

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 16 July 2020 at 5.20 p.m.

Present: Councillor Grenville Chamberlain – Chair

Councillors:	Anna Bradnam	Dr. Martin Cahn
	Nigel Cathcart	Sarah Cheung Johnson
	Graham Cone	Dr. Claire Daunton
	Dr. Douglas de Lacey	Geoff Harvey
	Steve Hunt	Peter Fane
	Richard Williams	

Councillors Heather Williams, Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Peter McDonald, Brian Milnes, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith and John Williams were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Liz Watts	Chief Executive
	Victoria Wallace	Scrutiny and Governance Adviser
	Stephen Kelly	Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development
	Peter Maddock	Head of Finance
	Anne Ainsworth	Chief Operating Officer
	Susan Gardner Craig	Interim Director of Corporate Services
	David Ousby	Head of Commercial Development & Investment
	Peter Campbell	Head of Housing
	Rory McKenna	Deputy Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

1. **Appointment Of Vice Chair**

Councillor Judith Rippeth was appointed as the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Vice Chair.

2. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jose Hales and Judith Rippeth.

3. **Declarations Of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4. **Minutes Of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 2020, were agreed as a correct

record of the meeting

5. Public Questions

There were no public questions.

6. Impact Of Homeworking On The Council

The Deputy Leader (non-statutory) presented the report which set out the impact of moving to near 100% homeworking for the council, following the government lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Committee members thanked the Deputy Leader and Chief Executive for the report and thanked the Chief Executive and council staff for their work during the lockdown, and particularly for the support that had been delivered to businesses.

Committee members commented on the following:

- Committee members found the data contained in the report very useful and noted the data regarding carbon reduction.
- Committee members noted that productivity had increased with working from home. Members commented that this demonstrated that the council was not just coping with the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic but was performing better due to working from home.
- The committee noted how well officers had transferred and adjusted to working from home and gave credit to the management team for managing this transfer.
- Committee members noted and found it encouraging that former remote workers felt a greater sense of inclusion since other staff had been working from home.
- Committee members acknowledged that working from home was not for everyone but presented a great opportunity for better well-being for those it suited.
- Committee members thanked the Chief Executive and HR for proactively collecting this data before the Scrutiny and Overview Committee had requested it.
- Committee members commended ICT for the support they had provided.
- A decline in staff taking regular breaks between surveys was noted and committee members suggested this needed to be monitored, to ensure staff were taking regular breaks and were not working more than they ought to.
- Committee members noted that communication had continued between different parts of the organisation despite the working from home arrangements.
- Committee members requested that this review was carried out again after six and 12 months.

The committee was informed by the Chief Executive that:

- Staff would continue to be surveyed, but the next survey would be done after the initial move back to the office had taken place.

- Working from home had been a challenge, particularly for those with small children at home. Some officers had been starting work at 5.30am to work around their children's needs. Staff had been told to do what work they could and the organisation's flexibility had been rewarded by staff putting in 100% effort.
- It was recognised that while working from home had its benefits, it did impose on officers' lives. Some officers did not have the space or suitable working arrangements at home and needed to return to the office. Whilst the council had offered equipment to make working from home easier, some staff did not have space at home for additional equipment.
- Some staff wanted to return to the office and the arrangements being made for staff to be able to do so safely were explained. Fewer than 50% of desks would be available in the office and services would organise how these would be allocated. It was anticipated that the majority of staff would split their time between working from home and the office and the move back to the office would be phased. Some staff would continue to work from home indefinitely.
- The organisation had set up opportunities for staff to take part in training and workshops to help prevent them feeling isolated while working from home; yoga and meditation had been offered in addition to more formal training. Staff had also been encouraged to take part in social activities online via the staff intranet, virtual pub quizzes and coffee mornings.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee thanked the Chief Executive for this report, which it noted.

7. Shared Services Annual Reports And 3c Shared Services Partnership Renewal Agreement

The Lead Cabinet Member for Finance presented the annual reports for the Waste, Planning, ICT, Building Control and Legal shared services.

Committee members queried whether there were still any single points of failure in the shared ICT service; the Chief Executive would look into this and provide an answer to committee members following the meeting.

As working from home arrangements were reliant on officers' home internet connections, the Lead Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste queried whether the council could help ensure more robust internet connections by supporting officers to upgrade their internet connections. The Chief Executive informed the committee that in cases where home internet had failed, officers had tethered their laptops to their phones.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee was informed of the following:

- The Head of HR and Corporate Services updated the committee on the telephony system project. She informed the committee that a new project manager had been appointed and the procurement options were being investigated.
- The Deputy Head of ICT role had been created to ensure all three

- councils received the attention needed from the shared ICT service.
- The Eastnet migration project was complete and all tests had been carried out.

Regarding the opening of household waste recycling centres, the committee was informed by the Head of Environment and Waste that:

- An increase in the tonnage of fly tipping had not been seen and a significant increase had not been seen in the Milton area. Officers were speaking with the County Council on a weekly basis regarding measures to prevent fly tipping on the highway and private land around Milton.
- Residents were being reminded of the booking system at the waste and recycling centres, which was in place for safety reasons. Few people were being turned away.
- Officers were working on a scrap campaign with farmers and countryside groups to raise the issue of fly tipping.
- The Head of Waste and Environment would take away for consideration with County Council colleagues, a suggestion to remove the charge for the removal of fly tips from private land.
- The council did not have a legal responsibility to collect and dispose of fly tips on private land but did have a responsibility to help landowners with enforcement. Officers had been working with them on this.
- Prosecutions for fly tipping were difficult to prove but fixed penalty notices were being issued.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment thanked the bin crews' adaptation to the changing circumstances during recent difficult times and thanked the Head of Environment and Waste and his team.

The Scrutiny and Overview committee noted the annual reports for shared Planning Waste, Internal Audit, ICT, Building Control and Legal services.

The committee considered the Partnership Renewal Agreement for 3C Shared Services and provided feedback on this in confidential session. Following their consideration of this, committee members indicated their support for this agreement.

8. SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chair introduced the report which presented the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) report on its review of the Council's Scrutiny function.

Committee members indicated their support for the report and highlighted the following:

- The identification by the CfPS that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee overburdened itself with too much activity and full agendas and the suggestion that the committee should look at fewer items but, in more depth, was noted.
- The need for the committee to become involved at an earlier stage in the development of proposals was acknowledged.

- The suggestion to introduce executive summaries instead of long committee reports, in which officers drew out key points, was supported by committee members. Members suggested this would help prevent the committee from becoming too focussed on the detail of proposals.
- It was suggested that committee members needed to focus on what value scrutiny could add rather than what the individual member could add; some individual comments would be more appropriately taken straight to Cabinet rather than raised at Scrutiny.
- Committee members suggested it would be helpful to have the continued guidance from the CfPS to review how the scrutiny function was progressing against the recommendations. The Chair informed the committee that this would come out of the Scrutiny Member workshop to be organised and led by the CfPS in September 2020.
- It was suggested that the committee should consider having its pre-meeting detached from the main committee meeting, rather than immediately before it.
- It was suggested that the committee may want to consider setting up sub-groups to look at items and report back to the main committee.
- Committee members suggested that a meeting of an exemplar Scrutiny Committee at another authority should be observed. Suggestions for this would be sought from the Centre for Public Scrutiny.
- It was suggested that the public did not understand the role of scrutiny or that this function existed. Consideration of how this was communicated to the public should be given. An article in the South Cambs magazine was suggested.
- It was highlighted that the scrutiny had come a long way and was much more productive than it used to be.
- The committee's interaction with Cabinet members needed to be considered. Concern was raised at the cross examination by the committee, of officers regarding policies for which Cabinet members were responsible.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee:

- a) Noted the CfPS Scrutiny Improvement Review report.
- b) Endorsed the Centre for Public Scrutiny's recommendations detailed in the Scrutiny Improvement Review report.
- c) Endorsed the proposal in the Scrutiny Improvement Review report that a Member workshop was held to consider the findings of the review and engage in ideas for change and improvement. This would take place in September 2020.

9. Work Programme

Following Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson's motion to Council on 13th July 2020, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed to set up a task and finish group to:

- Review and examine the SDCD structure to ensure ethnic minorities were not disadvantaged.
- Consider BAME access to housing and to homelessness welfare support.

- Provide input into the Council's Equality policy.
- Conduct an audit of street names and public monuments for which the Council was responsible, and which named individuals or organisations, to review any with racist links.

The committee agreed the terms of reference of the group would include the specific issues set out in the motion to Council.

The committee appointed the following members to the task and finish group

- Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson (Chair).
- Councillor Claire Daunton
- Councillor Geoff Harvey
- Councillor Richard Williams

Input from other members would be welcomed and Councillor Anna Bradnam also indicated that she would be willing to be a reserve member of the group if further input was required.

Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson commented that officer input would be welcomed into areas they thought the task and finish group should look at.

The Scrutiny and Governance Adviser clarified that Executive members could participate in a Scrutiny task and finish group in an advisory capacity only and could not be a member of the group.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed that the task and finish group would meet to consider its terms of reference and bring these back to a future committee meeting.

10. Exclusion Of The Press And Public

The committee agreed to exclude the Press and public from the meeting during consideration of the following agenda items. This was in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) (exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act). Paragraph 3 referred to information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

11. Referral To The Committee Of The Call-In Of A Decision Relating To A Potential Property Investment

The Monitoring Officer introduced the referral to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee of the call-in of a Cabinet decision taken on 29th June 2020, regarding the approval of a property investment.

Councillor Heather Williams set out the reasons for the call-in of this decision, the basis of which was that the decision was an outside Article 13 decision. Councillor Williams pointed out that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee had not initially supported the decision and considered that this decision should be taken by full Council.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Finance responded to the call-in. He emphasised that this was an Executive decision as it was within the budget approved by Council in the Commercial Investment Strategy.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was an Executive and not a Council decision, as it was within the budget approved by Council in the Commercial Investment Strategy.

The committee debated the call-in:

- Committee members noted that a full presentation on the proposals had been given at the last Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting, and answers had been given to all questions asked by the committee at that meeting.
- Some committee members acknowledged that this was an Executive decision and not a Council decision, as it was within the policy and budget framework.
- Some committee members considered there was no reason to refer this to full Council or back to Cabinet for consideration, as it had been through the proper process.
- It was acknowledged by some committee members that the proposal had changed since the committee's original consideration of it. These changes had addressed some of the committee members' original concerns.
- Some committee members suggested this item should be referred to full Council for a decision, as a precedent had been set with other investment proposals which had been considered by full Council.

Having considered the Cabinet decision and referral of the call-in, it was proposed that the committee did not refer the matter back to Cabinet or Council, in which case the decision could be implemented immediately. Six members voted in favour of this proposal, two members abstained and one member voted against.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee therefore agreed not to refer the matter back to Cabinet or Council, and that the decision taken by Cabinet on 29th June 2020 could be implemented immediately.

12. Confidential Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

The confidential minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record, subject to an amendment.

13. To Note The Dates Of Future Meetings

The Meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.
