

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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

**PRESENT:** Councillor Brian Milnes – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	Anna Bradnam	Dr. Martin Cahn
	Gavin Clayton	Graham Cone
	Dr. Claire Daunton	Bill Handley
	Steve Hunt	Peter McDonald
	Judith Rippeth	Dr. Shrobona Bhattacharya
	Sue Ellington	Geoff Harvey

Councillors Jose Hales, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan Van de Weyer and Neil Gough were in attendance, by invitation. Ross Henley from Taunton Dean Council was also present as Cllr Gough's LGA mentor.

Officers:	Victoria Wallace	Democratic Services Officer
	Gemma Barron	Head of Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing
	Alex Colyer	Executive Director
	David Roberts	Principal Planning Policy Officer
	Rebecca Weymouth-Wood	Interim SSWS Waste Policy Manager

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Grenville Chamberlain, Ruth Betson, Sarah Cheung Johnson and Douglas de Lacey. Councillor Geoff Harvey was present as a substitute for Councillor Cheung Johnson and Councillors Sue Ellington and Shrobona Bhattacharya were present as substitutes for Councillors Betson and Chamberlain.

Councillor Milnes chaired the meeting with Councillor Handley acting as Vice Chairman.

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

Councillor Anna Bradnam declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to agenda item 8 Mobile Wardens Grants Scheme Review, as a member of Milton Parish Council which had benefitted from the mobile warden grant and may apply for future grants. Councillor Sue Ellington also declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to this item as the trustee of a mobile warden scheme in Over

Councillor Bill Handley declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to agenda item 7 Community Energy Grant Review, as a trustee of Over Day Centre which may apply for energy grants in future.

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

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions had been received.

#### **5. GREATER CAMBRIDGE SHARED WASTE SERVICE COLLECTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

The Waste Policy, Change and Innovation Manager and Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Licensing presented the report which set out the service that the Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service (GCSWS) would deliver for residents of both Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The committee discussed the report:

- The high collection rate of bins on the scheduled collection date was noted.
- Members commented that the 50% recycling rate was good but could be better.
- It was clarified that the developer normally paid for the bins for new houses. The Council charged for the delivery of the new bins. Charging for additional bins would be consistent across Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils. There were no plans for concessionary charges for the elderly.
- Residents could collect compost free of charge from the Amey Cespa depot. Cambridgeshire County Council sold bags of compost at recycling centres; the GCSWS saw no return from this.
- The councils wanted to encourage home composting. This was considered the ideal environmental approach to green waste as it was more efficient for residents to compost at home rather than waste crews collecting green waste.
- The trial of earlier collection times in Cambridge City was welcomed before further rollout.
- It was suggested that a consciousness raising exercise looking at rubbish as a resource be undertaken.
- Awareness raising to encourage residents to consider bin lorry access when parking their cars, was suggested.
- The committee was informed that the service was focussing communications on the issues that residents found confusing, such as which plastics could be recycled for example, to ensure the material the service collected was of good quality and uncontaminated. It was suggested that a campaign focussing on what should not go into the recycling bin as well as what should, would be beneficial.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the report.

#### **6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGIES**

The Lead Cabinet Member for Housing presented the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Strategies (MTFS). This provided an update in respect of the financial position and forecasts for the Housing Revenue Account, allowing review of financial assumptions, approval of any mid-year budgetary changes, approval of any future business plan changes and agreement of the budget strategies for 2019/20 and beyond.

The committee was informed that:

- The threat to the Council of having to sell empty high value homes had been factored into longer term strategies. The threat of this had diminished as the government had said that this would not happen before at least April 2019 and was thought to be unlikely thereafter.
- It was reported that the Government would be withdrawing the HRA borrowing cap

imminently and more would be known after the Government's Autumn Budget Statement. The Council needed to establish what the impact would be if the borrowing cap was removed. Depending on the outcome of this, the HRA MTFS report would be amended before it was presented to Council in February 2019. If the cap was removed the Council would think more widely and ambitiously as time restraints associated with the cap would not be a factor.

In discussing the report, the committee raised the following points:

- A glossary of terms was requested to accompany the report as well as an explanation of the brackets in the financial information.
- Fire safety of Council owned properties was raised. It was suggested that sprinklers in the corridors of these could improve safety. The committee was informed that any cladding on Council owned properties was compliant with fire safety regulations. The Council had made provision for investment in fire safety doors.
- The review of communal rooms was discussed. It was highlighted that some communal rooms were in a poor state. The committee was informed that funding had been identified for architect fees as part of a project reviewing the communal rooms. The potential for communal rooms being used by external bodies, such as community groups, was suggested however many of the rooms needed to be improved before this could be considered. The Leader of the Council suggested that the communal rooms review being undertaken by the Council needed to be accelerated.
- The committee was informed that the Housing service had gone back to a patch based system of working so that staff got to know the residents in the areas they covered, to ensure early intervention. Voids had been a priority and pressure had been put on Mears to turn void properties around quickly. The low level of voids was noted.
- Regarding Universal Credit, the committee was informed that resources had been put in place to help tenants in bad debt and resources had been put into general housing management to help tenants. New working age claimants in South Cambridgeshire would now be on Universal Credit.
- The committee was informed that the Council had seen an increase in the level of tenant arrears due to the introduction of welfare reforms impacting some tenants' ability to pay their rent on time. The impact had been seen on working age people and those with larger numbers of children. The Council was working to reduce the level of arrears.
- The Council took a firm initial stance on rent arrears however was compassionate in cases where tenants were in real financial difficulty. In such cases the Council worked to support the tenant to keep them in their home.
- The committee was informed that a significant number of additional posts were planned to be recruited to in order to support tenants with the impact of Universal Credit, to facilitate early intervention and support tenants to prevent a build up of rent arrears. Council officers referred tenants to other services, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), as appropriate. The Council was providing funding to the CAB to ensure tenants in need had access to their services.
- While the Council was compassionate and worked to support those in real financial difficulty, it was important that tenants understood their obligation to pay their rent. The Council did not charge interest on rent arrears and the committee was assured that it would never consciously add to a tenant's debt. Bailiffs were not used to recover housing rent arrears.
- The Council sought to recover former tenant rent arrears however, this was hard to do, particularly in the case of absconders.
- The committee was informed that the Council was ahead of its savings target and savings would be invested in housing stock.

- The committee was informed that it was not realistic for the Council to employ a dedicated planning officer to deal with its own planning applications. The service was working to ensure consistency and continuity of planning advice.
- The committee was informed that a member workshop on the budget would be taking place on 6 November 2018.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the report.

## **7. COMMUNITY ENERGY GRANT REVIEW 2018**

The Head of Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing and the Chairman of the Grants Advisory Committee presented the report which presented changes to the Community Energy Grant scheme, as recommended by the Grants Advisory Committee and the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee.

The committee was informed that business cases had to be included in grant applications so the Council could monitor the impact of grants that were awarded. The committee was assured that no negative feedback had been received from applicants regarding having to submit a business case.

All grant recipients had to report back to the Council on how their projects had gone. The Council supported them to do this.

The committee was informed that upgrading street lamps to LEDs was being looked at.

It was suggested that the collective benefit of the schemes that were being run should be measured.

Some members commented that they did not feel that this report needed to be considered by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the report.

## **8. MOBILE WARDEN SCHEME GRANTS REVIEW 2018**

The Head of Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing and Chairman of the Grants Advisory Committee presented the report which set out minor changes to the Mobile and Community Warden Scheme Grants for 2019/20, as recommended by the Grants Advisory Committee.

It was suggested that applicants be made aware of the campaign to end loneliness and describe how their scheme contributed to this.

Members supported the scheme as it would help prevent hospital admissions.

The committee was informed that the Council was reviewing the emerging housing strategy and was mindful of solutions to prevent loneliness. More modern solutions to prevent loneliness would be considered.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the report.

**9. IMPLEMENTATION-ADOPTION OF COMPLETED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS (SPDS) (LAND NORTH OF CHERRY HINTON SPD & CAMBRIDGESHIRE FLOOD AND WASTE SPD)**

The Principal Planning Policy Officer and Deputy Leader of the Council presented the report which set out the Cambridgeshire Flood and Water Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and Land North of Cherry Hinton (LNCH) SPD. These would be recommended to Cabinet for adoption. The adoption of these was subject to prior adoption of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, which had been adopted in September 2018.

The committee noted the report.

**10. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee discussed its work programme. The Finance Scrutiny Monitor would monitor rent arrears with officers.

A briefing on the homeless strategy was requested before it was presented to the Scrutiny and Overview at a future committee meeting.

Before it was considered by full Council, the committee would consider an item on the Cambridge Ice Rink.

**11. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE**

There were no updates from Scrutiny Monitors.

**12. TO NOTE THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The committee noted that its next meeting would take place on Thursday 22 November 2018 at 6pm.

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**The Meeting ended at 7.55 p.m.**

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