



Report to: Cabinet 22 March 2022

Lead Cabinet Members: Councillor John Batchelor (Housing)
Councillor Neil Gough (Deputy Leader and Lead
Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport)
Councillor John Williams (Finance)

From: Councillor Judith Rippeth, Vice-Chair in the Chair,
Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson, Vice-Chair of the
Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting

Update from Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Purpose

1. This report is to inform Cabinet about relevant discussion among members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at their meeting on 3 March 2022 and to make recommendations at paragraphs 2, 10, 11, 15 and 25.

Ermine Street Housing – Business Plan

Recommendation from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

2. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee supports the recommendations contained in the report to the Cabinet meeting on 22 March 2022.

Comments

3. While recognising that the Business Plan had been prepared prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Councillor Cone asked that the Cabinet be conscious of any adverse impact that invasion, and ongoing war, might have on Ermine Street Housing.
4. Further comments are contained in a confidential report elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda.

Scrutiny Review of hybrid technology and risk mitigation

5. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee examined the procedures and backups in place for the delivery of hybrid meetings, should the technology fail. The Committee considered what further measures could be put in place to assist Members and explain to the public as to what should happen in these situations
6. Committee members heard Councillor Neil Gough (Deputy Leader) commend the hybrid technology in the Council Chamber as a huge benefit in increasing public participation in the democratic process. The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services said that the system had raised public expectation of being able to view the major public meetings at South Cambridgeshire District Council, and that there was in excess of a 90% success rate. Any problems had been identified and fixed quickly.
7. Councillor Heather Williams, at whose request this item had been added to the agenda by Councillor Grenville Chamberlain, was concerned about decision making. She sought clarity about where authority lay to adjourn a meeting in the event of technology failure. In the interests of consistency, she suggested an amendment to the Council's Standing Orders.
8. In response, the Monitoring Officer said that such a constitutional change would require referral to the Civic Affairs Committee. He added a cautionary note pointing out that no single measure would cover every potential scenario.
9. Councillor Heather Williams and Councillor Dr. Richard Williams both supported referral to the Civic Affairs Committee. The Deputy Leader accepted this idea. Councillor Anna Bradnam, who was Chair of the Civic Affairs Committee, observed that the technology was still relatively new for South Cambridgeshire District Council. Problems had been much reduced, and she was minded to vest the decision whether to adjourn in the relevant Committee Chair. Councillor Bridget Smith noted the ongoing improvement in the system's reliability and questioned whether referral to the Civic Affairs Committee at this stage would be the best use of that Committee's time. Councillor Heather Williams said that the effect would be to give Committee Chairs official authority to adjourn meetings in the event of technological failure.
10. Following further discussion, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee concluded its Review and, by affirmation, recommended that the Cabinet
 - (a) **Refers** to the Civic Affairs Committee the question of governance in the event of technology failure during a meeting or other event being webcast to the general public; and
 - (b) **Requests** officers to investigate options for making reliability of the hybrid technology a Key Performance Indicator.

Councillor Anna Bradnam was not part of the affirmation, noting her role as Chair of Civic Affairs Committee.

Greater Cambridge First Homes – Interim Position Statement

Recommendation from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

11. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee supports the recommendations contained in the report to the Cabinet meeting on 22 March 2022.

Comments

12. Councillor Peter Fane drew comfort from the officer report and emphasised his view that First Homes should not be allowed to have an adverse impact on the Council's affordable housing policy. He urged the Authority to concentrate on rural exception sites rather than First Homes exception sites.
13. Councillor Dr. Richard Williams called for a more objective approach given that there was insufficient detail yet from central Government as to how First Homes would work in practice. Councillor Heather Williams agreed that the Authority must do whatever was in the best interests of residents.
14. Councillor Graham Cone said that it was important to consider key workers as a whole rather than to distinguish between different categories.

Quarter 3 Performance Report

Recommendation from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

15. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee supports the recommendations contained in the report to the Cabinet meeting on 22 March 2022.

Comments

16. Referring to Key Performance Indicator (KPI) H211 (Average days to re-let all housing stock), Councillor Dr. Claire Daunton ascertained that the reason for the higher refusal rates compared with those pre-Covid was due in part to publicity material giving insufficient information about the location of properties in terms of factors such as access to local facilities. Councillor Daunton was pleased to learn that the Authority was striving to improve the effectiveness of such material.
17. Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson referred to the Business Plan Progress Report and received clarification that Measure B5ii) (Complete local engagement to understand what the community wants in the new community centre (Quarter 2)) referred to the community centre in Northstowe Phase 1.

Councillor Cheung Johnson maintained that there had been minimal community engagement and urged the Authority to carry out more.

18. Councillor Cheung Johnson asked about Measure B5iii) (Submit planning permission for new Civic Hub in Northstowe (Quarter 4)). Upon receiving clarification that consultation had been focussed on stakeholders, she asked that descriptive text be amended to reflect that fact and requested further community engagement.
19. Councillor Dr. Richard Williams expressed concern about the levels of staff turnover and formal complaints. He also urged the Authority to avoid the use of quantitative measures where qualitative data is being considered (in the Business Plan).
20. Councillor Heather Williams requested that bar and pie charts contain clear definition of categories other than by colour alone.
21. Referring to KPI AH204 (Percentage of tenants satisfied with responsive repairs), Councillor Heather Williams noted the use of text messaging to obtain data but urged the Authority to offer an alternative option to those tenants not confident with texting.
22. Councillor Heather Williams suggested that an indication of the number outstanding would help to identify the scale of the challenge faced in dealing with complaints.
23. Regarding Action D5 (Council and committee meetings will be run paper-free wherever possible), Councillor Anna Bradnam said that, in the interests of accessibility for all, paper agendas should remain an option for those Councillors who are unable to use technology for whatever reason.
24. Where graphs are used, axes should be defined clearly.

Annual Equality Scheme Update and Progress Report

Recommendation from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

25. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee supports the recommendations contained in the report to the Cabinet meeting on 22 March 2022.

Comments

26. Councillor Judith Rippeth observed that the issues addressed in the report potentially affected every resident of South Cambridgeshire.

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