

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 3 September 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Roger Hickford – Chairman
Councillor Kevin Cuffley – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard Henry Batchelor
Grenville Chamberlain Philippa Hart
Bunty Waters Anna Bradnam

Councillors Ray Manning and Peter Topping were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Alex Colyer Executive Director (Corporate Services)
Jean Hunter Chief Executive
Richard May Policy and Performance Manager
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were noted from Councillor Jose Hales. Councillor Anna Bradnam was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Hales.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising were:

- The Executive Director (Corporate Services) would circulate:
 1. A breakdown of the savings in the Shared Legal Services Business Case that was discussed at the 7 July 2015 meeting.
 2. The 2014/15 spend across the three Councils involved in the Legal Shared Service.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5. QUARTERLY POSITION REPORT ON FINANCE PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The Executive Director (Corporate Services) presented the 2015-16 first quarterly position statement on finance, performance and risk which would be presented to Cabinet on 10 September 2015.

The committee was informed that candidates for planning officer posts had come forward following a recruitment campaign. Members were informed that a creative approach had been taken to the recruitment for these posts and it was hoped that most posts would be filled once interviews had been carried out. The committee was informed that:

- Discussions were ongoing with potential applicants to senior posts.
- The Council had subscribed as an employer on Linked In and was using this as a route to contact potential candidates directly. The committee was informed that the Council was employing as many routes as possible to approach people directly.
- The vacancy level in Planning was not unique to this authority.

Concern was raised regarding the Council getting value for money regarding agency staff. Members were informed that procurement rules had been changed to allow the Council to use more agency staff suppliers and therefore have better control of the quality of staff put forward for posts.

Members were informed that where market supplements were being advertised for posts, existing equivalent staff would be receiving the market supplement as well.

The committee was informed that existing members of staff had been successful in achieving promotions within Planning and this was encouraged by the organisation despite the need to then backfill posts.

A paperless Planning office was being worked towards. Problems with the current Planning IT system had been acknowledged and were being addressed. An upgrade of the system was taking place in October 2015 which would facilitate more paperless working.

Staff turnover was discussed as this was higher than target:

- Staff morale particularly around shared services was queried by members. The Chief Executive informed the committee that the latest results of Investors in People and the staff survey had been very positive but it was recognised that there was some uncertainty regarding shared services.
- Exit interview rates had not been high enough to draw conclusions but it was thought that levels of staff turnover reflected a more buoyant jobs market.
- Recruitment and retention had been made a higher strategic risk as it was recognised that local government was no longer such an attractive employer as it had been compared to the private sector whose job market was more buoyant than it had been. It was also no longer as easy for local government to offer the job stability and attractive terms it used to offer in comparison to the private sector.

Shared services was discussed:

- The Chief Executive and Executive Director (Corporate Services) had been working with staff facing shared services.
- Members were informed that staff moving to a shared service would only have to reapply for jobs where there were more staff than posts. Whilst there was potential for this, members were informed that all three Councils involved in the shared services were operating with vacancies. Members were informed that the shared ICT service for instance would have 14 fewer posts, however there were currently 9 agency staff filling posts in this service.
- The shared waste service was referred to as an example as this had resulted in a reduction of 12 posts yet there had been no redundancies.
- Members were informed that the broad response from officers was that the logic of shared services was understood, staff were positive about this and wanted shared services to work despite there being uncertainty. Staff were being supported through the process.

Staff sickness was discussed as members noted that there had been a significant rise in staff sickness compared to the equivalent quarter in the previous year:

- Members were informed that the level of sickness was concentrated in cases of long term sick leave and individuals where specific circumstances were known and through which the staff members were being supported.

Members were informed that the situation regarding savings was comfortable, with all savings deliverable and achievable. It was anticipated that the Council would overachieve on its savings targets in the next period. A fuller position regarding this would be presented to Cabinet in November.

The impact of the Government's budget announcement on the Council with regard to housing was queried. Members were informed that implications were:

- The Housing Business plan had to be recast.
- It took £12 million out of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy which would impact on the ability to deliver new houses. The capital improvement programme would have to be looked at closely in order to balance the books and the Council's housing expenditure was already low regarding administration and responsive repairs.
- Costs of the Council Tax support scheme would increase by around £150,000 but the Council was confident that costs would be absorbed. A report would be presented to the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder.

Members were informed that:

- A member workshop on the impact of the budget on claimants and the Council's financial position would take place on 2 October 2015.
- Discussion had been taking place with the MP for South Cambridgeshire regarding meeting with Secretary of State Brandon Lewis to discuss the implications of this for the Council.
- The Government's announcements also impacted Housing Associations and the implications on other policies, such as Right to Buy, were not yet known.
- Some Councils were considering judicial review.

The Customer Contact Centre's performance was discussed:

- The improving trend regarding calls not abandoned was noted however it was pointed out that while the Corporate Plan stated the target was met between May and June, the target was only met in June. Members requested that the figures were always given so that the trend could be seen. It was clarified that the reporting period was 18 May-12 June.
- Using Revenues and Benefits officers to support the Contact Centre had been successful and feedback from the Contact Centre had been positive about this. The Rents team would also be joining this arrangement to provide additional support to the Contact Centre and help alleviate the pressure at times of high demand. Members were assured that teams supporting the Contact Centre did not feel under resourced as a result of this. Members were informed that the Council was creating more generic posts whereby officers would work across teams, which would help smooth demand and pressure across teams.
- Digital by Default and making forms available online was queried. The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder recognised that it was too soon to move entirely to digital communication and that access to channels of communication that people were used to, such as face to face and telephone, had to be maintained.

Consultation regarding A428 and A1303 bus priorities was queried. Frustration was

expressed at the slow process to approval for City Deal projects, with much time spent on consultation processes despite original intentions being for the City deal to represent a new way of working. It was requested that the City Deal ensure that economic growth was supported by the development of infrastructure. The example of Sawston was given where 560 new houses were proposed along with major expansions of nearby employment sites, but with no additional transport infrastructure. The Leader emphasised that the purpose of the City Deal was to deliver housing and jobs, and to improve physical and digital connectivity between them.

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

6. ORCHARD PARK TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE

Councillor Lynda Harford provided a written update on the work of the Orchard Park Task and Finish Group, which was circulated at the meeting. It had been agreed with the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chairman that the group's final recommendations would be presented to the committee at its meeting in November 2015.

The committee **NOTED** the update.

7. APPOINTMENT OF SCRUTINY MONITORS AND MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

The following Scrutiny Monitors were appointed:

Description and/or Portfolio	Scrutiny Monitor
Corporate and Customer Services	Cllr Grenville Chamberlain
Economic Development	Cllr Philippa Hart
Environmental Services	Cllr David Bard

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The committee's work programme was noted.

The draft Medium Term Financial Strategy was added to the work programme for November.

9. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted. The next meeting would take place on Thursday 5 November 2015 at 6pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.10 p.m.
