

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on  
Tuesday, 7 February 2017 at 6.00 p.m.

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

Councillors: Kevin Cuffley Henry Batchelor  
Graham Cone Jose Hales  
Philippa Hart Bunty Waters

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

Officers: Alex Colyer Interim Chief Executive  
Dawn Graham Benefits Manager  
Mike Hill Director of Health and Environmental Services  
Julia Hovells Business Manager/Principal Accountant (Housing)  
Susan Gardner Craig Head of People and Organisational Development  
Richard May Policy and Performance Manager  
Caroline Ryba Head of Finance  
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were noted from Councillor David Bard.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

### **4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

### **5. GRASS VERGE CUTTING**

The update on grass verge cutting was discussed. Members did not feel that the report had answered the original question raised by Councillor Bard at the last meeting. Members advised that as local members and parish councillors had not been made aware of the changes to grass verge cuttings, which had been handed back to the County Council, this had led to a lot of work for parish clerks due to the number of complaints received from residents across the district. Members felt that the report did not pay respect to parish councils nor the problems that the changes to grass verge cuttings had caused.

The Leader of the Council responded, pointing out that the responsibility for grass verge cuttings was the County Council's and not the District Council's. The District Council had historically cut verges out of courtesy but had stopped doing this. The Housing Portfolio

Holder explained that as the duty to cut grass verges had always been the responsibility of the County Council, it was also their responsibility to deal with the complaints regarding the lack of grass verge cutting. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that when a duty such as this was returned entirely to another authority, the District Council should ensure that that authority communicated with parishes.

## **6. CUSTOMER CONTACT SERVICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2016 - PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the Customer Contact Service's annual performance report for 2016 and congratulated officers on the service's steady improvement and return to good performance.

Members were informed that the Contact Service was fully staffed and that good training, good quality and well informed staff was leading to good performance.

The Committee was informed that bin collection dates were changing from 27 February 2017 and a large volume of calls was expected. The Portfolio Holder explained the contingencies that were being put in place for this, such as extra staff and calls regarding bin complaints being redirected to a team that was being assembled to deal with missed bins. This would enable other important calls regarding issues such as homelessness and benefits for example, to continue to get through to the Contact Centre. The committee was informed that there was an option to outsource calls to UK based call centres if the volume of calls was so high that this was required. Knowledge acquired and lessons learned from the change to blue bin collections, was being used to inform this. The Portfolio Holder clarified that the changes were being made over a period of two weeks, so contingency plans would be in place for at least this time and may be in place for a month depending on the demand.

The following points were made:

- The Contact Centre was congratulated for its improvements in performance.
- The local member for Meldreth informed the Portfolio Holder that a large stretch of road in her area had not received a flyer regarding the changes to bin collections, though posters had been displayed in the village.
- The committee was informed that information would also be made available regarding the change to bin collections on social media and the Council's website.
- The percentage of calls abandoned was queried and the committee was informed that the drop in performance had been due to a staffing shortage in August 2016, due to holidays and vacancies.
- The service was not aware of any problems being raised with electronic forms by members of the public.
- The committee was informed that abandoned calls from the same number were treated as separate abandoned calls.
- The committee was informed that there would be an overlap in the contingency plans being in place for the change to bin collections, with council tax bills going out. Members were reminded that if needed, an outside provider could be used to help manage the volume of calls resulting from the changes in bin collections. Members were also reminded that the issuing of council tax bills was an annual billing for which processes and contingencies were in place.
- The committee was informed that if a third party provider was used to help deal with the volume of bin collection calls, this would be funded by a salary underspend in the service.
- Figures were requested for how many people used the Council's website. The

committee requested this be compared to the number of telephone calls to the Council. The committee was informed that this data was being gathered by the Digital by Default team.

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

## **7. 2016-17 THIRD QUARTERLY POSITION STATEMENT ON FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE**

The Corporate and Customer Services and Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holders presented the report which provided a statement on the Council's position with regard to its General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital budgets, corporate objectives, performance indicators and strategic risks.

The report was discussed and the following points were made:

- The percentage of affordable homes being only 30% in Cambourne West was queried. Members were informed that this had been deemed the viable amount through the use of the formula for viability. The committee was informed that both the applicant and the Council employed their own viability consultants and pointed out that a balance had to be struck between the percentage of affordable homes and the provision of community facilities. Cambourne West was providing the highest contribution per house to local infrastructure.
- The impact of designation on planning income was queried. The committee was informed that designation would lead to the loss of revenue from planning applications. Members were informed that if the Council was designated, the loss from planning revenue was unquantifiable as it would depend on the length of time of the designation. The committee pointed out that this risk was not on the strategic risk register and was assured by the Leader of the Council that the strategic risk register would be updated to reflect this risk. The Interim Chief Executive informed the committee that the Council had taken all the steps that would be required, if it became a designated authority. Therefore there was confidence that if the Council was designated, this would quickly be reversed. The basis of the designation was the number of in time determinations.
- It was requested that performance data regarding appeals against planning refusals, be split between committee and officer decisions.
- The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder informed the committee that designation looked at performance over the past year and although performance was now good, it had not been in the first three months of the year. The case had to be made as to why the Council should not be designated and a decision was due on this on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017.
- The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder clarified that he was the portfolio holder for risk management and performance management.
- It was felt that the A10 should be included in strategic transport improvements listed on the Corporate Plan, due to the development at Waterbeach. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder informed the committee that this was likely to come forward with Section 106 agreements for Waterbeach.

The strategic risk register was discussed, with the following points raised:

- Concern was raised regarding a change in interest rates potentially impacting Ermine Street Housing. The Interim Chief Executive assured the committee that there were references to this in service level risk registers and in Ermine Street Housing's own risk register.
- The committee felt the colour scoring of the risk register needed to be reviewed. It was highlighted to the committee that the colour did not indicate the level of

risk, but the direction of travel of the risk. The committee felt that the colour score concealed the level of risk and that this did not provide enough transparency.

- The Interim Chief Executive informed the committee that a review of the risk management strategy was being launched ahead of the Corporate Governance Committee meeting in June 2017. A member workshop to which all members would be invited, was being organised.
- Members were informed that minutes of the meetings of the Shared Services Joint Committee, would be made available for future meetings.
- The Leader of the Council informed the committee that the outputs of Devolution could be measured when the Combined Authority had been established and what it would be delivering was set out. The committee was informed that at the present time, it was too early to measure risks against the outputs of Devolution. Members were informed that the minutes of the Shadow Combined Authority meetings were being made available in the public domain.

The Chairman raised concern regarding taxi licensing following the recent Cambridge News article regarding taxi licensing at South Cambridgeshire District Council. The Chairman proposed the set up of a working group to look at licensing policy and implementation, as well as looking at the policies of neighbouring authorities. The Environmental Services Portfolio Holder informed the committee that the Cambridge News article was the result of a Freedom of Information request to which South Cambridgeshire District Council had responded whereas other councils had not. The Portfolio Holder was happy for a working group to be set up and informed the committee that policy was being reviewed. It was advised that the committee discuss this with the Head of Service for Licensing regarding the timing of this, to ensure that the working group added value to the review of licensing policy rather than duplicating any work that was being undertaken.

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

## **8. CORPORATE PLAN 2017-2022**

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the Corporate Plan 2017-22.

The Vice Chairman suggested the following additions to the Corporate Plan:

- To (ii) under 'Living Well', the addition of 'close to their homes' was suggested, so that (ii) would become 'Support to our residents to stay in good health as they grow older, with access to the services they need close to their homes'.
- That under 'Connected Communities' an additional point be added as follows:
  - 'Support and develop employment in the villages'.

The committee was reminded that the Corporate Plan was a living document, so it would be amended if needed following the establishment of the Combined Authority or following Britain's exit from the European Union. The Corporate Plan was intended to be in the best interests of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the Corporate Plan.

## **9. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY, BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING**

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented the Council's financial strategies and budgets that would be presented to Council for approval on 23 February 2017.

These were discussed by the committee with the following comments made:

- It was suggested that a summary page should be included explaining what happened with the council tax residents paid, to show what they got for their payment and to justify any increases in council tax. The committee was reminded that the council tax booklet was sent out to residents with their annual bill, explaining how the council tax was used.
- The Portfolio Holder highlighted that income was being increased rather than staffing and expenditure being reduced.
- The Local Member for Melbourn asked if support grants could be increased and if consideration could be given to this in future.

The Housing Portfolio Holder presented the Housing Revenue Account. The following points were raised:

- The Portfolio Holder confirmed that there was currently no policy regarding the sale of higher value houses and there was not yet an underpinning regulation available. Two large data collection exercises had been undertaken and would inform the policy. The assumption was being made that payments would start from April 2018. There was an acknowledgement from Government that local authorities would need time to plan for raising the funds required.
- In response to a question regarding whether the council's new build ambitions would change, the Portfolio Holder informed the committee that the Council's new build ambitions had had to have been reined in.
- In response to a question asked regarding whether the 1% rental decrease also applied to service charges, the committee was informed that it did not. The Council would however continue to keep service charges as low as possible.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented the confidential Ermine Street Housing Business Plan.

The committee commended the report for its clarity and thanked the officers and portfolio holders for the clarity of their presentations. The committee supported the separation out of items such as savings due to staff turnover.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the report and **ENDORSED** the recommendations to Cabinet.

## 10. SHARED SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORTS

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and Director of Health and Environmental Services, presented the 3C Shared Service 2016/17 Quarter 3 update report.

The legal shared service update was discussed:

- The committee was informed that savings targets had not been met due to problems recruiting staff. Despite this, the service was progressing particularly well and was now based in Cambourne with staff on the City Council payroll.
- The Director of Health and Environmental Services explained that each council had a tally of hours to use from the service, which equated to the amount of money that each partner council had put into the service.
- The service's targets for returning telephone calls within one day and email acknowledgements within two working days, were queried. In response to this the committee was advised that these were standard response times.
- The committee was informed that the ambition was for the legal service to be run as well as a commercial legal practice would be, with external contracts secured

and commercial rates charged.

The committee was informed that it had proven difficult to recruit to the posts within the Building Control Shared Service due to strong competition from the private sector, which was able to undercut the Council's service whose fees had to be published in the public domain.

An up to date organogram for all the shared services was requested, with the staff directory being updated with all shared services staff, so that members could contact them. The Director of Health and Environmental Services would action this.

Councillor Hart informed the committee and Portfolio Holder that she did not feel that the performance of the ICT service had yet got back to where it had been.

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

#### **11. WORK PROGRAMME AND TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

The Chairman proposed that a working group be set up to look at taxi licensing. Before this was done this would be discussed with the Head of Service for Environmental Health and Licensing, to establish what work he was undertaking in terms of reviewing the Council's policy, to ensure that any work the committee undertook complemented and added value to this.

Members requested that the Interim City Deal Chief Executive be asked to attend a future meeting if possible.

Councillors David Bard, Grenville Chamberlain and Philippa Hart would form a working group to look at Ermine Street Housing. An email would be circulated to the committee and its substitute members to invite further participation in the group. The committee would meet informally following a Full Council meeting, to determine terms of reference for the group.

#### **12. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE**

Councillors Cone and Hart informed the committee of Portfolio Holder meetings they had recently attended.

#### **13. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 11 April at 6pm.

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**The Meeting ended at 8.55 p.m.**

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