

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 18 September 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Grenville Chamberlain – Chairman
Councillor Brian Milnes – Vice-Chairman

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| Councillors: | Ruth Betson | Anna Bradnam |
| | Dr. Martin Cahn | Gavin Clayton |
| | Graham Cone | Dr. Claire Daunton |
| | Bill Handley | Peter McDonald |
| | Eileen Wilson | Judith Rippeth |

Councillors Neil Gough, Philippa Hart, Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Hazel Smith and John Williams were in attendance, by invitation.

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| Officers: | Victoria Wallace | Democratic Services Officer |
| | Suzy Brandes | Principal Accountant (General Fund & Projects) |
| | Susan Gardner Craig | Head of People and Organisational Development |
| | Mike Hill | Director of Housing and Environmental Services |
| | Caroline Hunt | Planning Policy Manager |

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sarah Cheung Johnson and Douglas de Lacey. Councillor Judith Rippeth was present as a substitute for Councillor Cheung Johnson.

Apologies were conveyed to the committee on behalf of the Leader of the Council who was unable to attend the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th August 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Lead Cabinet Member for Planning and the Planning Policy Manager presented the new Local Development Scheme (LDS) for Greater Cambridge, which would be presented to Cabinet for adoption subject to the adoption of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan. The adoption of the LDS would guide the preparation of a new jointly prepared Local Plan for Greater Cambridge and a jointly prepared Cambridge Northern Fringe Area Action Plan.

The committee was informed that the Council was required to keep an up to date Local

Development Scheme on the website at all times. Exact timing would become clear as work progressed.

The committee discussed the report and comments raised by Members included the following:

- How the LDS fed into transport infrastructure with regards to Highways England's plans was queried. The committee was informed that this would be an issue for when the new Local Plan was developed. It was anticipated that there would be a lot of engagement with members regarding this, which would provide the opportunity to discuss and explore issues. Officers highlighted that they were trying to give the Council the flexibility to create the plan it wanted to create.
- The potential governance arrangements for developing the new Local Plan were discussed. The model that had been used and that had worked well to develop the previous Local Plan, would be used to develop the new Local Plan with separate governance arrangements. In response to some concern raised over the potential for the two councils to work in isolation while developing their aligned plans in parallel, officers provided assurance that the councils had worked well together in developing their previous plans and that separate governance arrangements had not been a contributing factor to how long it had taken to get the Local Plan approved. Decisions would be taken at key stages by full Council with officers meeting through a joint working group in the run up to key stages of decision making.
- How the Combined Authority would feed into the new Local Plan development process depended on the governance arrangements that were agreed. Legislation did not make reference to how the Combined Authority could feed into governance arrangements.
- Concern regarding the interdependencies of projects was raised. Reassurance was sought that some of the deliverables were pinned down along with trigger dates.
- The committee was informed that in relation to the Northern Fringe Area Action Plan, the relocation of the water treatment works was a significant dependency for some of the development in the action plan. A bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) to relocate the water treatment works, had been successful at the first round. A final decision on this was expected around April 2019. The Northern Fringe Area Action Plan needed to have advanced significantly in order to help the success of the HIF bid.
- The committee was informed that the development on the Northern Fringe was significant and additional to the assumptions that had already been made in the Local Plan. This would help to contribute to the longer term needs of the district.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee recommended to Cabinet that following the adoption of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan:

- a) The new Local Development Scheme for Greater Cambridge, prepared joint with Cambridge City Council, is adopted, which confirms the intention to prepare:
 - (i) A joint Local Plan for Greater Cambridge, comprising the administrative area of both Councils,
 - (ii) A joint Cambridge Northern Fringe Area Action Plan, for the area shown in the Local Development Scheme which when adopted, will form part of the development plan for Greater Cambridge; both prepared under Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act with separate democratic processes to agree both plans, informed by a joint member advisory group;
- b) The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development is granted delegated authority, in liaison with the Deputy Leader, to make any editing changes identified prior to publication.

6. 2018-19 Q1 POSITION STATEMENT: PERFORMANCE, FINANCE AND RISK

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered the 2018-19 Quarter One Position Statement on Finance, Performance and Risk. The Lead Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which provided a draft of budget forecast based on quarter one with regard to the Council's General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital budgets, performance indicators and strategic risks. The committee was informed that a better way to present the financial information in the report was being looked at.

It was intended that quarterly financial information would be provided to all members through the weekly Members' Bulletin. This information would however still be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

The committee was informed that the strategic risks and performance indicators were those set by the previous administration and were being reviewed.

The committee was informed that variances were provisional as the Council's final accounts had not yet been finalised.

The committee expressed concern about the presentation of the financial information, which it was felt was difficult to understand. The committee requested that the information be presented in a more accessible way, such as by providing an explanatory note or key to explain what text in brackets and different colours meant. The committee pointed out that these documents were available for public scrutiny and therefore needed to be easily understood by members of the public.

An error in the Outturn Projection Variance percentage was pointed out at the end of page 46. It was confirmed that the formula in the cell was incorrect.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Finance clarified the reasons for the Council's accounts having not been closed on time:

- The Government's deadline for the closure of accounts had been brought forward from September to July.
- The accountancy team had been working under extraordinary circumstances as while working towards the early closure of accounts, they were also working on the introduction of the Council's new financial management system.
- Additional temporary resource had been brought in with the recruitment of an interim chief accountant. Due to their availability, it had not been possible to extend this contract and difficulty in recruiting additional temporary resource had been experienced due to a skills shortage in the sector.

The committee highlighted that this had been the second time the accounts had not been closed on time and urged that this must not happen again. The Lead Cabinet Member assured the committee that he was confident that this would not happen again. The committee was informed that the reason for the accounts not being closed on time last year, was due to an issue being raised late in the process by the external auditors, regarding the valuation of the Council's assets.

Provisional Forecast Variance:

- The underspend for the year to date in housing repairs was queried and assurance provided by the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing that the Council had not cut back on housing repairs.
- The Capital overspend in relation to waste collection and street cleansing was

queried. The Director of Health and Environmental Services explained that this was due to purchases not made at the end of the previous year being completed by Q1. Budget carry forward from the previous year to fund these purchases was approved by the Council in July 2018.

The Strategic Risk Register was discussed:

- STR10 Increase in cost of managing homelessness: The Local Cabinet Member for Housing informed the committee that the joint Trailblazer bid to introduce more joint working and initiatives around homelessness prevention, had been successful and the Council had benefitted from this. Homelessness prevention posts had been recruited to and the Council was well prepared to deal with the implementation of the new homelessness legislation. It was highlighted that the risks remained red despite the control measures that were in place.
- STR13 Recruitment and Retention: The Head of People and Organisational Development informed the committee that there were difficulties in recruiting to some professional and technical areas such as Finance, Planning, Environmental Health and qualified HGV drivers. This was an issue being experienced across local authorities, which was having an impact on the delivery of some services. The Local Member for Customer Services and Business Improvement informed the committee that staff workshops had been scheduled in early October to find out from staff what impediments there were to working in South Cambridgeshire and what would make this easier. Opportunities to incentivise staff were being looked at.
- The imminent departure from the organisation of the head of the ICT shared service was raised; it was suggested that this be added as a strategic risk. The Director of Health and Environmental Services explained that strategic risks should concentrate on generic issues rather than one-off events.
- STR 26 Contract Failure: The Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Health and Licensing clarified that this risk was associated with the normal stresses and strains expected with the management of any contract.
- STR 7 Partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council and STR14 Access to Primary Care in Growth Areas: the low scoring of these risks and the lack of action required regarding STR 14 was queried given the importance of health and wellbeing and access to healthcare. The Director of Health and Environmental Services explained that the risk register addressed the strategic risks to this organisation. These were currently considered to be low risks in this respect as they were highly dependent on the County Council and were not within South Cambridgeshire District Council's control. The organisation recognised the importance to residents of health and wellbeing and access to primary care in growth areas. In relation to this, the committee was informed that NHS England did not currently engage well with the planning process in order to access the funding available for the provision of health services. The Lead Cabinet Member for Planning was working to engage with NHS England on this.

The Senior Accountant informed the committee that work was ongoing regarding the scoring of risks.

Key Performance Indicators were discussed:

- FS109 % invoices paid in 30 days: Consistent poor performance was queried. The Director of Health and Environmental Services explained that this was in relation to smaller invoices which were batched by suppliers and sent for payment at the end of the month. The committee was assured that the Council was not incurring any penalties in relation to this.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the report.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed its work programme.

The committee was informed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman had requested a meeting with the Chief Executive and Leader, to discuss the timeframe the committee had to consider reports before meetings.

8. THE ROLE OF SCRUTINY MONITORS

The committee reviewed the role of Scrutiny Monitors. The committee was informed that the Leader supported one to one meetings taking place between Lead Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Monitors on an ongoing basis. Councillor Bill Handley as the Finance Scrutiny Monitor, requested the opportunity to spend some time with finance staff to develop a better understanding of their roles.

9. TO NOTE THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The committee noted that its next meeting would take place on Thursday 18th October 2018 at 6pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.53 p.m.
