

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 15 November 2022 at 5.20 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Drew – Chair
Councillor Graham Cone – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Anna Bradnam Libby Earle
Sue Ellington Sally Ann Hart
James Hobro Helene Leeming
Richard Stobart Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer
Heather Williams

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

In the Chamber

Anne Ainsworth (Chief Operating Officer), Aaron Clarke (Democratic Services Technical Officer), Peter Maddock (Head of Finance), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser)

Virtually: Peter Campbell (Head of Housing), Jeff Membery (Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services), Stephen Kelly (Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development), Kevin Ledger (Senior Policy and Performance Officer), Michael Parsons (Waste Operations Manager), Alex Snelling-Day (Policy, Climate and Environment Team Manager) and Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Councillors Bill Handley (Lead Cabinet Member for Communities), Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader), Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council) and John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) were in attendance, by invitation.

Councillors Peter Fane and Dr John Loveluck (Scrutiny and Overview Committee members) were in attendance remotely.

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies.

3. Declarations of Interest

With reference to agenda item 9 (Young People Task & Finish Group - Terms of Reference), Councillor Heather Williams declared an interest because the Task & Finish Group in question had been established as a result of her motion to Full Council in July 2022.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022.

5. Public Questions

There were no public questions or statements.

6. 2022-23 Quarter Two Performance Report

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a report on the Council's Quarter 2 position regarding its operational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and 2020-25 Business Plan actions.

With reference to FS104 (Percentage of Business Rates collected (year to date)), Councillor Sue Ellington said that a simple percentage figure did not really provide the kind of information needed for there to be effective scrutiny. While accepting assurances from both Councillor John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) and the Head of Finance that the current position was generally positive, Councillor Ellington said that an attempt should be made to demonstrate this by creating a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) that more clearly reflected the state of business in South Cambridgeshire. Councillor Heather Williams asked that the KPI should differentiate between those businesses struggling to pay business rates and those simply not paying.

KPIs PN510 to PN512 related to Development Management. Councillor Peter Fane said that a differentiation should be made between those planning applications determined within the period set by statutory targets and those determined within a timescale set by an Extension of Time Agreement. Councillor Fane asked that the percentage of appeals against major planning permission refusals allowed should specify the proportion allowed in respect of appeals against non-determination. The Committee noted that the number of Extension of Time Agreements and refusals made in order to meet determination targets was unrelated to the time taken to validate applications.

In response, the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development said that only a small number of appeals were against non-determination, and this would not affect the standards being measured. He offered to provide clarity in writing.

While he was unsure how many small applications had been determined within statutory timescale, he confirmed that average time was now recorded for applications. Members noted a chart showing the number of days taken to determine current applications compared with lower and upper quartile performance. A reduction in the backlog of applications had resulted in a progressive reduction in determination timescales for all applications. Further analysis would show those applications falling outside the timescale. The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development undertook to give further details at the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting.

Councillor Heather Williams said that for some time now there had been concerns about the extent to which the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service relied on extensions of time agreements. to which the response had been that a system would be put in place. The Chair undertook to pursue this matter with the Lead Cabinet Member for Planning and the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development.

The Committee noted that the number of Extension of Time Agreements and refusals

made in order to meet determination targets was unrelated to the time taken to validate applications.

The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development informed Members that KPI PN519 (Average time to determine validated householder planning applications) should be Amber not Green.”

The Chair invited the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development to make a short statement. That statement

- clarified the number of applications determined within an extended time limit agreed with applicants
- confirmed that the previously reported backlog in validating householder planning applications had been eliminated

The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development undertook to provide a full written statement of the above to all members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. This would also include an analysis of appeals against the non-determination of planning applications.

Councillor Graham Cone questioned how realistic the target of 17 days was referred to in AH211 (Average days to re-let all housing stock). In reply, the Head of Housing gave an assurance that the Council had deliberately set itself a challenging target after benchmarking itself against a group of similar local authorities. Councillor Heather Williams expressed concern about the impact of stated problems with electricity meters on tenants' cost of living. The Head of Housing assured the Committee that the recently re-let contract required there to be a greater focus on voids and re-lets and that he was confident that this KPI would show improved performance as a result.

Turning to the Contact Centre, and after clarifying that CC303 (percentage of calls handled) referred to calls answered by a contact centre agent, Councillor Sally Ann Hart asked that future statistics should include a measure as to the effectiveness of the call-back option. Councillor Helene Leeming expressed concern at KPI CC307 (Average call answer time (seconds)). The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services acknowledged that the Contact Centre was subject to peaks in demand and assured the Committee that the situation was constantly monitored to make sure that available resources (considered to be sufficient) were deployed in an appropriate and effective manner dependant on demand at any given time.

Moving on to performance against the Business Plan, Councillor Richard Stobart challenged the Leader (Councillor Bridget Smith) to explain why the proposed development of a formal engagement programme with schools and employers was being pursued only locally (Measure A2(ii)). In reply, the Leader said that it was right that the Council should focus on 'local' in the first instance but added that it did work with universities when recruiting to higher-paid jobs. South Cambridgeshire was an expensive area to move into although it was hoped that initiatives such as a four-day-week would help compensate for that.

Action B5 related to the delivery of two new sports pavilion, community centre and civic hub (containing health, library, and community facilities) at Northstowe. Councillor Heather Williams said that there was an urgent need for Full Council to consider again the provision of temporary community facilities in the new town especially as a planning application for the civic hub was not anticipated before Quarter 4.

Councillor Sue Ellington used Action C6 (Upgrade our stock of 1,800 streetlights to LED, which will reduce energy consumption and save Parish Councils money) to highlight the very significant financial pressures currently being faced by smaller villages in maintaining their streetlights. Both Councillor Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) and Councillor John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) sympathised with the sentiment but regretted that South Cambridgeshire District Council simply did not have the necessary resources with which to help.

Subject to the comments in paragraphs 2 to 9 above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee supported submission of the Quarter 2 Performance Report to Cabinet on 12 December 2022.

7. General Fund Revenue Bids & Savings

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a draft of the report to be presented to Cabinet on 12 December 2022 relating to Revenue bids and savings for 2023-24.

Referring to paragraph 9 of the draft report and the budget gap likely to be between £700,000 and £1 million, Councillor Heather Williams said that future such reports should make it clear what bids had already been discounted so that Members could decide whether resources were being allocated in the most effective way for the benefit of residents.

In response to Councillor Richard Stobart, the Green Energy Investment Manager gave more detail about how extending the contract of a Project Officer post previously submitted as a one-off bid, would help the Council to meet its Net Zero targets and to deliver key Member priorities.

The Head of Finance said that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to be submitted to Cabinet in December would reveal a likely budget gap of around £7.5 million over the forecast period up to 2027-28. In response to Councillor Graham Cone, the Head of Finance confirmed that that figure was nett of about £2 million of savings expected to be made from the service transformation programme.

Councillor John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) speculated about the implications for South Cambridgeshire District Council of measures anticipated to be in the Government's Autumn Statement. He also urged Committee members to consider the Council Budget in the context of its Business Plan.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **supported** the recommendations in the draft report, namely that Cabinet notes

1. the growth bids put forward (both one-off and ongoing), detailed at Appendix A and B and considers whether those for 2023-24 should be included in the Budget to be proposed in February 2023. These would undergo further refinement and consultation with stakeholders; and
2. the proposed range of service efficiency savings/additional income detailed in Appendix C and D and consider whether those for 2023/2024 should be included in the Budget to be proposed in February 2023. These would undergo further refinement and consultation with stakeholders.

8. The future use of South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee received and noted a report about officers' current concepts for the best use of space within South Cambridgeshire Hall in Cambourne. Appended floorplans showed an early-stage proposal for most South Cambridgeshire District Council officers to be working on the first floor to allow more space for renting out and for potentially providing community facilities.

Councillor Heather Williams said that great care must be taken to make sure that space was only let to businesses adhering to South Cambridgeshire District Council's ethical standards. Several Councillors said that it would be important to consider the personal safety of Council staff and security of the Council's business interests given the open-plan nature of South Cambridgeshire Hall. In reply, Councillor Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) and the Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services acknowledged Members' concern and assured the Committee that such concerns would be considered when developing detailed aspects of the project. The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services said that the second floor offered the biggest opportunities for income-generation.

Following further discussion and having reviewed proposals for the best use of space at South Cambridgeshire Hall, the Chair concluded by saying that, while safety and security had rightly been highlighted as concerns, the general principle offered significant opportunities in finding ways to help address the budget funding gap faced by the Council. An update report would be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at an appropriate date so that it could continue to review progress.

9. Young People Task & Finish Group - Terms of Reference

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered a report seeking its endorsement of the Terms of Reference agreed by the Young People Task & Finish Group for conducting its investigation into youth engagement in South Cambridgeshire.

Councillor Richard Stobart, Chair of the Task & Finish Group, summarised the timetable set by the Group and anticipated making recommendations in June for decision by Cabinet or Full Council in July 2023.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **approved** the Young People Task & Finish Group Terms of Reference attached to the report at Appendix A.

10. Ice Rink

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee received and noted a report updating Members about the ice rink at Newmarket Road, Cambridge, which had been part-funded by a loan from South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The Head of Finance confirmed that a proposal to extend the repayment period by five years was subject to the Cambridge Leisure and Ice Centre (CLIC) negotiating a new lease. CLIC did not require additional funding and the interest rate would remain fixed at 4.31%. Councillor John Williams (Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) referred to proposals to relocate the Newmarket Road Park & Ride site and the implications for CLIC. The only risk for this Council was repayment of the loan and Councillor Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader) said it was in everyone's interest that the ice rink remains viable.

11. Work Programme

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted its work programme attached to the agenda.

The Committee considered a request from Councillors Paul Bearpark and Richard Stobart that it add to the work programme the monitoring of legal agreements made under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Following some discussion among Members, the Chair and Vice-Chair agreed to explore with the Chief Executive the option of holding instead a training workshop for all Councillors.

12. To Note the Date of the next meeting

Members noted that the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting would be on Thursday 15 December 2022 at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.
