

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 16 November 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Graham Cone – Chair
Councillor Stephen Drew – Vice-Chair

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| Councillors: | Anna Bradnam | Tom Bygott |
| | Dr. Martin Cahn | Libby Earle |
| | Sue Ellington | Judith Rippeth |
| | Richard Stobart | Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer |

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Anne Ainsworth (Chief Operating Officer), Gareth Bell (Communications and Communities Service Manager), Bode Esan (Head of Climate, Environment & Waste), Heather Jones (Deputy Director of Planning & Building Quality), Stephen Kelly (Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development), Kevin Ledger (Senior Policy and Performance Officer), Peter Maddock (Head of Finance), Lesley McFarlane (Development Officer - Health Specialist), Jeff Membery (Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services), John Murphy (Monitoring Officer), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser) and Eddie Spicer (Service Manager – Housing Assets)

Councillors Bill Handley, Heather Williams, Bridget Smith and John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) were in attendance, by invitation.

Councillors Cllr Henry Batchelor, Cllr John Batchelor, Cllr Peter Fane, Cllr Carla Hofman and Cllr Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) joined the meeting remotely.

1. Apologies for absence

Councillors Sally Ann Hart, James Hobro and Helene Leeming sent apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Richard Stobart declared an interest as a Director of the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership LLP.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2023, subject to the following

Minute 6 – Cost-of-Living Support Update

In the second line of the paragraph beginning “Councillor Helene Leeming thanked...” the phrase “warn hubs” should be “warm hubs”.

Councillor Judith Rippeth had not been at the previous meeting and asked that it be noted that she would not be affirming the minutes of that meeting.

4. **Public Questions**

There were no public questions or statements.

5. **2023-24 Quarter Two Performance Report**

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed a report analysing the Council's Quarter Two (Q2) operational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and 2020-25 Business Plan.

The scrutiny review focussed on the following Key Performance Indicators and aspects of the Business Plan:

AH215 – Successful homeless preventions as a proportion of all homeless cases closed

The Committee welcomed the significant improvement in this KPI.

AH245 – Percentage of SCDC homes with active HHR Category 1 or 2 damp and mould cases

The Committee noted that this was a new KPI and that it was still too soon to identify trends. The Leader of the Council reminded Members that the provision and maintenance of high standard housing was one of the Council's strategic priorities.

CC307 – Average call answer time

In response to a comment, the Leader of the Council described the Contact Centre as the Council's 'shop window.' She thanked Contact Centre staff for their hard work and commended the pride they had in undertaking their responsibilities.

ES414 and ES418 – Household waste

In response to enthusiasm for the recent food waste trial in the Milton and Waterbeach ward, the Lead Cabinet Member for Environment assured Committee members that the Council was already preparing for the mandating of separate food waste collections and was confident that behavioural change among residents was achievable. With particular reference to ES418 (Percentage of household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting) the Head of Climate, Environment and Waste said that results were best considered on an annual basis because of the impact made by weather on the composting element of the KPI at various times of the year.

PN519 – Average time to determine validated householder planning applications in weeks

In response to a comment about this KPI, the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development said that ten weeks was the total for determining an application rather than simply validating the application. He reminded Members that this was not a Government target and the important thing for the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service was to gauge the overall householder experience.

SH332 – Percentage of emergency repairs in 24 hours

The Committee noted the incredible success of this KPI.

Business Plan Objective 1a – delivery of new high quality Council homes

The Lead Cabinet Member for Housing was confident that the Council would be able to compensate in future years for any shortfall in the number of new homes delivered in 2023-24. The Leader of the Council reminded Members that the Council was not itself a landowner but welcomed a reversal of the recent decline in the availability of exception

sites.

Business Plan Objective 1bii – Planning policies that address climate and ecological emergencies

The Leader of the Council agreed that training around Biodiversity Net Gain should be as wide-ranging as possible and include all South Cambridgeshire District Councillors and partner organisations such as Parish Councils.

Business Plan Objective 2a – Supporting start-ups and small businesses to set up and grow

The Leader of the Council updated the Committee on progress towards providing space at South Cambs Hall. In terms of timescale, the Chief Operating Officer said the aim was to make such space available from April 2024.

Business Plan Objective 3b – Nature recovery

In relation to water scarcity, the Leader of the Council assured the Committee that the Secretary of State was aware of water shortage in the eastern region. The expectation was that South Cambridgeshire District Council would receive Government funding to help it to encourage residents to use less water.

Business Plan Objective 5b – Grants aiding the provision of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in parishes

In response to a question about whether more could be done to support local communities, the Deputy Leader said that the Council's website was constantly being updated to increase awareness and understanding at Parish Council level.

Business Plan Objective 6c – Creating areas where people feel safe, and communities thrive

The Committee noted that an event at Milton Country Park aimed at helping teenagers with their mental health had been postponed due to a lack of referrals. A suggestion was made that it would be useful to work with primary and secondary schools in an effort to identify mental health issues early on and before any formal referral process.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee commended to Cabinet the KPI results and progress against Business Plan actions detailed in the appendices to the report.

6. Health & Wellbeing Strategy Refresh 2024-2028

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed a report on an up-to-date Health and Wellbeing Strategy covering the period 2024-2028 and addressing the circumstances brought about in part by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The scrutiny review focussed on the following topics:

Community Transport.

The Strategy as presented did not address the issue of social mobility and Committee members asked the Lead Cabinet Member for Communities to look again at how the Council might help Community Transport schemes to find more volunteer drivers. Members also asked that, where such formal schemes were not viable, the Lead Cabinet Member should explore with officers and other stakeholders alternative options, such as the WhatsApp arrangement in Cambourne, for helping people to make unplanned journeys.

Mental Health

Committee members emphasised the importance of good mental health within all age groups and welcomed the Council working on this in partnership with the Integrated Care System. With reference to young people, Members noted the project targets in Appendix B to the report, such as nature-based programmes like the one with Wild Minds at Milton Country Park.

Communication

While noting there was already an extensive network of communication channels used to promote health and wellbeing measures (including more passive channels such as *South Cambs Magazine*), Committee members called for ongoing active promotion to be used as well whenever possible to ensure those in most need were being supported.

Subject to these comments, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee commended to Cabinet the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and its appendices.

7. General Fund Revenue Bids & Savings

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed a report analysing the Council's new Revenue bids and savings for 2024-25.

The scrutiny review focussed on the following topics:

Additional Refuse Team Leader (50%)

In response to a request for clarification, the Head of Climate, Environment and Waste explained that the additional team leader would enable resources within an expanding service to be managed more effectively and that the 50% referred to in the bid acknowledged that the Waste Service was shared with Cambridge City Council.

Waste Service Planning Officer (whole service cost £48,000 with £16,000 income to offset) (50%)

In response to a request for an explanation, the Leader of the Council reminded the Committee that South Cambridgeshire was a growth area. The Head of Climate, Environment and Waste said that this post would allow for early and effective engagement with developers.

Empty Homes Officer

The Leader of the Council undertook to ask officers to provide Committee members with details about the key role that would be performed by this appointment.

Personal Assistant Team Leader

By way of clarification, the Leader of the Council said that this post would be filled by one of the existing PAs.

Expansion of cyber security team

The Vice-Chair said that approval of this bid would be money well spent in tackling what was a considerable risk to the Council.

New digital phone lines

In response to a request for clarification, the Leader of the Council explained that the RAG rating was red due to the amount of waste that would result from what was a necessary replacement of current infrastructure. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee was assured that its members would be kept informed about progress and notified about measures to protect the functionality of 'red button' alarm systems.

Introduction of Data Team

In response to a question, the Chief Operating Officer explained that the Council would benefit from having a central resource focussing on collating data from a variety of sources and presenting it in the most efficient and effective way. The Leader of the Council added that such a team was essential if the Council were to achieve best value.

Subject to these comments, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee commended to Cabinet the growth bids and proposed range of service efficiency savings and additional income detailed in the appendices to the report.

8. Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee received and noted the work programme attached to the agenda.

9. To Note the Date of the next meeting

Members noted that the next scheduled Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting would be on Thursday 18 January 2024 starting at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.
