

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on  
Tuesday, 6 March 2018 at 5.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Orgee – Chairman  
Councillor Kevin Cuffley – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard Ruth Betson  
Grenville Chamberlain Graham Cone  
Philippa Hart Tumi Hawkins

Councillors Robert Turner and Nick Wright were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers: Susan Gardner Craig Head of People and Organisational Development  
Dawn Graham Benefits Manager  
Mike Hill Director of Health and Environmental Services  
Stephen Kelly Joint Director of Planning and Economic  
Development  
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jose Hales.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The committee agreed the following amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2018:

- Agenda Item 6 – the sentence *‘For these reasons it was believed that this risk was being managed.’* would be deleted and the following sentence would be added: *‘The committee felt that the risk assessment could not be downgraded prior to receiving a letter from the Department for Communities and Local Government’.*
- Agenda Item 8: Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford corridor: The first sentence would be amended to *‘Hope was expressed that the Council would ensure that it would be involved in discussions about the route. It was hoped the Council could influence the routing of the proposed rail line’.*
- Agenda Item 8: Self-build affordable housing: The word *‘affordable’* would be removed.

### **4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

### **5. CUSTOMER CONTACT SERVICES 2017 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

The Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, Benefits Manager and Head of

People and Organisational Development, presented the Customer Contact Service annual performance report for 2017. The committee was informed that performance had improved steadily in 2017 due to the service being fully staffed and being proactive in filling vacancies.

The committee discussed the report:

- In response to a query, the committee was informed that on calling the Contact Centre, callers were placed in a queue and informed of this by an automated message.
- The committee was informed that there was a consistent number of residents who did not use online services. This number had been expected to reduce but it had remained the same.
- The Benefits Manager informed the committee that although performance figures were good she wanted to see a better performance going forward, for example with fewer calls being dropped.
- Committee members raised issues regarding being able to contact Council officers directly. An example was given of having to go through the Contact Centre in order to get hold of an officer to answer queries when on Planning site visits. It was felt that when trying to answer queries whilst on site, councillors should be directed to the relevant officer quickly. It was also pointed out that some officers did not respond to voicemail messages.
- The full complement of staff and the limit to the number of calls that could be handled by the service was queried. As this information was not available at the meeting, the Head of People and Organisational Development agreed to circulate this information to the committee following the meeting and explain which staff were part time and full time.
- The committee was informed that rotas were plotted on the previous year's activity. There was an industry standard for the number of staff needed to respond to a number of calls and this was used in conjunction with the previous year's call numbers, in order to plot the rotas.
- The reason for the percentage of calls answered at first point of contact no longer being reported corporately, was queried. In response to this the committee was informed that in the majority of cases this metric was not met at times when new staff were being trained, and it had been found that reporting this metric corporately had not added value. However the metric was still monitored by the service. Despite this, the committee felt that having this information would be helpful.
- The committee was informed that a joint work plan was being developed with the Planning Service for low level enquiries to be diverted from the Planning Service to the Customer Contact Service. The aim of this was to take unnecessary pressure off Planning Officers and to provide better customer service. The Portfolio Holder emphasised that residents would still be able to talk to Planning Officers when needed.
- It was observed that between 2015-2017, the total number of calls had reduced despite the changes to bin rounds in March 2017. This suggested that enabling residents to self-serve online, was helping to reduce the number of calls.
- The committee was informed that the Council was on target to implement the automated visitor system.

The committee thanked officers for the report and were encouraged by the Customer Contact Centre's performance.

## **6. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE**

The Planning Portfolio Holder and Joint Director for Planning and Economic

Development presented the report which updated the committee on performance and ongoing service improvements within the Development Management Service.

The Portfolio Holder expressed concern regarding the under delivery of homes. The Council needed to ensure that sites were coming on stream and that homes on those sites were being delivered. The committee was informed that delivery was slowing on some larger sites, such as Northstowe.

The committee was informed that:

- The Development Management Service's performance was strong and Government targets were still being met.
- In relation to designation, if all five year land supply issues were discounted, the service was within the Government guidelines regarding designation. The Council was awaiting further communication regarding designation. The Joint Director advised the committee that there was no practical purpose to the service being designated as performance was not an issue, as demonstrated by its improvement which was continuing.
- The 10 day target for land searches was being met.
- The number of compliments regarding the service had risen, which reflected the improvement in the service.
- The first of the Planning roadshows had received very low turnout from members of the public, which had been disappointing for officers.
- Staff were due to be TUPE transferred to the Planning Shared Service on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018.
- In relation to the number of planning applications received, the committee was informed that discharge of conditions were also logged and there was just one sequential numbering system.
- Planning applications were still being submitted without adequate information. These were being sent straight back. The committee was informed that these were sometimes coming from the same agent.
- The Planning service was now contacting residents whose applications had not been validated due to the insufficiency of the application submitted by their agent. The Council held a list of recommended agents.
- In response to an example given of an application having been validated, going to consultation and then being invalidated without the agent being informed, the Joint Director explained that this may have occurred if it became apparent following consultation for example, that a tree assessment was needed. The Joint Director could not comment on the individual case cited but would be happy to look into it. He advised members that officers could only determine that everything that was needed had been submitted with the application, after the site had been visited. If anything was missing then there would be no other option than to invalidate the application.
- The Joint Director explained that there was an issue with the way the Planning Portal worked, as the finance and payments system could not keep up with the validations performance. Ways of improving this were being looked at.
- A Government project had been launched to look at the issue of low housing delivery. This was looking at tools that could be applied to developers who did not build after permission had been granted. A major challenge for the Council was getting houses built where permission had been granted. Where permissions were granted, the Council was trying to apply conditions to ensure housing was delivered in a timely way. The committee was informed that Mid-Bedfordshire had been trying to impose conditions to aid delivery. The Joint Director advised that there was a risk to imposing conditions for delivery, which had implications regarding the risk to lenders financing projects.
- In response to the concerns raised regarding low housing delivery, the local member

for Cambourne pointed out that other things were dependent on the delivery of homes on major sites, such as schools and transport infrastructure.

- In response to a concern raised, the committee was informed that further primary schools in Cambourne West would not be built until capacity had been exhausted in existing primary schools.
- Regarding performance, the committee was informed that this had improved in December 2017 despite staff absence and an increase in applications. The service was still working on improving customer satisfaction.

The committee noted the update and requested a further update in six months time.

## **7. 3C SHARED SERVICES UPDATE**

The Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and Director of Health and Environmental Services, presented the report which updated the committee on Shared Service performance and progress.

The committee was informed that the next Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder meeting would look at the Shared Legal Service in more detail.

The committee was informed that:

- All three shared services had had a slow start and things had not gone as well as had been hoped in the first year due to problems recruiting leaders to each service. Staff had been lost during the move to shared services and savings targets were not met in the first year. Strong leaders had since been recruited to each service and each service had a new business plan. Savings targets would be met but this would be achieved less quickly than had first been hoped. Lessons had been learnt from the implementation of these shared services.
- The data presented was for Quarter 3. There was a lag in the presentation of data due to the partnership's shared governance. Improvements to the reporting were being looked at.
- The overspend in the Building Control Shared Service had been due to interim management and staffing. A permanent manager had been in post since June 2017. Officers were now confident about this service, which should generate an income for the Council.
- The committee was informed that recruitment was challenging for both shared and non shared services. Shared services was a way in which the Council was trying to limit the impact of the difficulty to recruit.

The committee discussed the report:

- Members felt that evidence for optimism had not been provided in the report and that there was not enough detail in the report.
- The committee was informed that the financial pressure was covered by current budgets and plans were in place to deliver the original saving aspirations over the next three years. The detail of how this would be met had been presented at the Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder meeting.
- Concern was expressed by members regarding going into a shared Planning Service and advised that the lessons learned from the first shared services, needed to be consolidated.
- In response to a query regarding risk factors, the committee was informed that these were being picked up in business plans, which would be submitted for Cabinet approval in April 2018. The committee was informed that staffing had been a significant issue for shared services but that this issue had since settled.
- In response to a query, the committee was informed that the Legal Shared

Service had delivered its savings targets.

- In response to a query the committee was informed that of 156 litigation cases, the Legal Shared Service had won 148. A large number of these were in relation to debt recovery.
- Committee members congratulated the Shared Waste Service for continuing to deliver its service despite the recent snow. The Director of Health and Environmental Services informed the committee that despite the snow, all bin rounds had been completed in South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City.

The committee noted the report and requested a fuller report which included more detail in future.

## **8. UPDATE ON THE WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Hart raised the issue of the Combined Authority's borrowing powers on which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Chairman had been consulted as a matter of urgency before the matter had to be considered urgently by Cabinet. The committee requested that the Combined Authority be informed that the process had not been at all satisfactory and that the Council should not have been put in this position by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The Chairman informed the committee that he had submitted a report to Councillor Cone's Task and Finish Group, which would be presented to the first Civic Affairs Committee meeting of the new municipal year.

The Chairman advised that it would be up to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee appointed for the next municipal year to determine the committee's work programme.

Councillor Hart suggested that the new committee set up a task and finish group to look at shared services.

## **9. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE**

There were no updates from Scrutiny monitors.

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

The committee agreed the future meeting dates:

- Thursday 21 June 2018 at 6pm
- Thursday 6 September 2018 at 6pm
- Thursday 8 November 2018 at 6pm
- Thursday 31 January 2019 at 6pm.

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**The Meeting ended at 6.35 p.m.**

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