

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 1 October 2009

PRESENT: Councillor JD Batchelor – Chairman
Councillor JA Hockney – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	Mrs VM Barrett	Mrs PM Bear (as substitute)
	Mrs JM Guest	R Hall
	MB Loynes	MJ Mason
	Mrs DP Roberts	Mrs BZD Smith
	Mrs BE Waters	

Councillors TD Bygott, MP Howell and NIC Wright were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Nicole Kritzinger	Economic Development Officer
	Jo Mills	Corporate Manager, New Communities
	Dale Robinson	Corporate Manager, Health & Environmental Services
	Jackie Sayers	Scrutiny Development Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs EM Heazell and Mrs JEO Squier.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor MB Loynes declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 5 on the agenda: Economic Downturn – Action Plan Update as the Council's Economic Champion and he played no part in the debate as a Member of the Committee. He remained in the room to answer questions from the Committee.

22. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings held on Thursday 3 September at 2pm and 5:30pm were agreed as a correct record.

It was **AGREED** to appoint Councillors Mrs DP Roberts, Mrs BZD Smith and Mrs BE Waters onto Young People Task and Finish Group.

23. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

24. ECONOMIC DOWNTURN - ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Councillor Wright, Planning Portfolio Holder and lead member for Business and Employment, presented a report which updated the Committee on the delivery of actions proposed to mitigate the impact of the recession on businesses in South Cambridgeshire. It was noted that the aim was to keep residents in employment, and off benefits.

Hardship fund

It was noted that there had been only three applicants to the hardship fund and it was agreed that it should be better advertised. However, it was understood that some businesses were reluctant to provide the Council with the necessary financial

information that an application required. The Corporate Manager for New Communities said that any of the £25,000 originally allocated that remained unspent would be reviewed during October, alongside the contingency fund not yet allocated.

In response to questioning Councillor Wright justified the expenditure of £2,000 for financial advice for staff on the grounds that the District Council was an employer of South Cambridgeshire residents. Councillor Howell, as the former Staffing portfolio holder, supported this funding as a good employer should assist its staff.

It was noted that these initiatives were for 2009/10 and so were due to end on 31 March 2010 and any extension would have to be agreed by Council.

There was a general observation that the report contained many acronyms which should be avoided or explained in future.

The Committee

RECOMMENDED that more publicity be given to the Hardship Rate Relief that was available to businesses.

25. VALUE FOR MONEY

The Chairman introduced this report which suggested ways in which the Committee examine the Council's value for money strategy.

It was suggested that matters that needed to be considered included comparing the Council to other authorities and better publicising the actual percentage of Council Tax which went to the District Council.

The Committee

AGREED that the existing Finance task and finish group be tasked to examine the evidence regarding the Council's value for money record and to report their findings to the Committee.

26. PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

This item was discussed after Item 4: Public Questions.

The Corporate Manager for Health and Environmental Services introduced this report on the Performance Improvement Strategy.

It was agreed that paragraph 5.13 should be amended to reflect that the Committee would only scrutinise performance issues after all other avenues had been investigated.

CorVu

Councillor Wright explained that CorVu was introduced following the Corporate Governance Inspection, which recommended that the Council adopt a new performance management system. He praised the CorVu system, which had recently become accessible to Members and he advised that all Councillors should use this system to regularly review the Council's performance. This suggestion was supported as it was recognised that all Members had an important contribution to make to performance management.

Budget reduction

It was noted that the Council would find it particularly challenging to meet the stated aim of improving satisfaction with the Council's services in light of the need to reduce the budget by £1.6 million in the next financial year.

Partnership

The Corporate Manager for Health and Environmental Services stated that it was essential that the Council had targets to measure how much value was added through Partnership working.

Staff turnover

It was noted that whilst staff turnover had been too high, this figure had drastically reduced in recent months. It was understood that a certain level of staff turnover was beneficial as it brought new ideas to the organisation and the aim was to achieve the right balance.

Integrated systems

The Corporate Manager for Health and Environmental Services explained that although the Council's systems were not fully integrated many were interfaced and the Council was improving in this area.

Celebrating successes

It was agreed that the Council needed to be more proactive in publicising its achievements.

It was noted that performance targets needed to be focussed, with the emphasis on quality and not quantity and this could mean that some important services did not have a performance indicator. A member of the Committee expressed concern that too much resources were being directed to performance management at the expense of actually delivering services. In response Councillor Wright asserted that only by accurately measuring the Council's performance could decisions regarding the efficient allocation of its resources be correctly made.

The Committee

RECOMMENDED the setting up of a workshop to train Members on how to use the Council's performance information, especially through the use of CorVu.

The Committee

AGREED that the Performance Improvement Strategy's Action Plan should be reviewed by the Committee in the next municipal year.

27. SUSTAINABILITY, PROCUREMENT AND EFFICIENCY PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRESENTATION

Councillor TD Bygott, Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency portfolio holder, distributed a short report to the Committee which detailed the issues that had been recently been dealt with and the challenges expected in the remainder of the current municipal year.

Land drainage

Councillor Bygott explained that putting the maintenance of the Awarded Watercourses out to tender had proved the efficiency and capabilities of the in-house team, which were providing the services more cheaply and at a higher standard than the external bids. It

was suggested that the Council needed to work more closely with other local authorities and drainage boards.

NI186 – reduction in CO₂ emissions from the whole District

It was acknowledged that performance target NI186 was a challenging one in a rural district. Councillor Bygott supported the provision of houses which were built to last several generations and supported the renovation of older homes to make them more energy efficient, although it was noted that the Council had to comply with its Conservation policies which made it more difficult for a Listed Building owner to install energy saving measures.

The Corporate Manager for New Development explained that the aim was to change the organisational culture to ensure that sustainability became a cross-cutting issue that would be part of everything the authority did.

Contact Centre

Councillor Bygott agreed to distribute the costings of the Contact Centre.

Customer service excellence

It was understood that the budget of £24,600 was for expenditure other than staff costs.

Corporate Aims, Approaches and Actions

Councillor Bygott stated that work on most of his Actions was on target and eleven Parish Councils were involved in schemes for renewable energy and low-carbon living. However, the Climate Change Action Plan was now likely to be ready by April 2010 rather than the start of the year. Also, Councillor Bygott had not yet attended any Parish Council meetings outside his own ward.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Bygott for his attendance and his frank and informative answers.

28. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

Housing

It was noted that the Housing Portfolio Holder had held a meeting with residents on 23 September in Gamlingay to discuss their petition.

Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder Presentation

It was noted that Councillor Mrs BZD Smith's report on the meeting held on 24 September would be distributed shortly.

29. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

It was expected that the Youth Participation Strategy would be available for discussion at December's meeting, to agenda to be finalised at the next meeting in November.

The Committee **NOTED** its Work Programme.

30. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee **NOTED** the following future meeting dates:

2009: 5 November at the Community Centre, Orchard Park and 3 December at Haslingfield.

2010: 7 January at Great Shelford; 4 February at the Council's Offices at Cambourne; 4 March at Linton and 1 April at Foxton.

The Meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.
