

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 3 September 2009

PRESENT: Councillor JD Batchelor – Chairman
Councillor JA Hockney – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	Mrs VM Barrett	Dr DR de Lacey
	R Hall	Mrs EM Heazell
	MB Loynes	Mrs DP Roberts
	Mrs BZD Smith	Mrs JEO Squier
	Mrs BE Waters	

Councillors MP Howell and NIC Wright were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Philip Aldis	Community Safety Officer
	Gemma Barron	Partnerships Manager
	Rick Hylton	Vice-Chairman of Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership
	John Reynolds	Chairman of Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership
	Chris Savage	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
	Jackie Sayers	Scrutiny Development Officer
	Neil Weston	Partnership Support Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs JM Guest and MJ Mason.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor JD Batchelor declared a personal interest in item 6 of the agenda, as an elected member of the Police Authority.

22. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 July were agreed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the first bullet point on paragraph 4 to read:
“The subsidising of the rent and charges paid by Sheltered Housing residents ...”

23. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

24. PRESENTATION BY MATTHEW WINN, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COMMUNITY SERVICES

Matthew Winn, Managing Director of Cambridgeshire Community Services, gave a presentation on the services his organisation provided, which included a range of NHS and social care services in the Cambridgeshire area, commissioned by and accountable to the Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust.

NHS Trust

Matthew Winn explained that the Cambridgeshire Community Services and the Primary Care Trust planned to become an NHS Trust by April 2010, with the establishment of a Community Foundation Trust, as a future aim. Being an NHS Trust will allow the organisation to compete with other health providers.

Demand for savings

Matthew Winn explained that annual funding from the Government, which in previous years had been over 2%, had dropped to 0.7%. This made cost savings inevitable. It was possible that some service provision could be contracted out if a private sector provider could fulfil the same service more efficiently. Other possible savings could be delivered by providing services in the community, instead of at a hospital. It was noted that the 3 year pay award was coming to an end and future negotiations would have an impact on the budget.

Areas of deprivation

It was noted that whilst the life expectancy for those who lived in Cambridgeshire was higher than average, Fenland's life expectancy was lower than average. The Committee requested that in future data be presented by District, instead of by County, as this would have more meaning for residents and their elected representatives.

It was suggested that it would be more efficient to have the same provider service provider for adults and children.

Case referral to other counties

It was understood that General Practitioners referred cases with social care elements and those living close to the county border could be referred to a service provider in another county. Concern was expressed that this could lead to different standards in care for residents from the same village.

Occupational Health

Matthew Winn explained that Occupational Health prioritised their cases and urgent referrals were responded to within 2 days. It was asserted that the waiting times for some non-urgent referrals were unacceptable and Matthew Winn requested that he be provided with details of any specific cases outside the meeting.

Matthew Winn reported that his organisation had a good working relationship with South Cambridgeshire District Council and he had no concerns to report to the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Matthew Winn and Karen Mason for attending the meeting and providing the Committee with such informative answers.

25. REPORT FROM THE SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP

County Councillor John Reynolds, Member of the Cambridgeshire Police Authority, presented this report as the Chairman of the South Cambridgeshire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, by emphasising that South Cambridgeshire's crime rate was considerably lower than the national average, which made the Partnership's crime reduction targets more challenging. It was noted that the Committee would receive a report from the Partnership twice a year. It was understood that the Partnership also reported to the South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership Board.

Responding to the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

Concern was expressed at the findings in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter which found that performance on reducing crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour had been poor. Councillor John Reynolds reported that whilst the Partnership accepted the comments in the Letter on the increase of crime levels, this trend was reflected at both county and national levels. In response to the local increase in burglary, which was reflected nationally, an awareness campaign had been launched to promote the

measures that residents themselves could take to prevent crime.

Value for money

The Community Safety Officer explained that this year the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership had a budget of £121,000, just over £90,000 of which came through the County Local Area Agreement. In response to concerns about value for money, Councillor John Reynolds explained that reducing the hours of two full-time officers to part-time had provided savings that could be spent on other community safety projects.

Prolific and Priority Offender Scheme (PPO scheme)

Inspector Chris Savage of the Cambridge Constabulary explained that the PPO scheme had been successful in addressing repeat offenders often responsible for burglary and that although it would be desirable to provide the same level of service for all offenders when released from prison, more funding at a County level would be required to enact this.

Place survey

Members of the Committee expressed surprise at the results of the Place Survey, which stated that only 17.4% of people saw anti-social behaviour as a problem. Councillor John Reynolds explained that 1,100 people were interviewed for the Place Survey and the questions were set by the Government. Concern was expressed at the fact that only 26.6% of those surveyed feel that the police and their partners are successfully dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime issues, although it was noted that this was the second highest figure of all the districts in the county.

Crime deterrents

It was noted that it was very difficult to assess the effectiveness of a crime prevention initiative. For example, Inspector Chris Savage explained that there was evidence that Smart Water was an effective deterrent as criminals were aware of its use. He conceded that levels of crime detection resulting from such an initiative did not necessarily reflect its usefulness. A member of the Committee suggested that postcode engraving was a more cost effective crime prevention measure.

Crime reduction conference

The Community Safety Officer explained that the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Anti-Social Behaviour Information Event would be held on 29 September 2009 in the Council Chamber. He agreed to provide Councillors with a further copy of the details, which had been sent to Members on previous occasions.

Vehicle crime

At the request of the Committee, the Community Safety Officer agreed to report back on paragraph 1.3.1, which stated that vehicle crime had decreased but included data which suggested an increase.

Domestic violence

It was agreed that the report should have indicated whether the 67 repeat incidents represented an increase or decrease.

Working with parish councils

It was suggested that regular police attendance at parish council meetings would greatly assist the police in imparting local knowledge important to crime reduction. It was also stated that a visit or phone call was preferable to an e-mail when responding to victims of crime. Inspector Chris Savage explained that the police were sometimes prevented from fully updating elected representatives on an incident, as this would involve the

sharing of personal information.

In conclusion Councillor John Reynolds explained that it was difficult to assess the effectiveness of crime prevention measures, especially as the latest available crime figures were always months out of date.

The Committee agreed that there were still considerable concerns regarding that performance of the South Cambridgeshire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and that they would like to invite the Chairman of the Partnership to return later in the civic year.

26. PLANNING PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRESENTATION

Councillor NIC Wright, Planning Portfolio Holder, gave a brief verbal update on the challenges facing his portfolio for the rest of the municipal year.

Building Control survey

The Building Control survey was unsatisfactory and so a new survey was being carried out later this year.

Planning applications determined by officers

It was noted that the target of 95% of planning applications to be determined by officers would not be met this year. The Corporate Manager for Planning and Sustainable Communities stated that the target should have been 90%, which was in line with the Government's recommendation.

Chairman's delegation

It was noted that the Planning Committee in October would decide on the future of Chairman's delegation, an issue that had been discussed at length at June's Scrutiny Committee meeting. It was unclear if the legal advice that parish councillors could not attend these meetings remained unchanged.

Updates on planning applications

Councillor Wright explained that planning officers were very busy and this possibly explained why parish councils were not being kept fully up to date on the state of planning applications in their parish.

Travellers

Councillor Wright explained that the issue of Travellers did not come under his portfolio. However, he informed the Committee that the Council were losing planning appeals because alternative sites could not be offered. The Corporate Manager for Planning and Sustainable Communities added that the Council was making progress in clearing illegal sites, but this would become much more difficult if the authority did not co-operate with the Government over the provision of additional Travellers' sites. It was noted that the original number of pitches had been 200 but this had been reduced to 89, through the lobbying of the Council.

Acceptance of planning applications

Concern was expressed at the registration of poorly prepared planning applications and it was suggested that the minimum standard of acceptance should be consistently applied. The Corporate Manager for Planning and Sustainable Communities stated that he was looking at ways to improve this process.

Parish Plans

The Partnerships Manager explained that the South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic

Partnership provided funding to support communities develop Parish Plans (now known as Community-Led Plans) and were liaising with Cambridgeshire ACRE regarding the implementation of the recommendations in the Plans.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Wright and the Corporate Manager for Planning and Sustainable Communities for their attendance and informative answers.

27. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

The Scrutiny Monitors gave reports on the following portfolio holder meetings.

Finance and Staffing on 25 August 2009

Councillor Hall reported that staff turnover was currently at a level of 5.5, which was seen as too low. Flexible retirement for staff, which would allow staff to reduce their hours and start claiming part of their pension was discussed. The projected overspend in the General Fund had increased to £358,000, whilst savings of £325,000 would be identified at a later date.

Housing on 11 August 2009

Councillor Heazell reported that the main item of business had been the recommendation to Cabinet that the properties at Frog End, Shepreth be transferred to a Housing Association as the capital receipts for sale on the private market could not be ring-fenced for affordable housing in the village. Councillor Heazell expressed her concern regarding the rescheduling of these portfolio holder meetings and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman agreed to raise this issue with the Leader.

Planning and New Communities 1 September 2009

Councillor Hall reported that the main issue of discussion was the decision of the Planning Portfolio Holder to charge a fee for the pre-application planning process for strategic, major and minor developments, charges to be made for written advice and meeting with the relevant planning officer.

The Committee **noted** that it had already received a written report from Councillor Smith on the Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder meeting on 23 July 2009.

28. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

It was agreed that the Chairman should liaise with the Scrutiny Development Officer to consider how the Committee could add value to the decision making process with regard to Chairman's Delegation, which would be discussed at the Planning Committee of 7 October 2009.

29. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee **NOTED** the following future meeting dates:

2009: 1 October at Melbourn; 5 November at Orchard Park and 3 December at Haslingfield.

2010: 7 January at Great Shelford; 4 February at the Council's Offices at Cambourne; 4 March at Linton and 1 April at Foxton.

The Meeting ended at 7.40 p.m.
