

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 9 November 2017 at 5.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Orgee – Chairman

Councillors:	David Bard	Ruth Betson
	Grenville Chamberlain	Graham Cone
	Jose Hales	Philippa Hart
	Anna Bradnam	

Councillors Simon Edwards, Mark Howell and Lynda Harford were also in attendance.

Officers:	Victoria Wallace	Democratic Services Officer
	Jane Green	Head of New Communities
	Stephen Kelly	Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development
	Mike Hill	Health and Environmental Services Director
	Richard May	Policy and Performance Manager
	Trevor Nicoll	Head of Waste Resources

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kevin Cuffley and Tumi Hawkins. Councillor Anna Bradnam was present as a substitute for Councillor Hawkins.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ruth Betson informed the committee that she was the Council's champion of youth initiatives and Councillor Grenville Chamberlain informed the committee that he was the Chairman of the Caravan and Motorhome Club.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development and the Head of New Communities, presented the Development Management Performance report. This updated the committee on performance and ongoing service improvements within the Development Management Service. Further to the information contained in the report, the committee was informed that in respect of the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) performance targets for speed of decision making, the service had maintained a position above designation. There was a risk of designation on appeal performance which was subject to the outcome of two outstanding appeals. The

committee was assured that despite the improvement in performance, the service was not becoming complacent with further work still to do. The Director emphasised that the Council was a competent authority with a competent planning service.

The committee discussed the report:

- Members asked how many five year land supply decisions were Planning Committee decisions which went against officer recommendations. This data was not to hand at the meeting but would be provided to members following the meeting.
- In response to a query regarding the classification of major and non major applications, members were informed that CLG considered anything above ten dwellings a major development.
- The committee how many officer and committee decisions had become appeals and how many of these related to major and non major applications. This information was not available at the meeting but would be provided outside the meeting. The committee was informed that the vast majority of applications were dealt with by officer decisions.
- The committee was informed that the department was analysing data of all officers' caseloads, to enable better understanding of this in order to become more sophisticated in the way caseloads were managed. Members were informed that officers' caseloads were within capacity.
- The committee was informed that applications were asked to be withdrawn when there were significant problems with the application. The applicant was then invited for pre-planning advice before resubmitting their application. Advising applicants to withdraw their application was not done routinely and data on this would be provided.
- The submission of invalid applications was discussed and it was proposed that an application checklist be provided to applicants to help them submit valid applications. Members were informed that the Council's planning portal, through which 80% of planning applications were submitted, did this to a point as it required applicants to submit a Design and Access Statement before it accepted the submission of a planning application. Guidance was being simplified so that it was easier for applicants to understand.
- The Joint Director advised that following data analysis, it had been found that several planning agents accounted for the majority of invalid applications submitted. These agents would be written to and help and advice offered to help them submit valid applications. The service would also be looking at simplifying its planning guidance. The service had found that some planning agents did not keep their clients informed of the progress of their applications, therefore the service would be trying to keep householders informed of this.
- Members were informed that all senior planning officers oversaw with the S106 officer, the S106 for the applications on their caseloads and were trying to start S106 conversations earlier. Members advised that there was a need for officers across organisations to work more closely and in a more consistent manner. There were still a number of pending S106 agreements, which were being worked through.
- The service was conscious of delays to planning applications submitted by businesses.

The committee **NOTED** the report and asked that a further update report be provided at its February committee meeting. The committee requested that comparison data cover a wider time period.

6. PERFORMANCE OF THE PLANNING ENFORCEMENT SERVICE

The Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development and the Head of New

Communities presented the report which updated the committee on the performance of the Planning Enforcement Service.

The committee was informed that:

- Since the report had been written, structures had been removed as a result of enforcement notices at St Martin's Cottage and Thistledown Cardinals Green.
- The service had seen a 25% increase in the reporting of complaints. Reporting was easy to do online and a large number of complaints turned out to be permitted development. The website encouraged potential complainants to understand whether their complaint related to permitted development or to a real breach.
- There was no standard timescale for the completion of an enforcement case and new enforcement cases were not necessarily closed within a quarter, particularly where there was a real breach of control.
- The current approach was to try and resolve cases without statutory notices being served.
- The Enforcement Policy would be reviewed and the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's input would be sought.
- The committee was informed that Planning Enforcement officers were receiving the support they needed from the shared legal service. The committee was informed that the shared legal service had an in-house barrister, which had been helpful.
- The committee was informed that Planning Enforcement had a drone, which was helping to turn enquiries around more promptly without having to secure access to sites.
- The local member for Smithy Fen asked whether comital proceedings had been instigated regarding the breach of injunction. It was urged that this not be tolerated and comital proceedings be progressed as soon as possible. In response to this, members were informed that legal papers would be issued within the next 10 days.
- The Chairman requested that the service made sure that all elected members, including those elected through a by-election, were included in the circulation of the weekly enforcement report to members.

The committee noted the report.

7. 2017-18 SECOND QUARTERLY POSITION STATEMENT ON FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented with the Policy and Performance Manager, the report which provided an update in respect of the Council's financial position, performance and risk. The Portfolio Holder highlighted the following:

- The Council's performance was on track.
- Invoices were being paid within 30 days however performance was still not where the Council wanted it to be.
- Performance around complaints handling was not where the Council wanted it to be, however work was in progress to improve this.
- There had been a significant improvement in the performance of the processing of benefits claims.

The report was discussed by the committee:

- Members advised that the table at paragraph 17 of the report was not easy to understand and further explanation was requested to make it easier for members of the public to understand. The committee pointed out that this was a public

meeting and as such, papers needed to be easily understood by members of the public.

- Further information regarding the Combined Authority housing programme would be provided to members after the meeting, as the information was not available during the meeting.
- In response to a query regarding the net risk score, members were informed that the Council's Executive Management Team scored the risks using a methodology that had been designed by the Corporate Governance Committee. Any proposed change to the methodology would have to be approved by the Corporate Governance Committee.
- Members were informed that the arrow on the Strategic Risk Matrix reflected the movement of the gross risk.
- The committee was informed that Universal Credit had already been introduced for a small part of the district's population. There was a Government administration grant to help the Council cater for the increased administration that would result from the full introduction of Universal Credit, however this was only a two year grant. It was hard to predict if this would lead to a shortfall in resource.
- It was advised that the performance of devolution and the performance of the Greater Cambridge Partnership should be added to the Strategic Risk Register, as there was a risk to the Council if they did not deliver. The Portfolio Holder would suggest this to Cabinet.
- In response to a query regarding lack of sign off of the Council's accounts by Ernst and Young, the committee was informed that this was a service level risk rather than a strategic risk. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder assured the committee that the Council's business was not affected by this. The committee was informed that the Government's valuation of the Council's housing stock was based on the affordability to support and maintain this stock.
- The committee was informed that the next bidding round for the County Council's innovation fund was in the new year and the Council would be submitting a bid.
- In response to a query that could not be answered at the meeting, officers would find out whether an older people's accommodation needs report had been completed.
- The committee was informed that a consultation on the planning shared service had been completed and a report would be presented at a future Cabinet meeting.
- In relation to the Corporate Plan, a query was raised regarding S106 contributions for Girton sports pavilion and sports pitches. This could not be answered at the meeting and officers would circulate information to members following the meeting.

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

8. PERFORMANCE OF THE SHARED WASTE SERVICE

The Environmental Services Portfolio Holder presented the report which updated the committee on the performance of the Shared Waste Service. The Head of the Shared Waste Service and Director of Health and Environmental Services were also present to answer questions.

The Director of Health and Environmental Services explained issues that the new shared service had encountered in relation to staffing and informed the committee that a grievance process was in place. All waste service staff were South Cambridgeshire District Council employees and staffing systems were being amalgamated. There were

163 members of staff in the service.

The Portfolio Holder explained the management of the material recycling facility (MRF) contract, which was with a private company. Members were informed that this was the contract for the processing of blue bin waste.

Members were informed that the Shared Waste Service was working with two ICT systems that were relatively incompatible, however a procurement for a new system was underway.

Members were pleased to see a gradual improvement in the waste collection rate however felt that customer feedback should be sought. The committee advised that good practice was to seek customer feedback proactively, which the Portfolio Holder acknowledged. He advised that the service may consider seeking customer feedback after the new service had been running for a year.

Due to the reconfiguration of bin rounds, the committee was informed that 10 miles per bin lorry vehicle was being saved per week. This was significant in financial and environmental terms given these vehicles did 2.5 miles per gallon. The committee was informed that the service procured the most efficient vehicles available on the market. The committee requested to know the average mileage of the bin lorry fleet per year. Officers did not have this figure to hand so members would be informed of this following the meeting.

The committee was informed that operational missed bins were bins the service knew it had missed for operational reasons, for example if a traffic jam had prevented the crew from collecting bins.

Inclusion of the financial savings made by the Shared Waste Service was requested for the next report to the committee.

The committee was informed that:

- The Council's Health and Safety adviser was looking at all waste service working practices, to identify where improvements could be made.
- The timing and intensity of bin collection rounds was being looked at.
- Members were reminded that there were no City crews and no South Cambridgeshire crews; there was one merged service and therefore one crew. Much work had been undertaken and was still ongoing regarding staff culture.
- The next service change was due to be introduced on 11 December 2017 with the removal of paper caddies.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the report.

9. CORPORATE PLAN

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder apologised for there being no Corporate Plan report, explaining that more work was being undertaken on this to incorporate the feedback from the 'Let's Talk' consultation.

10. DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

As the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy had not been available to the committee until the day before the meeting, the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder agreed to hold an informal briefing on this for the committee and its substitute members. This

would take place in advance of the Cabinet meeting taking place on 16 November 2017. It was agreed that any issues raised at this meeting would be fed into the Cabinet meeting.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

Ermine Street Housing task and finish group

A date for this group to meet would be arranged. Councillor Tony Orgee would also be a member of this group.

Council credit card transactions task and finish group

A task and finish group would be set up to look at the implications for the Council of the introduction of charges for the use of credit cards. The Chairman suggested that Councillors Tumi Hawkins and Kevin Cuffley form this group.

Complaints about councillors

In response to an issue raised by a resident, the Chairman proposed the set up of a task and finish group to look at the procedures around the handling of complaints against councillors. This was discussed by the committee and it was proposed that this be incorporated in the work of the member development task and finish group which was being chaired by Councillor Cone, as this was looking at councillor job roles, job descriptions and code of conduct. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chairman and Councillor Cone would discuss this further following the meeting.

Future meetings

The Director of Health and Environmental Services advised the committee that the shared services annual report would not be produced in time for the committee's March 2018 meeting. The Director of Health and Environmental Services advised that a quarter two update report could be provided in February or March for the 3C ICT and Legal services. The Chairman advised that the review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be the priority of the committee's February 2018 meeting.

The committee agreed that it would not meet in April 2018 due to purdah. The Chairman requested a meeting be arranged to take place in March 2018, before the start of purdah on 26 March 2018.

12. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

No updates were received from Scrutiny monitors.

13. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 6th February 2018 at 6pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.
