

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Wednesday, 9 November 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
Philippa Hart Bunty Waters
Anna Bradnam

Councillors Simon Edwards, Lynda Harford, Mark Howell, Peter Topping and Nick Wright were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer
Stephen Kelly Joint Director for Planning and Economic
Development
Julie Baird Head of Development Management
Alex Colyer Interim Chief Executive
Dawn Graham Benefits Manager
Mike Hill Health and Environmental Services Director
Julia Hovells Principal Accountant
Richard May Policy and Performance Manager

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kevin Cuffley and Jose Hales. Councillor Anna Bradnam was present as a substitute for Councillor Hales.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest. Councillor David Bard reminded the committee with regards to agenda item 6, that he was the Chairman of the Planning Committee.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising were:

- Councillor David Bard referred to the issue of grass verge cuttings having transferred to the County Council without parish councils having been informed, which he had raised at the previous meeting and about which he had requested a report. A report was requested on this for the Scrutiny meeting scheduled for February 2017. The Director of Health and Environmental Services agreed to action this.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5. **CUSTOMER CONTACT SERVICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2016 - PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and the Benefits Manager presented the report, which updated the committee on the performance of the Customer Contact Centre.

The fluctuation of performance statistics over the past year was noted and although the October performance figures looked good, given the fluctuation over the year further evidence was needed in order to prove the improvement was real.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted that Customer Contact Centre officers were very well trained and as such were recruited by other service areas within the Council, leaving the Contact Centre short staffed. Members were informed that apprenticeships would help to retain staff and plans were in place to maintain staffing levels in the event of Contact Centre staff being recruited by other service areas.

It was hoped that during the busy year end period in March and April, that with the over recruitment of staff and a move to e-forms, good performance would be maintained.

The length of time for calls to be answered by the Contact Centre was highlighted by committee members and acknowledged by the Portfolio Holder.

Members were informed that there were currently 17 Contact Centre staff members, though not all were on duty at the same time. Staff levels varied according to call loads.

Concern was raised over e-forms as not all residents had access to the internet. The Portfolio Holder advised that residents would still be able to talk to the Contact Centre and obtain hard copies of forms.

The committee was informed that calls to the Contact Centre were recorded for training purposes.

Consultation would take place with Members to gather views on how the service of the Contact Centre could be improved.

The committee was informed that the nature of the Contact Centre was different to private sector contact centres, due to the complex nature of some of the issues being dealt with, such as calls from residents struggling to pay rent or council tax for example.

The committee advised that in order to stop Members from calling the Contact Centre and adding to call volumes, they needed to have officers' direct dial telephone numbers. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder advised that these numbers were available on the staff intranet. Committee members informed the Portfolio Holder that Members had been unable to access the intranet for some time.

It was advised that the Contact Centre should compare itself against the performance of other authorities' contact centres. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that this had not yet been done and agreed that this would be good practice.

The HR Manager added that 80% of calls were dealt with by the Contact Centre rather than by back office functions.

It was noted that the percentage of calls dealt with at the first point of contact was constant.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the report and requested a further update in May or June 2017.

6. PLANNING PERFORMANCE

The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development and the Head of Development Management, presented the report which updated the committee on performance and service improvement within the Development Management Service.

The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development was pleased to report continuing performance improvement, with performance remaining better than Government targets and above the threshold for designation. He was confident that the processes and protocols that had been put in place by the Head of Development Management and her team, would continue to improve performance.

977 backlog applications had reduced to 47. It was confirmed that October's performance for minor applications was 75% and not 37/79.

The current challenge around the five year land supply was highlighted. The committee was informed that land supply was at 4.1 years.

Validation was queried and the committee was informed that the clock started on an application once all the information to validate it according to the Town and Country Planning Act, was received. The committee was informed that thought was being given to making available in the public domain, performance information regarding the rate of valid applications submitted by agents.

Concern was raised regarding designation. The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development informed the committee that clarity had been sought but had not been forthcoming regarding this. He advised the committee that the Council could be designated on the basis of performance relating to appeals rather than the speed of decision making. There was ongoing dialogue with the Planning Advisory Service regarding this. According to information provided by the Planning Advisory Service, designation would involve no more action than what was already being done by the service to improve performance.

Concern was raised regarding consultation responses from individuals being put in the public domain. The committee was informed that it was made clear to respondents that their details would be put online. It was advised that all Members needed to be made aware of this so that this information could be passed onto residents via their parish councils.

The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development was asked how many out of time applications were taken to appeal on non-determination. This information was not available at the meeting but would be included as standard in future reports.

It was queried whether conditions could be applied to planning approvals whereby building must be carried out within a certain timescale. The committee was informed that representation had been made to Government regarding this, however it was explained that the issue with compulsory construction was the enforcement of these conditions.

The committee was informed that the building industry was facing challenges of lead-in times for building materials with bricks and tiles having to come from Germany, which delayed construction.

It was suggested that there should be monitoring of the delivery of schemes that had been approved, however the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development advised that the law did not allow for this.

The committee **NOTED** the update and congratulated officers for the improvement in Development Management performance.

7. SHARED SERVICES

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report. Recruitment was highlighted as an issue in each of the shared services. The Leader of the Council pointed out to the committee that at the current stage in the development of shared services, the focus was on consolidating these services and recruiting to them.

Comments and discussion ensued:

- The Local Member for Meldreth referred to the heads of terms and the business plans for the shared services that had been presented to the committee earlier in the year, whilst highlighting the brevity of the latest report to the committee. The Local Member for Meldreth advised that there was evidence of a reduction in service, that was more significant than implied in the report in which this was described as 'anecdotal'. The Local Member gave the example of having on a number of occasions raised ICT service issues regarding the Good App, which had not been resolved.
- It was confirmed that the Lead Portfolio Holder and Director for shared services, were the Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and the Director of Health and Environmental Services.
- It was highlighted to the committee that by the nature of the ICT service, it was subject to staff turnover due to the prevalence of technology companies in Cambridge and London. In order to challenge this, the shared service offered varied work in order to attract and retain employees.
- It was acknowledged that it would take time for the ICT service to reach its performance potential and that this had not yet been achieved.
- It was confirmed that regular meetings took place regarding shared services. Public meetings of the Shared Services Joint Group had not yet taken place as the group had not yet been formally constituted.
- Members were informed that Tom Lewis had been in post since September 2016, as the Head of the Legal Shared Service. A permanent head of the shared ICT service was being recruited.
- Concern was expressed that should the planning service move to a shared service, performance could worsen as a result of this. In response to this, the Interim Chief Executive assured the committee that lessons learned from the development of the ICT, Legal and Building Control shared services would be applied to the planning shared service should this proceed. The main lesson learnt had been the importance of leadership and the need to recruit leaders first.

It was agreed that a shared service quarterly monitoring report would be presented at the meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee scheduled for February 2017.

Members requested the following information be included in the report:

- Information regarding planned meetings of the Shared Services Joint Group.
- The structure of each shared service.
- The personnel and vacancies in each shared service.
- Roles and responsibilities of staff in each of the shared services.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016/17

The Housing Portfolio Holder and the Business Manager/Principal Accountant presented the report which would be considered by Cabinet on 17 November 2016, in order to provide an update in respect of the financial position and forecasts for the Housing Revenue Account, allowing review of financial assumptions, approval of mid-year budgetary changes and agreement of the budgets strategy for 2017/18.

Members commended officers for the quality and content of the report, which reassured them that the Housing team was competently dealing with the Housing problems faced by the Council as a result of changes in Government legislation.

The annual loss of income of £1,834,000 due to the gap between actual and target rent levels was referred to. The committee was informed that the Council was doing everything within its power to exercise influence at a Government level, and that the only opportunity to move rents to the higher level was when properties became void.

Right to Buy receipts were queried. It was clarified that the Council's purchase of existing homes was separate to Ermine Street Housing and was with Housing Revenue Account funds.

The committee was informed that there was still a pipeline of build schemes that would come forward despite ambitions having to be reduced significantly.

The clarity of Appendix B which clearly set out the assumptions for inflation, was commended by Members.

The Housing Portfolio Holder and Housing Team were congratulated for their work. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged the hard work of the previous Housing Portfolio Holder, which had led to this.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee thanked officers for the report and **ENDORSED** the recommendations to Cabinet, which were that Cabinet:

- a) Approve the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy, to include:
 - changes in financial assumptions as detailed in Appendix B to the HRA MTFS
 - mid-year revenue budget changes, as detailed in Appendix D to the HRA MTFS, which impact future forecasts for the HRA.
 - mid-year capital budgets changes, as detailed in Appendix E to the HRA MTFS
 - update to the new build schemes included in the Housing Capital Investment Plan, incorporation of the latest budgetary figures in respect of new build schemes, and re-phasing of expenditure in line with anticipated build timetables
 - changes in anticipated receipt and use of capital resources for the HRA, as included in Appendix H to the HRA MTFS
 - recognition of the delegated decision to acquire a number of existing market homes, thus utilising retained right to buy receipts with the required timescales

9. 2016-17 SECOND QUARTERLY POSITION STATEMENT ON FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK - REPORT TO FOLLOW

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented the financial aspects of the 2016-17 Second Quarterly Position Statement on Finance, Performance and Risk, and was pleased to report that the Council was in a good position.

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the performance aspects of the position statement.

The Council's Strategic Risk Register was discussed and comments from Members were:

- Clarification was sought regarding strategic risk STR03 'Illegal traveller encampments or developments'. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that no new traveller sites would need to be brought forward following the change in definition of gypsies and travellers and due to the over provision of sites in the district. Concern was raised that it may be complacent not to consider the need to provide encampments for gypsies and travellers a risk, given the difficulty in doing so should the need arise. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder agreed that this should remain a strategic risk for the time being and would propose this to Cabinet.
- The Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment (GTNA) was discussed and the Local Member for Shepreth applauded the travelling showmen in Meldreth for having engaged in the process of the development of the GTNA.
- Concern was raised regarding the recent change in the definition of gypsies and travellers, that should the Council ever be expected to enforce this that some older people who did not fit the new definition would be forced into accommodation elsewhere. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder assured the committee that this was not something that he could ever support.
- The appearance of Devolution on the strategic risk register was welcomed. It was confirmed that the current status of the risk should remain green as this reflected the direction of travel. If Devolution were to be agreed by Council, further risks would emerge regarding the delivery of Devolution.
- Concern was raised regarding access to primary care services in growth areas and members were pleased to see that this featured on the risk register as a concern. Whilst funding had been available for the provision of primary care services, gaining agreement from NHS England had been challenging. The Director of Health and Environmental Services informed the committee that the Council was starting to see better engagement from NHS England. The Interim Chief Executive informed the committee that a multi-agency project team working across growth sites was in place, and NHS England was involved in this.

The Committee noted the report.

10. PRIORITIES FOR THE CORPORATE PLAN 2017-2022

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the report which set out the priorities for the Corporate Plan 2017-2022. The Committee reviewed the Corporate Plan.

The committee was assured that within the living well objective, the Council acknowledged the prevention of loneliness amongst the elderly population as an important issue, which it was addressing. Specific reference to this in the document

would be considered.

Homelessness was discussed. Members expressed appreciation for the extensive efforts of Council officers to prevent homelessness through early intervention. The committee was informed of a Bill passing through Parliament into which some of the Council's good practice in housing was being fed.

The need to deliver transport infrastructure projects was raised, as it was felt that such projects were crucial to the area as congestion would only worsen as more homes were built. The Leader of the Council highlighted that one of the key aspects of Devolution was the delivery of key infrastructure, which was also vital to the delivery of the Local Plan.

11. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY - REPORT TO FOLLOW

As the report had been unavailable in time for the meeting, this item was not discussed. Members were reminded that this would be discussed at Cabinet on 17 November 2016, which all members could attend to raise any issues.

12. WORK PROGRAMME

The committee's work programme was discussed:

It was agreed that a Shared Services quarterly monitoring report should be presented to the committee at its February 2017 meeting.

The Chairman asked committee members if there were any areas they would like to look at in more detail. Members agreed that they would like to look at Ermine Street Housing as a discreet piece of work and would set up a working group to take this forward. A terms of reference for such a group would be drafted and members selected for the group. It was agreed that committee substitutes could be members of the working group. Councillors Chamberlain and Bard expressed initial interest in being members of the working group.

13. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Hart informed the committee of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder meeting that she had attended.

14. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on 7 Tuesday February 2017 at 6pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.26 p.m.
