suggested that there were certain times of the year when there was a lull in the availability of planning officers. Whether there was sufficient office cover throughout the year to avoid peaks and troughs of activity was queried. The Head of Development Management assured the committee that peak holiday periods were planned in advance to ensure enough cover in the department throughout the year, and that officers took workload into consideration when planning their holidays.
- The committee was informed that the Council could not prevent applicants from submitting planning applications at peak holiday times. It could however take a view on the length of public consultation over a holiday period, to ensure sufficient opportunity for the public to be informed.
- The committee requested the Planning department keep members informed of major planning applications in their wards and that this be embedded in the culture of the department. The Planning Portfolio Holder apologised if this had not been consistently done. The Local Member for Hardwick thanked officers for having kept him well informed of applications in his ward.
- The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development expressed the view that where applications were submitted without following the pre-application process, agents be notified that such applications would be refused. Member support would be needed if this was implemented.

- Members expressed concern for officer wellbeing in laying more customer service aims and expectations on officers, in addition to their existing workload. The Head of Development Management informed members that the Council's Contact Centre would be trained to deal with more generic planning enquiries and more information would be available publicly on the Council's website. It was hoped this would steer more generic planning enquiries away from planning officers.
- When asked about officers working from home, it was clarified that line managers would know in advance when an officer would be working from home.
- The Planning Portfolio Holder informed members that a further Planning training session for Planning Committee members and substitutes was being scheduled for September 2016. Members requested that at least 4 weeks notice of training be given, to allow those members who worked to be able to book leave in order to attend.
- Members asked whether, rather than having to dedicate a whole day to training, if training could be carried out in shorter stages over a period of time. The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development would discuss this with Democratic Services.
- Members queried whether the reorganisation of the Council's legal services had impacted negatively on Planning. In response to this, the committee was informed that collaboration with legal services was important. The Planning Portfolio Holder informed the committee that timescales of the discharge of conditions was being looked at, as was the actioning of projects by developers once applications had been approved.

The Scrutiny and Overview committee noted the report and thanked the Planning Portfolio Holder and officers for attending.

6. QUARTERLY POSITION REPORT ON FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and Policy and Performance Manager presented the 2015-16 Year End Position Statement on Finance, Performance and Risk, which would be presented to the July 2016 meeting of Cabinet. The committee considered the report and the following points were made:

- The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder proposed that for future performance reporting to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, the committee nominate in advance of the meeting the portfolio it would like to consider in more depth. This would enable the relevant Portfolio Holder to attend the meeting and answer more in depth questions. At the end of the reporting year, the Portfolio Holder proposed that the committee still review the year end position statement as a whole. It was advised that at least one month's notice in advance of the meeting be given, with regards to which portfolio the committee would like to consider. The Portfolio Holder felt that this would enable more effective scrutiny of individual portfolios.
- The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder informed the committee that highlight reports were presented to the Council's Executive Management Team on a monthly basis and therefore any urgent issues would be highlighted to the relevant Portfolio Holder through these meetings.
- The committee suggested that if specific portfolios were going to be looked at by the committee, that the committee should be presented with information covering a longer period than one quarter.
- Clarification was sought on how a Portfolio Holder reporting to the committee would report back on any actions from that meeting. It was clarified that this would come back to the next meeting under matters arising, either directly from the relevant Portfolio Holder or from a relevant officer.

- The committee supported the Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder's suggestion whilst reserving the right to call Portfolio Holders back to meetings as it saw fit.
- A number of negative variances in the report were queried. The Portfolio Holder clarified that this was due to Northstowe not coming forward as quickly as originally anticipated and due to refurbishment of the Whaddon travellers' site.

Risks were discussed:

- Concern was raised over lost rental income from renting out space in the Council's offices to the Police and Crime Commissioner's office, which was moving. The committee was informed that empty space in the building was being made available to rent to other organisations.
- The Shared Services risk (STR27) scoring was queried and it was questioned whether this should remain green. Concern was raised that only one Monitoring Officer was covering all the shared services councils. The Executive Director (Corporate Services) reassured members that the monitoring officer activity could, under the guidance of the monitoring officer, be carried out by the rest of the legal team. The new head of the shared legal service, would be the Monitoring Officer.
- The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder highlighted two further potential strategic risks:
 - He had requested that Devolution be addressed in the Council's strategic risk register. This would be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee in autumn 2016.
 - He alerted the committee to a potential future increase in tax on diesel fuel, which could impact the Council in a negative way. This would be monitored closely.

The Committee noted the report and agreed to proceed with the Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder's suggestion regarding future position reporting by portfolio, to be identified in advance of the meeting by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee's Work Programme for 2016-17 was discussed. It was agreed that the following items would be looked at at future meetings:

September 2016:

- Shared Services
- Planning

November 2016:

- Contact Centre performance

8. APPOINTMENT OF SCRUTINY MONITORS AND MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee appointed the following Scrutiny Monitors:

Portfolio	Scrutiny Monitor
Leader	Councillor Tony Orgee
Finance and Staffing	Councillor Philippa Hart
Corporate and Customer Services	Councillor Henry Batchelor
Environmental Services	Councillor David Bard

Greater Cambridge City Deal	Councillor Grenville Chamberlain
Housing	Councillors Jose Hales and Bunty Waters
Planning	Councillors Graham Cone and Philippa Hart

9. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Some members expressed concern that future meetings had been scheduled for Tuesday evenings, which clashed with some Parish Council meetings.

The September 2016 meeting date would be rescheduled from Tuesday 6 September to Thursday 8 September at 6pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.05 p.m.
