

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 6 February 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Orgee – Chairman
Councillor Kevin Cuffley – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard
Grenville Chamberlain
Jose Hales
Tumi Hawkins
Ruth Betson
Graham Cone
Philippa Hart

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

Officers: Patrick Adams
Beverly Agass
Suzy Brandes
Susan Gardner Craig
Richard May
Trevor Nicoll
Caroline Ryba
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Chief Executive
Principal Accountant (General Fund & Projects)
Head of People and Organisational Development
Policy and Performance Manager
Head of Waste Resources
Head of Finance

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5. SHARED WASTE SERVICE ALTERNATIVE BIN COLLECTION DAY INITIAL PROJECT REVIEW

The Environmental Services Portfolio Holder presented this report, which reviewed the implementation of the Shared Waste Service Alternative Bin Collection Day project.

Collection of cardboard

Concern was expressed regarding missed collections of cardboard. The Head of Waste Services explained that cardboard left beside the bin should be collected, providing it was small enough to fit inside a wheeled bin. Instances of cardboard not being collected should be reported to the Council to ensure that errors were rectified. He also pointed out that the Council could provide an extra blue bin for households that required it. This was a better solution than continuously having to put out side waste. The Committee recommended that the Council be more proactive in communicating how it collected

cardboard side waste.

Reducing waste

It was suggested that the Council should reduce the number of plastic cups used at its offices, especially at its meeting to give the correct perception to the public. The Portfolio Holder explained that there was a complex debate about the virtues of paper as opposed to plastic cups. It was noted that the Council had recently changed the way in which it collected its office waste in an aim to increase its recycling rate.

It was suggested that more could be done to encourage businesses, particularly those that used mail order, to reduce the amount of packaging. The Head of Waste Services explained that the Council was lobbying for this, but we were one voice in a larger national issue.

Improving practice

It was noted that the Council's collection vehicles were equipped with CCTV cameras, which could be used for training purposes. For example, bins should be placed back where they were collected from and any instances of this not happening could be investigated.

It had been reported that batteries were being mixed in with recycling, which caused contamination. The Portfolio Holder apologised for this, as the aim was to collect these separately.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the operatives were gaining experience of rounds, which meant that cover could be provided in the event of staff sickness.

In response to questioning the Head of Waste Services explained that there was no policy in place with regard to lying bins on their sides in windy weather, it was a judgement call for the operatives.

Missed bins

Whilst missed bin collections were responded to promptly, they should not have occurred in the first place. The Head of Waste Services explained that all missed collections were analysed to try and avoid repeats. If they were promptly reported then it was likely that a vehicle would only have to make a brief detour to collect it. Analysing the data could also identify instances of assisted collections being repeatedly missed. The aim was to avoid repeat errors as these cost the Council money and resources.

Training

The Head of Waste Services reported that operatives had recently received training, which covered health and safety and promoting mutual respect and dignity at work. This would help to improve the service.

Overall performance

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Council provided an excellent service, with the lowest collect rate recorded this year for a village in a single quarter was 99.4%. He explained that overall the Council collected 5 million bins a year and it was inevitable that some bins would be missed. A number of Committee members reported that they had not received any complaints.

Export of recycling waste

China had recently announced that they would no longer be accepting certain types of plastic for recycling. The Portfolio Holder explained that as the Council's recycling was collected by Ameycespa, who disposed most of its waste locally, he was hopeful that the

announcement from China would not have a detrimental effect on the Council's recycling rate. The Portfolio Holder offered to send this information to all councillors and put in on the Council's website.

The Committee recommended that communication be improved for residents through the website and parish councils through direct contact.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for a comprehensive report and presentation. The Committee **NOTED** the report.

6. 2017-2018 THIRD QUARTERLY POSITION STATEMENT ON FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK

In the absence of the Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented this report which provided the Committee with details of the Council's performance at the end of the third quarter.

Finance

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder advised that the variances between the working budgets and the forecasted figures were all within acceptable limits.

Use of temporary accommodation

Concern was expressed at the number of families in temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation and their length of stay. The Portfolio Holder for Housing shared the Committee's concerns. She explained that due an increase in demand for housing there had been an increase in the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The longest a family had been housed in such temporary accommodation was six weeks.

Concern was also expressed at the number of under 35s in temporary accommodation. It was noted that under Government guidance, single males under the age of 35 were not a priority for affordable housing.

The Chairman expressed concern at the reference to the unpaid invoices regarding December's figures for the amount spent on Bed and Breakfast accommodation. It was suggested that the total amount could be included in the comments field in future reports.

The Housing Portfolio Holder explained that the pressures on affordable housing were reflected nationally. The Council were looking at alternatives, such as building pre-fabricated buildings for residents who required temporary accommodation. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing explained that the Council had set a £60,000 contingency budget for this area and it had not yet proved necessary to use it.

Risk Register

The Leader explained that the Risk Register had been improved to make it a more dynamic document where risks were regularly reassessed. Member of the Committee considered each risk in turn and focussed on recent changes to the risk ratings.

STR 2 Gypsy and Travellers

Members of the Committee queried why the importance of this risk had been reduced before the Local Plan Inspector's report had been received.

STR 25 Risk of Designation as a Poorly Performing Planning Authority

It was queried why both the gross and net risk had been reduced to 9. The Planning Portfolio Holder explained that whilst the number of appeals lost stood at 10.8%, which

was just above the 10% threshold, the majority of lost appeals related to the five year land supply. When this was taken into account the actual percentage of lost appeals was only 2%. In addition, the Local Plan was closer to adoption than had been the case when the major applications had been determined. The committee felt that the risk assessment should not be downgraded prior to receiving a letter from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

STR 12 Shared Services Initiatives and STR 14 Access to Primary Care

Members of the Committee questioned why the net risk rating had been reduced. The Leader shared Committee members concerns regarding the ability of the NHS to use Section 106 money to provide health care to new communities. The Housing Portfolio Holder stated that there were also issues regarding the County Council's use of Section 106 funds and it was important that the District Council were involved in these discussions.

It was noted that the Mare Fen Bank was an earth bank designed to protect the nature reserve.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder thanked the Committee for their concerns regarding the Risk Register, which would be discussed at Cabinet.

Minor amendments

Members of the Committee identified typographical errors and requested financial appendices to be printed in larger size in future reports for clarity.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

7. CORPORATE PLAN 2018

The Chief Executive introduced this report which highlighted what the Council was seeking to achieve in 2018/19. The Committee were invited to make recommendations to Cabinet.

Members of the Committee made the following points:

- It was important to receive feedback from residents, especially those moving in to new communities, as they could challenge pre-existing ideas.
- It was acknowledged that the provision of broadband was led by the County Council. 97% of the District received broadband and so the aim of covering the remaining 3% could prove challenging.
- Concern was expressed regarding the use of inspiring terms such as "Living Well", without providing substance on how such a Strategic Aim would be delivered.
- Concerns were expressed at how the NHS were going to deliver healthcare for villages that were expanding without using section 106 funds to build new facilities.
- The Committee welcomed the format of the Corporate Plan. The snapshot on pages 101-2 of the agenda was praised, in particular how it highlighted that the Council no longer received any Revenue Support Grant funding from the Government.

The Committee **NOTED** the Corporate Plan.

8. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY, GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2018-19 (INCLUDING COUNCIL TAX SETTING), HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2018-19 (INCLUDING HOUSING RENTS), CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy and explained that the Committee were being asked to consider the financial strategies and budgets prior to the report going to Cabinet and then Council.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that for 2017/18 there had been real surprises from the Government, as expected the Local Government Settlement was £0. In fact the Government was in effect taxing the Council. It was noted that the Council were spending less and would have to continue to find extra savings or more ways of increasing income in the years ahead.

Funding Greater Cambridge Partnership

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that the amount of funding to the Greater Cambridge Partnership had been reduced, as the number of new homes built was less than expected, which meant a decrease in New Homes Bonus.

Council Tax

It was proposed that Council Tax be increased by £5 for a Band D property. The Committee accepted this proposal. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder warned that the underlying Council Tax showed how much savings or additional income still had to be found.

Reserves

The Executive were currently recommending that the minimum reserves should remain at £2.5 million. This figure had been increased years ago from £1.5 million due to the financial uncertainty nationally.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that whilst the five year Medium Term Financial Strategy showed the Council reaching the limit of its reserves, history had shown that either additional savings or additional income would be found to push this date further back.

Ermine Street Housing Ltd

The Committee welcomed the funds that had been brought in through Ermine Street Housing Ltd, but expressed concern that the Council was relying on this. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that the funds brought in for 2017/18 were higher than expected, but the Executive recognised the risks such as fluctuating interest rates and assured the Committee that the Council was not complacent. Ermine Street Housing Ltd had its own risk register.

Business Rates

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that Business Rate appeals could be backdated to 2010 and so could adversely affect the Council's finances. The Business Rates revaluation, which came into effect in April 2017 could also reduce receipts. The implications of the Government's Fair Funding Review was not yet known but it was likely to mean extra funding to the County Council at the expense of the Districts.

Precautionary items

It was noted that none of the precautionary items for 2017/18 had yet been spent.

Cost of planning appeals

Whilst noting the costs of appeals, two members of the Committee stated it was money well spent as it defended local democracy and championed the views of local residents by forcing deeply unpopular proposed developments to appeal. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder recognised the strength of feeling from councillors and local residents, but it was his duty to inform the Committee that planning appeals, on decisions made by the Planning Committee against the recommendation of the officer, had cost the Council £250,000. It was noted that the Planning Committee was made up of all parties and took non-political decisions.

Local Plan

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that the £750,000 cost of the Local Plan had been budgeted for. It was not known if this funding was sufficient to cover the entire cost of the Local Plan. It was noted that all planning authorities had to deal with changing definitions resulting from a Supreme Court ruling regarding the definition of sustainability and five year land supply.

Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford corridor

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that the Leader had met with the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the local MPs about this matter. Hope was expressed that the Council would ensure that it would be involved in discussions about the route. The committee hoped that the Council could influence the routing of the proposed rail line.

Treasury Management

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that the Council was enjoying a far higher level of return compared to other authorities and this was due to the loan to Ermine Street Housing Limited.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Housing Portfolio Holder provided the Committee with an overview of the challenges facing the HRA.

Right to buy receipts

It was expected that there would be a reduction in the number of right to buy completions over the next five years. The Housing Portfolio Holder explained that if receipts were not spent within a certain time limit the receipts had to be returned to Government with interest. It therefore made sense to ensure that right to buy receipts were appropriately invested within the required timescale.

Rent

The Housing Portfolio Holder explained that rent had to be decreased by 1% for the next two years, but then will be increased by the rate of inflation plus 1% for five years.

Self-build housing

The Housing Portfolio Holder shared the Committee's disappointment with regard to the lack of take up of self-build housing and she expressed the hope that this situation would improve.

Re-financing of housing debt

The Housing Portfolio Holder explained that the Council was not attempting to pay off its £205,000,000 housing debt and so this would have to be re-financed in the future.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder expressed his thanks to the officers for their hard work in producing the reports and appendices.

The Committee **NOTED** and **ENDORSED** the recommendations to Cabinet as laid out in the report.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee **NOTED** its Work Programme.

10. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

No updates were provided by the Scrutiny Monitors.

11. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meeting will be held on 6 March 2018 at 5pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.
