

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 7 September 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

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

Councillors:	Anna Bradnam	Tom Bygott
	Libby Earle	Sue Ellington
	Peter Fane	James Hobro
	Helene Leeming	Judith Rippeth
	Richard Stobart	Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

In the Chamber: Farzana Ahmed (Chief Accountant), Gareth Bell (Communications and Communities Service Manager), Aaron Clarke (Democratic Services Technical Officer), Andrew Francis (Elections and Democratic Services Manager), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser), Pippa Turvey (Democratic Services Team Leader), Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Remotely: Peter Campbell (Head of Housing), Bode Esan (Head of Climate, Environment & Waste) and Jeff Membery (Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services)

Councillors Dr. Tumi Hawkins (Lead Cabinet Member for Planning) and John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) were in attendance, by invitation.

Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council) was in attendance remotely, by invitation.

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. Apologies for absence

Committee members Councillor Dr. Martin Cahn and Councillor Sally Ann Hart sent apologies.

Apologies were also received from Councillor John Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Housing) and Councillor Bill Handley (Lead Cabinet Member for Communities).

3. Declarations of Interest

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

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2023 subject to a correction being made to show Peter Campbell, Head of Housing, having been present in the Chamber rather than remotely.

5. Public Questions and Statements

There were no public questions. However, tenant representatives on the Housing Engagement Board had submitted a written statement relating to Minute 6 (Mutual Exchange Policy) and this had been attached to the agenda for Members' information.

6. Mutual Exchange Policy

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a report detailing the role of the Housing Engagement Board in reviewing the Council's Mutual Engagement Policy and highlighting three aspects where tenant representatives and Council officers had differing opinions: under-occupation, overcrowding and staffing.

The Chair summarised a statement submitted by the tenant representatives.

Committee members considered several issues arising from the report. In particular they

- established to their satisfaction that the current and anticipated number of mutual exchanges could not justify the employment of an officer dedicated to that one activity.
- agreed with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Housing that generic multi-skilled Area Housing officers were better placed to understand the factors involved in individual cases and would also avoid creating a 'single point of failure.' Members were assured that Area Housing Officers would also be able to detect signs of coercion where mutual exchanges took place within South Cambridgeshire and alert their opposite numbers in the case of cross-border mutual exchanges.
- Understood that mutual exchanges might result in the Council saving money because, while the Council was responsible for ensuring certain standards between the end of one tenancy and start of the next, tenants themselves were responsible for accepting or refusing the condition of mutual exchange properties.
- welcomed the proposed policy's flexibility and pragmatism in terms of such things as increased tenants' choice and supporting tenants to be close to their support networks and noted that, where officers exercised discretion, records would be kept to ensure that any perception that discretion was being applied unfairly as between different individuals could be

investigated.

- welcomed the fact that tenant representatives had been involved in the review of the policy and that officers had considered their views.

Having considered the issues involved and the statement submitted by the tenant representatives on the Housing Engagement Board, and having heard from officers and the Leader of the Council in the absence of the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee supported by affirmation the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet as set out in paragraphs 7 and of the officer's report.

7. Quarter 1 Performance Report

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a report on the Council's Quarter One (Q1) position regarding its operational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and 2020-25 Business Plan actions.

In connection with FS117 (Percentage staff turnover) Councillor James Hobro noted that the trend was upwards. However, the Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services assured the Committee that the percentage increase represented only a small number of people: there was no cause for concern at this stage and the KPI remained well within target.

Recognising the increased public interest in Council performance, Councillor Peter Fane highlighted FS104 (collection of Business Rates) and FS105 (collection of Council Tax). Councillor John Williams, Lead Cabinet Member for Resources said that the method of collecting both taxes meant that Quarter 1 figures gave a distorted picture: the outlook remained excellent for end-of-year figures.

Councillor Sue Ellington was happy with ES412 (Kilograms of residual (black bin) waste per household (year to date)) but asked how the Council intended to reduce the amount of residual waste. The Head of Climate, Waste and Environment said that, in the short term, the emphasis would be on encouraging behavioural change but added that, looking further ahead, other measures might be considered. Councillor John Williams emphasised the importance of maximising recycling rates.

For some time now, Scrutiny and Overview Committee members had been asking whether the target for AH211 (Average days to re-let all housing stock) was realistic. The Vice-Chair drew Members' attention to what he described as an incredible performance in reducing re-let time by 42% in just three months.

Councillor Anna Bradnam was pleased to see the new KPI AH245 (Percentage of South Cambridgeshire District Council homes with active Housing Health & Safety Rating Categories 1 or 2 damp and mould cases). Noting officers' pro-active approach, Councillor Bradnam welcomed the fact that the Council had recognised the risk caused by damp and mould and was taking steps to address it.

Councillor Richard Stobart referred to progress against the Business Plan (We will

create and implement planning policies that address climate and ecological emergencies (including working towards net zero by 2050). The Committee noted the Leader of the Council's determination that the Cabinet would work with Parish and Town Councils and others to overcome the challenges faced in achieving the objective of biodiversity net gain.

Following further discussion about recycling rates and having reviewed the KPI results and comments at Appendix A to the report and progress in delivering the 2023-24 Business Plan outputs at Appendix B, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee approved by affirmation the presentation of the Quarter 1 Performance Report to Cabinet on 28 September 2023.

8. Final report from the Young People Task & Finish Group

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered the final report and recommendations from the Young People Task & Finish Group.

Councillor Richard Stobart, Chair of the Task & Finish Group, introduced the report describing the outcome of 12 months' investigation into the aspiration of young people in South Cambridgeshire as a 'call to action.' Councillor Stobart commended the way in which youth engagement had been championed by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service and said this should function as a model for other Council service areas. He highlighted communication as crucial in understanding how young people perceived the world they lived in and the issues that directly affected them.

Councillor Graham Cone, Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, and Councillor Helene Leeming who had both been members of the Task & Finish Group thanked Councillor Stobart for the way in which he had led the Group and dealt with various challenges that had been met along the way.

Referring to paragraph 15 of the report, Councillor Peter Fane said that the work conducted during the past year should be seen as the start of an ongoing process aiming to seize long-term opportunities through setting up a more formal structure for engagement.

The penultimate bullet point in paragraph 3 recommended that Cabinet should instruct officers to incorporate into an updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) a specific and easily understood statement of intent relating to young people. This had already been done and this recommendation therefore was disregarded. The Deputy Director of Planning and Building Quality referred Members to an SCI Toolkit that might prove useful in the future.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee endorsed the final report of the Young People Task & Finish Group and, subject to deletion of the recommendation relating to the Statement of Community Involvement, recommended that Cabinet endorses the investigation carried out by the Young People Task & Finish Group and recommends that Full Council:

- instructs officers to share the general feedback received from young

people during the Task & Finish Group's work with local authorities and educational providers so they can take this into account when providing their services.

- notes the successful youth engagement programme currently run by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service and supports the provision of appropriate coaching to enable officers in other priority areas such as housing and local business to find ways of similarly involving young people.
- Instructs officers to investigate the feasibility of holding, within the next 12 months, a scheduled meeting of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee at a local educational establishment, to which students and other young people should be invited.
- asks officers to write a letter to the Mayor of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority highlighting the feedback from young people on the limitations of public transport and urging him to take into account their views when developing proposals for bus franchising.
- invites young people, including from the groups approached as part of the Task & Finish exercise (**Appendix 1**), to contribute evidence to officers involved in developing a new Equality Policy embracing generational differences.
- encourages all Members of South Cambridgeshire District Council to commit to engaging with young people and representative organisations in their wards by establishing regular visits to local schools, colleges, youth clubs and other locations as appropriate. In the longer term, a more structured form of dialogue might be appropriate.

9. Work Programme

Members noted the scrutiny work programme attached to the agenda.

10. To Note the Date of the next meeting

Members noted that the next scheduled Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting would be on Thursday 19 October 2023 starting at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.
