

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on  
Thursday, 8 September 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Orgee – Chairman  
Councillor Grenville Chamberlain – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard Kevin Cuffley  
John Batchelor Philippa Hart  
Anna Bradnam Bunty Waters  
Graham Cone

Councillors Simon Edwards, Peter Topping and Robert Turner were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Julie Baird Head of Development Management  
Stephen Kelly Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development  
Jean Hunter Chief Executive  
Richard May Policy and Performance Manager  
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Henry Batchelor and Jose Hales. Councillors Anna Bradnam and John Batchelor were present as substitutes.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2016 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the addition of Councillor Kevin Cuffley on the attendance list.

### **4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

### **5. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS IN SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS**

The Planning Portfolio Holder, Head of Development Management and Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, presented an update on performance and service improvement within the Development Management Service. The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, commended the work of the Development Management Team in improving performance.

Points of discussion and clarification regarding the update were:

- It was clarified that of 220 planning appeals received, 15 related to non determination appeals and two were from the backlog.
- Following queries raised at the previous meeting, it was confirmed that notifications of major applications were being provided. Members were informed that options for

providing electronic notifications were being explored, to enable more prompt notification.

- The actual figures in table 2 of Appendix 1 of the report, as well as the percentages, were requested for the next update report.
- Alongside table 1 of Appendix 1, which outlined the national targets, members requested a table outlining what was being achieved against these targets. It was confirmed that 60% was a national target and that if performance fell below 50%, designation would occur.
- Members were informed that the implications of designation were not yet known, as designation measures had only been consulted on by the Government and a designation process had not yet been developed.
- Members requested that the number of planning appeals in which costs were awarded against the council, be included in the report.
- The target date of the end of October 2016 to clear the backlog was queried, as the rate of clearing the backlog had been steadily declining. The Planning Portfolio Holder confirmed that the backlog was progressing faster than it had been as more staff had been recruited. The Head of Development Management was confident that the backlog would be cleared by the end of October to the middle of November 2016. Projections for this were being reviewed on a weekly basis.
- The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development advised that more detailed reporting on the backlog would be included in the report to the committee in November 2016.
- The committee was informed of some development agencies taking advantage of the lack of a five year land supply, and the actions being taken by the Council to address this.
- The Planning Portfolio Holder emphasised that the National Planning Policy Framework stipulated that development should be in sustainable locations and the Council followed this policy. It was also emphasised that every planning application was judged on its own merit.
- It was clarified that the 13 week timescale for major planning applications, started once an application had been received and was valid.
- Members raised concern that documentation for old planning applications was not available on the planning portal. The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development would look into this outside the meeting. Councillors Hart and Bradnam would liaise with The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development regarding this.

The committee **NOTED** the update and **AGREED** that a further update report would be scheduled for the committee's meeting in November 2016.

## 6. SHARED SERVICES UPDATE

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered the update on recruitment across the shared services, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council were in attendance to answer questions regarding this.

The following issues were raised by members of the committee regarding the shared ICT service:

- Experiences of a decline in service were raised, with a lack of acknowledgement of queries and the length of time for queries to be dealt with given as examples.
- Concern was raised over the Good App. Members' experiences were that the functionality of the App had worsened.

Concern was raised by members of the committee over street sweeping. The Director of Health and Environmental Services advised that the service's policy and approach was to prioritise bins and that at times of staff shortages, street sweeping drivers covered bin lorry driving. Members were informed that nationally it was difficult to recruit HGV drivers and the Council was trying to recruit more. Members were advised to inform the Director of Health and Environmental Services of any particular areas of concern regarding street sweeping and the service would deal with the issue, as soon as there was capacity available to do so.

The issue of recruitment and retention was raised. The Chief Executive of the Council explained that this was a challenge in South Cambridgeshire for a number of reasons, such as high housing costs and the competitiveness of the private sector in South Cambridgeshire. Members were informed that reasons for staff leaving the employment of the Council were closely monitored, with exit interviews taking place with each departing staff member. This was reported to the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder on a quarterly basis.

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder assured the committee that there was no evidence of an underlying malaise that was leading to staff resignations. He assured the committee that the rate of turnover was healthy.

The Leader of the Council also highlighted that whilst there had been staff resignations from the shared service, new staff had been successfully recruited such as a new legal management team.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee requested a further Shared Services update at its meeting in November 2016, with a focus on ICT performance and Legal services.

## **7. 2016-17 FIRST QUARTERLY POSITION STATEMENT ON FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK**

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented the Council's 2016-17 first quarterly Position Statement on finance, performance and risk for 2016-17.

The call answer time of calls to the Council's Contact Centre was discussed:

- The committee was informed that six new staff members had joined the Contact Centre and it was anticipated that the call answer time would reduce as a result of this.
- Members were made aware that reducing the call answer time would not be solved solely through the employment of more staff, but also by having the digital systems in place to drive activity to other areas and to encourage residents to use online facilities where possible.

The risk register was discussed:

- The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder informed the committee that the number of households in temporary accommodation had risen as anticipated.
- The significant risk to the Council of the increase in cost of managing homelessness, was highlighted. Additional funding had been put aside for the expected increase in homelessness. The Portfolio Holder informed the committee that extra funds had been budgeted as a precautionary item for the current financial year, however for the next financial year this would be a budgeted item. The Portfolio Holder was confident that the amount budgeted would be enough to cope with the increase in homelessness.

- Members were informed that subject to Devolution being agreed, this would be added to the risk register.

The committee noted the report and commended officers and the Portfolio Holder for the quality of the report.

## **8. WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee reviewed its work programme for 2016-17. Items to be added to the November 2016 committee agenda were:

- Development Management performance and progress in service improvements.
- ICT and Legal Shared Services performance.

The Local Member for Sawston proposed the committee look at the conditions under which grass verge cuttings had been transferred to the County Council without parish councils being informed, as the reasons for the change and processes behind them were unclear. It was proposed that a one off report was provided to the committee.

## **9. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE**

There were no updates from Scrutiny Monitors.

## **10. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The committee agreed that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 9 November 2016 at 6pm.

---

**The Meeting ended at 7.55 p.m.**

---