

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 14 November 2019 at 5.20 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Grenville Chamberlain – Chairman
Councillor Brian Milnes – Vice-Chairman

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

Councillors Neil Gough, Bill Handley, Hazel Smith, Heather Williams and John Williams were in attendance, by invitation.

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| Officers: | Victoria Wallace | Scrutiny and Governance Adviser |
| | Peter Maddock | Head of Finance |
| | Mike Hill | Director of Housing and Environmental Services |
| | Trevor Nicoll | Interim Assistant Director for Waste Resources & Special Projects |

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ruth Betson, Martin Cahn, Geoff Harvey and Judith Rippeth. Councillor Peter Fane was present as a substitute for Councillor Cahn.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Peter Fane declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a director of Shire Homes.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2019 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting, subject to an amendment to the confidential minute which related to agenda item 7.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Mr Daniel Fulton was invited to make a statement to the committee. Mr Fulton referred to the extraordinary Cabinet meeting that was scheduled to take place on 18 November 2019, the subject of which was the restructuring of the Council's senior management, and from which the press and public would be excluded. Mr Fulton referred to the reasons that had been given for the press and public being excluded from the meeting, with which he did not agree.

The Chairman thanked Mr Fulton for his comments, which were noted by the committee.

5. STREETLIGHTING POLICY AND LED UPGRADE PROGRAM

The Interim Assistant Director of Waste and Special Projects presented the policy for the

Council's Streetlighting Service, which the committee considered and commented on.

LED streetlights had been trialled in Hardwick. The Local Member representing Hardwick suggested that an alternative light deflector be investigated, which spread the light more widely in order to achieve a more even lighting pattern and avoid dark patches between streetlights.

Some committee members commented on the County Council's streetlight dimming policy and felt that 10pm was early for streetlights to be dimmed. Some committee members had noticed an increase in the number of people walking with torches in villages, as the streetlighting was insufficient. Committee members asked whether there was any evidence that dimming streetlights did not negatively impact residents. Officers advised that a consistent approach to dimming was needed as if inconsistent, this could create issues particularly for those with a visual impairment.

Although there was concern regarding insufficient lighting, lamp design to minimise light pollution was suggested. The committee was assured that lamps were directional and should therefore reduce light pollution.

Some Members raised concerns regarding the problematic situation that had arisen in parishes in relation to the arrangements for paying for the electricity for streetlights. The challenge parishes had faced in dealing with the legacy of the PFI contract with Balfour Beatty, was also highlighted. This had been worsened by the lack of maintenance of roads and pathways in villages and committee members knew of incidences where residents had tripped in the dark.

The Local Member representing Girton informed officers that in his village, there was concern about streetlights positioned under large trees. He suggested that something should be included in the policy to ensure that trees would be cut back, so that streetlights were not obscured by vegetation.

The Local Member for Duxford informed officers that an area of Duxford had been without a streetlight for nearly two months, which had been due to the lack of supply of LEDs. The Assistant Director for Waste and Projects informed the committee that the Council was changing streetlights within its control to LEDs and were actively replacing lights when they were reported to the Council.

The Assistant Director informed the committee that:

- Ornate lights would only be replaced with an LED in discussion with the parish council, to ensure parishes were happy with the replacement.
- Officers had been discussing with the County Council, whether there were simpler ways of looking after streetlights.
- There was not currently a trial for electric vehicle charging points to be installed in streetlights. Officers would be carrying out work to identify lights that could not be used for electric vehicle charging. Members were informed that these would be trickle feed charging points.

The committee congratulated the Assistant Director on his appointment as the President of the Chartered Institution of Waste Management.

6. 2019-20 QUARTER TWO PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Deputy Leader and Director of Housing, Health and Environmental Services,

presented the Quarter Two Performance Report. The committee considered and commented on this and the Operational Key Performance Indicator results.

Committee members were pleased to see that apprenticeships were being used in the Contact Centre and thanked the Lead Cabinet Member for listening to the committee's past comments regarding staffing. The committee noted that the average call answer time had reduced, which was directly attributable to recruitment. The Deputy Leader informed the committee that the Council's outdated telephony system was hindering the Contact Centre's performance. A new telephony system would be rolled out in the future, however the timescale for this was not yet known. In response to Members' queries regarding whether the new telephony equipment would be the best in class, officers informed the committee that the specification was not yet known but it would be ensured that the new equipment took the Council's new ICT equipment into account.

Committee members suggested that it be ensured that Contact Centre staff felt that they could say when they did not know the answer to a query, and not feel under pressure to always provide an answer. This was important so that staff did not provide the wrong advice when they were unsure of the answer.

The Interim Director of Waste and Special Projects informed the committee that there had been a spike in sickness absence in the waste service. The service had a dedicated HR officer which had helped to track and map short term sickness. A reduction in this had been since September 2019. Service managers were actively looking at how to reduce sick leave and address the reasons for this.

A standard deviation was requested, which would help Members to understand the figures provided in the performance report.

Performance relating to the increase in spend for the use of bed and breakfasts was discussed by the committee. The Director of Housing, Health and Environmental Services explained that a change in local hostel staff and a change in national policy relating to risk assessments, had impacted this performance. The Director explained that desktop risk assessments had been carried out by hostels rather than in person, which had led to more people being declined accommodation. Face to face interviews were however now being conducted, and an improvement was being seen.

Comments in the report in relation to Universal Credit were noted and the Council's readiness to deal with the impact of this was queried by committee members.

Performance in relation to the average number of days to re-let housing stock was discussed. The committee queried what measures were in place to reduce voids and re-let times. The Director of Housing, Health and Environmental Services agreed to provide an update on the work being done in relation to this at the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting.

In response to a query from Members regarding street sweeping of leaves, the committee was informed by the Assistant Director of Waste and Special Projects that the Council had two large street sweepers and three small sweepers for pavements and roads. The problem for the Council was that demand for street sweeping of leaves came all at once. The service was demand focussed and targeted where the issues were greatest. Members requested that the planned sweeping schedule be made available to parish councils. The Assistant Director informed the committee that this would be shared at the parish liaison forum meetings and it would also be put online.

In response to a query regarding complaints data, the Director of Housing, Health and

Environmental Services explained that this was complaints data from across the Council and officers were trying to understand the reasons for the poor performance.

Members thanked the Interim Assistant Director of Waste and Special Projects, for arranging the clearing of traffic islands in the centre of the A10, which had become increasingly overgrown.

7. GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered and commented on the medium term budget strategy for the Council, which was presented by the Head of Finance and Lead Cabinet Member for Finance.

The committee was informed that the fair funding review would take place in 2020/21 and it was anticipated that resources would move from the district to county councils in order to deal with the crisis in adult social care. A budget gap was anticipated from 2021/22. Officers also assumed that the New Homes Bonus would be lost, along with the income from business rates. The committee was informed that additional budget pressures may also arise.

Committee members expressed sympathy with officers having to deal with high levels of uncertainty from the government and thanked them for their efforts in trying to manage this for the Council.

The committee was informed that the intention was to finance the funding gap by identifying additional efficiencies and income generation. The Investment Strategy would be a large contributor to this. The committee was informed that figures were prudent and inflation had been included in calculations. The use of the General Fund balance would be a last resort.

8. SERVICE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME: SAVINGS PROPOSALS

The Deputy Leader presented the report which outlined the key objectives and intentions in relation to the transformation of Council services. This was within the context of a continually challenging financial environment due to ongoing reductions in funding from central government to deliver services. It was expected that future cost pressures would exceed the resources available.

The committee considered the revenue budget guiding principles, growth bids and the proposed service efficiency savings and policy options.

The Deputy Leader informed the committee that the budget allocation for Member training covered statutory training for Planning and Licensing, LGA courses and other ad hoc training and educational opportunities. The allocation would be an increase on the current budget. Committee members were also informed that additional sources of income were being explored; scope had been identified in Planning and through the expansion of the commercial waste service.

Committee members thanked officers for a clear report and commended the shared waste service for the savings it had made.

9. PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The committee agreed that the press and public should be excluded for the consideration of this agenda item, in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act), due to the commercial sensitivity of the information contained within the report.

10. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The committee agreed that the press and public should be excluded for the consideration of the confidential minutes of the committees previous meeting, This was in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act), due to the commercial sensitivity of the information contained within the minutes. The committee agreed the minutes as amended.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The committee received and noted its work programme. Councillor de Lacey suggested the committee should look at gypsy and traveller issues at some stage. In view of the changes the government had in mind, this item would be deferred until there was greater clarity.

Following the previous committee meeting, Councillor de Lacey had drafted a letter to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) regarding his response to officers in relation to Setchel Drove, which had been discussed at the committee's previous meeting. However since the letter had been drafted, the PCC had resigned from his post.

12. APPOINTMENT OF FINANCE SCRUTINY MONITOR

This item was deferred to the next meeting as not all committee members were present.

13. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 17th December at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.25 p.m.

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