

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 25 February 2021 at 5.20 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Grenville Chamberlain – Chair
Councillor Judith Rippeth – Vice-Chair

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

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

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| Officers: | Liz Watts | Chief Executive |
| | Victoria Wallace | Scrutiny and Governance Adviser |
| | Stephen Kelly | Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development |
| | Anne Ainsworth | Chief Operating Officer |
| | Peter Campbell | Head of Housing |
| | Jeff Membery | Head of Transformation |

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Martin Cahn, Jose Hales and Steve Hunt.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2021 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

4. Public Questions

There were no public questions.

5. 3C ICT Data Centre Incidents - Summary report

The committee considered an update from the Interim Head of ICT and Digital on the resilience of the ICT data centre services. He explained how the data centre operated, what had caused the service interruptions experienced in quarter three of 2020/21 and the action taken to resolve these issues. He explained the

reasons for the recent start-up issue with staff laptops and the action being taken to resolve this.

The Chief Executive clarified that South Cambridgeshire District Council had a partnership agreement with the ICT service and that this was a shared service which was run and owned by the three councils. The partnership agreement had been considered by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and had been signed off by Cabinet in September 2020.

The Interim Head of ICT explained the decision had been taken to split the data centre between two geographically diverse sites so that if there was an issue in one location, this would not be an issue in the other location. The County Council's recommendation had been to provide the data centre service from one of its locations in Peterborough. The committee was informed by the Interim Head of ICT that the servers and equipment were as efficient as they could be and that the right balance had been achieved between performance and equipment.

The Interim Head of ICT informed the committee of the following:

- There had been 18 weeks of uninterrupted service since the service interruptions experienced in Quarter 3 of 2020/21. An independent report being carried out would identify any further improvements that could be made to the service.
- All recommended precautions and measures were taken when software updates were applied.
- He assured the committee that steps were being taken to protect the council against ransomware attacks and that this issue was taken very seriously. The Leader informed the committee of a briefing received by the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board on the cyber security programme and the work being done to protect against major cyber attacks. She informed the committee that she would query with the Senior Leadership Team whether this issue was included in the Council's risk register.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Environmental Health and Licensing informed the committee that he had been asked to take Executive responsibility for ICT issues. He expressed concern about the lack of a service level agreement and that there was not a shared document repository.

The Lead Cabinet Member for Planning expressed concern that the recent ICT outages had significantly affected the Planning service and that many planning officers had been affected by the recent issue with laptops.

Committee members expressed concern about the system's resilience and that there were no penalties for the service if agreed downtime was exceeded. Committee members also raised concern about the downtime of the Planning Portal, about which some members had received complaints from parish councils who had been unable to access the system to view documentation relating to planning applications.

The committee requested a further ICT update in 3-4 months' time.

The committee recommended that a service level agreement be put in place, specifying the maximum service downtime.

6. Housing Repairs - Contract Progress

The committee considered an update from the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing and the Head of Housing, on the progress to date on the contract for repairs to council housing, which was due for renewal during 2022.

The Head of Housing and the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing informed the committee of the following:

- Void costs were higher for South Cambridgeshire District Council as the council's tenants stayed in properties for longer than they did elsewhere, and the council let properties in good condition.
- The reasons for the preferred option, which was to tender the service to an expert external provider, were explained:
 - An in-house service would be more expensive.
 - The council did not have the skills to provide an in-house service.
 - Having a nationwide contractor providing the service would enable access to the skills and experience of expert operatives from across the country.
- Mears had a nationwide programme to introduce electric vehicles, however this may be an issue in South Cambridgeshire due to a lack of electric vehicle charging points across the district.
- A new housing engagement board was being set up, through which tenants would be communicated with. The membership of the board would consist of six tenants and three councillors who would scrutinise housing policy matters.
- Before issuing the contract, officers would work with groups of residents to determine what was important to them and the priority that should be given to different categories of repairs and timescales for repairs.
- The contract with Mears had started off well and had met the council's needs, however this contract was now out of date.
- The intention was to have a programme of continuous improvement through the new contract.
- A price per property contract was intended to design out the need for multiple visits to a property. As properties in South Cambridgeshire were spread across a large geographical area, much of the repair costs for the council were associated with the cost of travel.

The committee discussed the potential advantages and disadvantages of having an in-house service. Some members suggested an in-house service would provide greater flexibility and the opportunity to provide training and apprenticeships. Some members suggested a hybrid model should be considered to provide scope for the council to carry out some minor repairs itself. Some committee members thought this would offer a better service to tenants, as it would ensure service was maintained and the relationship between council

officers and tenants was not undermined by officers not having control of when repairs were carried out.

The committee indicated its support for the retendering of the repairs service and agreed the following suggestions:

- Sustainability should be an integral part of the contract.
- The concerns of tenants should be noted. The committee noted existing communication channels with tenants would continue and be improved.
- Any potential improvement possibility should be integrated into the contract.
- The contract should include a handyman service for minor repairs.

7. Review of the Business Plan

The Deputy Leader (non-statutory) presented the proposed 2020-25 Business Plan.

The Deputy Leader would discuss with the Head of Transformation, the potential for a forum for lessons learned regarding new developments.

Committee members commented that the business plan was very clear.

8. Covid-19 Response Task and Finish Group Recommendations

The Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's Covid-19 Response Task and Finish Group presented the report which summarised the work undertaken by the task and finish group and its recommendations.

In relation to recommendation 1, the Chair informed the committee that applications for funding should be made through the Grants Advisory Committee. The Chair informed the committee that he had written to the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance to seek support for grants to be made available to community groups and had received a positive response to this.

The Chair thanked officers for the support they had provided to the task and finish group.

Subject to a slight amendment to the wording of recommendation two, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed the following recommendations and recommended these to Cabinet:

- Recommendation 1 – the Council should ensure adequate resource is allocated for community recovery and to support parishes with further development of their community response/emergency plans, so they are as well-equipped as possible for any future crises.
- Recommendation 2 (amended wording agreed by the committee is shown in bold and crossed through text) - The Council should host an

appreciation events to celebrate the success of the community response and to acknowledge the work of community groups, volunteers **and local members** during the Covid-19 pandemic.

9. **Anti-Racism Task and Finish Group Recommendations**

The Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's Anti-Racism Task and Finish Group presented the report which summarised the work undertaken by the task and finish group and the group's recommendations.

Subject to a slight amendment agreed to the wording of recommendation one (amended text shown in bold text), the Scrutiny and Overview Committee approved the task and finish group's recommendations and recommended these to Cabinet for adoption:

- **Recommendation 1** - Key performance indicators relating **to how the council responds to** BAME employees at South Cambridgeshire District Council should be reported to the Employment and Staffing Committee on an ongoing basis.
- **Recommendation 2** - The Leader of the Council should assign the responsibility for equalities to an existing Lead Cabinet Member.
- **Recommendation 3** - The Lead Cabinet Member with responsibility for equalities should investigate the establishment of an equalities advisory panel/group.
- **Recommendation 4** - The new equality advisory panel/group should track the outcomes of the equalities staff forum.
- **Recommendation 5** - The suitable Lead Cabinet Member should liaise with relevant officers on street naming in South Cambridgeshire.
- **Recommendation 6** – The Council should produce an equalities toolkit for businesses, to help broaden their understanding of race inequality in the workplace and enable them to undertake Race Equality Impact Assessment on their employment practices.
- **Recommendation 7** – Provision of training on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural awareness for all councillors and officers.
- **Recommendation 8** – The Council should seek to collaborate with Cambridge City Council in its engagement with BAME community groups.
- **Recommendation 9** – The Council should build links with local BAME community groups.

10. Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted its work programme.

11. To Note the Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 18th March 2021 at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.40 p.m.
