

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 7 November 2013 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Sue Ellington – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	David Bard	Alison Elcox
	Andrew Fraser (substitute for Roger Hickford)	Lynda Harford
	Douglas de Lacey	Jose Hales
	Bunty Waters	Bridget Smith

Councillors Kevin Cuffley, David Whiteman-Downes and Nick Wright were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Graham Aisthorpe-Watts	Democratic Services Team Leader
	Phil Bird	Business Improvement & Efficiency Manager
	John Garnham	Head of Finance, Policy & Performance
	Jean Hunter	Chief Executive
	Richard May	Policy and Performance Manager
	Jo Mills	Planning and New Communities Director

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Roger Hickford.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

24. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2013 were **AGREED** and signed by the Vice-Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendments: -

- Councillor Lynda Harford's declaration of interest at minute number 12 to reflect that she was an employee of an agent involved in the sale of properties being purchased by the Council;
- the inclusion of a new paragraph at minute number 19 to read: -

"A suggestion was also put forward that shared equity houses that had been on the market for a long period of time should be considered for purchase by the Council in accordance with the Empty Home Strategy".

25. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

26. ICT UPDATE

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a briefing note setting out responses to the four recommendations made by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's informal working group held on 15 November 2013 regarding redundant ICT equipment.

Councillor David Whiteman-Downes, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services, presented the briefing note and invited Members to ask any questions.

Discussion ensued on the second recommendation, which sought provision of dedicated on-site storage for obsolete equipment and clearance of the ICT workshop so that it could be used by ICT staff. Councillor Whiteman-Downes reported that the workshop had now been cleared. He added that the service would be looking to better manage the existing environment and introduce a more effective disposals routine, leading to less accumulation of old and obsolete equipment. It was also noted that the Council's ICT Strategy should be completed early in the New Year and that this issue would be included within in it.

Councillor Whiteman-Downes made reference to an item on Member ICT that was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 19 November 2013 and welcomed an opportunity to engage with Scrutiny and Overview Committee Members. It was therefore **AGREED** that an informal working group would be held on Friday 22 November 2013 at 1pm.

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

27. CONSERVATION SERVICE REVIEW

Councillor Nick Wright, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development, provided the Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on a review of the Council's conservation service.

The main drivers identified for the review were noted as being the way in which the service responded to the Planning Policy Framework, the imminent Local Plan and an emerging growth agenda as well as the perception of internal and external service users.

Councillor Wright explained that he had been exploring a number of options for delivery of the service in relation to the project objectives, which were to:

- conserve and enhance the quality of the environment in South Cambridgeshire;
- deliver a service that was agile, customer focused and able to meet new demands;
- be as cost effective as possible.

Jo Mills, Director of Planning and New Communities, described the meaning of the first two project objectives in more detail following a number of questions by Members. In essence, the Council could best protect the heritage of the district by putting the needs of applications, agents and other residents first, rather than focusing solely on the historic buildings themselves.

Councillor Wright reported that informal consultation had been held with staff from the Conservation Team, Historic Buildings Team, Natural Environment Team and the wider service area between August and September 2013. The results from this consultation exercise were reported to his Portfolio Holder Meeting on 22 October 2013.

It was noted that urban design had subsequently been included in the scope for the review of the conservation service. This was in response to comments received as part of the informal staff consultation exercise when it was requested that urban design be included because of its relationship with conservation, particularly the link between

design of buildings, development schemes and landscapes.

An in-house model had also been strongly supported by the teams across the service area as well as by customers, largely because it could be designed to be more responsive and provide advice based on local knowledge. Feedback received internally and externally identified that a significant change in culture was necessary to provide a fit for purpose in-house solution.

The committee noted that formal consultation had commenced with staff, which would inform final recommendations in December 2013 for implementation from January 2014. A question was raised as to whether any further consultation would take place with Members following which Councillor Wright stated that he had provided, and would continue to provide, opportunities for Members to contribute through his Portfolio Holder Meetings. He would be considering final recommendations at a Portfolio Holder Meeting in December 2013 which all Members were invited to attend. Councillor Wright also reported that he had consulted with the Council's political group leaders on the review as the process had developed.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **AGREED** to consider this item at its meeting on 16 January 2014 so that Members had an opportunity to discuss service priorities during the transitional period and suggest ways in which to move the service forward following implementation of the Portfolio Holder's final recommendations.

28. ENFORCEMENT & INSPECTION REVIEW UPDATE - VERBAL REPORT

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a briefing note which provided an update on the Council's Enforcement and Inspection Policy consultation.

On 12 September 2013 Cabinet had agreed to commence consultation with residents, businesses and parishes in South Cambridgeshire on the Council's draft Enforcement and Inspection Policy. The briefing note set out how this consultation would be undertaken over the coming months.

The document also made reference to providing the 200 businesses already on the new South Cambridgeshire District Council Business Register with a link to the consultation survey, in addition to a selection of licensing and food businesses. A comment was made that the survey should be circulated to as many businesses as possible, noting that an article encouraging responses from residents and businesses would be included in the Council's magazine.

In closing, it was agreed that Members should encourage the Parish Councils they represented to respond to the survey.

29. POSITION STATEMENT: FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Scrutiny and Overview Committee with a statement on the Council's position with regard to its General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, capital budgets, corporate objectives, performance indicators and strategic risks.

Councillor David Whiteman-Downes, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services, presented the report and commenced by taking Members through some of the performance headlines.

Discussion ensued on the performance of the Customer Contact Centre and it was reported that while customer satisfaction with the Contact Centre was 100%, this figure was based on too low a sample to be significant. Targets had been exceeded, however, for first time resolutions which were now performing at 86% against a target of 80%. Councillor Whiteman-Downes informed the committee that the Customer Contact Centre was working hard to resolve issues at the first point of contact, rather than refer calls onto back office staff. One of the negative aspects of this approach in the interim was that calls were taking longer than usual to deal with, meaning that call waiting times had increased. Some Members concurred with this and shared their personal experiences. The Contact Centre was also looking to address peak call times, which was another contributing factor to increased call waiting times. Members suggested that the number of instances where a caller ended their call before it was answered, known as drop-off rates, should be monitored.

Reference was made to the high level of staff turnover in the Customer Contact Centre. Councillor Whiteman-Downes reported that recruitment to the Contact Centre was an on-going process but emphasised that the vast majority of this turnover was internal. The high calibre of staff appointed to work in the Contact Centre meant that they were regularly appointed to other roles within the Council's service areas when vacancies arose.

Considering other aspects of the performance information contained within the report, the following comments were noted:

- targets for Planning and Economic Development were not very aspirational and should be reviewed. These materialised from the former Government's national indicator set, but for Planning and Economic Development were still published by the Government and used as national benchmarks;
- the target for the percentage of undisputed invoices paid in 30 days was set very high. This had been done purposely to chase high performance, ensuring that the Council was not charged in accordance with new rules relating to the late payment of invoices.

In going through the financial elements of the report, concerns were expressed regarding the predicted overspend relating to refunds on bills issued to non-domestic ratepayers resulting from revaluations agreed by the Valuation Officer. John Garnham, Head of Finance, Policy and Performance, explained the new rules regarding non-domestic rate collection and the fact that the Council now had to reimburse such refunds, even if an original appeal pre-dated the new arrangements. He added that the Valuation Office Agency had supplied a list of outstanding appeals, but this contained no indication of whether an appeal would be upheld and, if so, the impact on the rateable value or the effective date of the change. It was therefore very difficult to predict the amount of rates collectible and the impact on the Council's finances. Mr Garnham informed Members that the Council had already requested support on this issue from Ministers, Members of Parliament and the Local Government Association.

Members noted the impact of the job evaluation exercise on staff turnover and the fact that salary protection for those adversely affected would end in April 2014. Councillor Whiteman-Downes reported that the Council's Human Resources Team had worked very hard to ensure that tailored packages of support were in place where necessary. A report on this issue had been considered at the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder Meeting on 15 October 2013.

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

30. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an opportunity to plan its work programme for future meetings.

The work programme appended to the report was **AGREED**, subject to the inclusion of the following items: -

- empty homes – to receive a report on the number of empty Council-owned homes in South Cambridgeshire and their circumstances (for consideration at the meeting on 16 January 2014);
- Planning website – to include a review of the Planning website as part of the review of the Council's corporate website (for consideration at the meeting on 16 January 2014);
- Conservation Service review implementation – further to minute number 27 above (for consideration at the meeting on 16 January 2014);
- Organisational Development Strategy (item for scheduling);
- economic development – to consider how effective the Council is being to support economic development (item for scheduling).

31. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

A report by Councillor Roger Hickford had been circulated, outlining the main outcomes of the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder Meeting held on 15 October 2013.

Councillor Bridget Smith, the Council's representative on Cambridgeshire County Council's Adults Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee, reported that the committee had recently received a presentation from the Clinical Commissioning Group. The Commissioning Group reported that a significant deficit had occurred as a result of a misunderstanding between the Commissioning Group and NHS England as to who was responsible for an element of specialist services. Councillor Smith informed Members that this could trigger central Government input in Cambridgeshire and stated that she would submit a report on this issue to the next meeting of Full Council.

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

32. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Dates of future meetings were **AGREED** as follows: -

- 16 January 2014 – 6pm
- 11 February 2014 – 2pm
- 3 April 2014 – 6pm

The Meeting ended at 4.05 p.m.
