

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 24 January 2012.

PRESENT

Cllr D McVicar (Chairman)
Cllr A R Bastable (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs M C Blair
Mrs R B Gammons
Ms C Maudlin

Cllrs J Murray
B Saunders
P Williams

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE

Substitutes: Cllrs A Shadbolt (In place of Mrs C F Chapman MBE)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
P A Duckett
J G Jamieson
K C Matthews
A Zerny

Chairman of Customer and Central Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive
Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Officers in Attendance: Mr G Alderson – Director of Sustainable Communities
Mr R Fox – Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy
Mrs J Keyte – Community Safety Manager
Mr J Partridge – Scrutiny Policy Adviser
M Saccoccio – LDF North Team Leader
Ms S Wileman – Service Development Manager

Others in Attendance Ms P Fletcher Bedfordshire Police Authority
Mr L Mitchell Bedfordshire & Luton Joint Fire Authority
Ms K Morgan Bedfordshire Probation Trust

SCOSC/11/50 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 December 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/11/51 Members' Interests

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None.

(c) **Any political whip in relation to any agenda item:-**

None.

SCOSC/11/52 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman informed the Committee that public questions, statements or deputations had not been included in the agenda. This item was required in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure set out in Part A4 of the Constitution. This item would be considered following Item 7, "requested items."

RESOLVED

That in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure set out in Part A4 of the Constitution the item "questions, statements or deputations" be added to the agenda.

SCOSC/11/53 Petitions

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

SCOSC/11/54 Call-In

The Panel was advised that no decisions of the Executive had been referred to the Panel under the Call-in Procedures set out in Appendix "A" to Rule No. S18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

SCOSC/11/55 Requested Items

No items were referred to the Committee for consideration at the request of a Member under Procedure Rule 3.1 of Part D2 of the Constitution.

SCOSC/11/56 Questions, Statements or Deputations

The Committee were told that one speaker had registered to speak at the meeting in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 to Section A4 of the Constitution. The speaker raised issues in relation to Item 8 (Minute SCOSC/11/57 refers), including the following:-

- Openness, transparency and accountability in Council meetings. Public attendance at Task Force meetings in particular needed to be ensured.
- The input of Members in the development plan process and the definition of 'Member Briefings'.
- The benefits of forming a formal sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

SCOSC/11/57 Member Involvement in the Preparation of Planning and Related Strategy Documents

The Committee received a report from the Director of Sustainable Communities that outlined proposals for future working arrangements for Member involvement in the plan preparation process and related housing and transportation strategy documents. The Director commented that a single Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire would be prepared for adoption in 2014. The process of public consultation required throughout the development of the Strategy was extensive. Attention of Members was drawn to the legal implications outlined in the report.

Councillors sought clarification on issues relating to expediency, the role of Town and Parish Councils and whether all Councillors would be able to attend Sub-Committees, informal Task and Finish groups or Member briefings. A Member also commented that a large workload had been undertaken by the previous Task Force and whatever option was chosen there would be a considerable amount of work to be carried out.

Councillor Zerny stated that meetings of all Task and Finish groups should be open to the public to inform discussion and provide evidence. It was also

commented that all Members should be able to attend meetings of Task and Finish groups.

In response the Director commented that formal sub-committees, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Member briefings would be open to all Members of Central Bedfordshire Council. Decisions could only be taken by the Executive or in some cases Full Council. Under options A or B every issue would be considered by Members twice. Visits would continue to be arranged for Members under any of the options.

In response to the report and the issues raised by other Members the Committee raised and discussed the following issues in detail:-

- A considerable workload would be involved in producing a Development Strategy. Member briefings would assist in the explanation of documentation and help Members understand key issues. If the Committee resolved to approve option C a considerable amount of work would be undertaken by the OSC that would have previously been undertaken by the Task Force.
- Extensive public consultation was required to develop a strong evidence base for the Development Strategy.
- The importance of the public being able to contribute and the need for Members to lead the process of producing a Development Strategy. It was important that whatever option was chosen Members could call on witnesses as they felt appropriate. The public and press could be excluded from meetings under the provisions of the Local Government Act if exempt information was likely to be disclosed.
- Inadequate levels of public or Member engagement in the production of the Development Strategy would likely result in the Strategy failing at the Examination in Public.
- Meeting in private allowed the previous Task Force to discuss sensitive issues freely without creating undue distress as a result of media coverage.
- There might not always be adequate time in Member Briefings to discuss all of the issues that Members wanted to discuss.
- Option A would lead to a considerable amount of duplication as issues would be considered by Members twice.
- The importance of the Development Strategy being considered in a holistic way and not segregated into sections or areas.

Cllr Williams proposed (and was seconded) the following motion for approval by the Committee:-

To form an informal group made up of all Members, meeting in private, to receive and digest officer reports and be able to call in relevant witnesses to

gather information and take it back to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which would debate and discuss information outlined in public.

In debating this proposal Members discussed the legal implications of their decision and what formal record might result from the Member briefings outlined in option C. Members also discussed access to private meetings for the public, other Central Bedfordshire Councillors and witnesses.

Following debate Cllr Williams withdrew his motion and Cllr Mrs R Gammons proposed (and was seconded) the following motion:-

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives officer reports directly but preceded by Member briefings open to all Members as considered expedient including the calling of witnesses as deemed appropriate.

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives officer reports directly but, when considered expedient, these meetings will be preceded by Member briefings open to all Members including the calling of witnesses as deemed appropriate.

(Councillor Murray requested that his vote against this resolution be recorded).

(Note: the Committee adjourned for a short break from 11.30am and reconvened at 11.45am)

SCOSC/11/58 Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment, Identified Priorities for 2012-13

The Committee received a report informing Members of the three priorities that had been identified through the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment. The Head of Community Safety outlined the specific priorities that had been proposed and the consultation to which they had been subject.

In response to the report and the issues raised by other Members the Committee raised and discussed the following issues in detail:-

- Significant levels of advice and support that were provided to victims of anti-social behaviour. The response of the police force was determined by the levels of threat, harm and risk in each individual case.
- The importance of encouraging greater reporting of incidents of domestic abuse.
- Integrated offender management (IOM) enabled a range of agencies to work together to reduce reoffending. The Council was a key partner in IOM.
- Bedfordshire Police would continue to take action in relation to priorities that had been identified in local communities via police community support. In addition the Community Safety Partnership Tasking Group

reviewed local issues and developed specific short-term action plans to address these.

- There were currently sufficient numbers of domestic abuse refuges located throughout Central Bedfordshire.
- The importance of encouraging offenders to be personally responsible for their offences.
- The importance of agencies providing feedback to victims, particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour, in order to increase public confidence.

RECOMMENDED TO EXECUTIVE

That the three Partnership Strategic Assessment Priorities for 2012-13 be approved as follows:-

- (i) Anti-Social Behaviour**
- (ii) Reduce Reoffending**
- (iii) Domestic Abuse**

SCOSC/11/59 Development Brief for Land West of Abbey Lane, Ampthill

The Committee received a report from the Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Economic Development that proposed a development brief for land west of Abbey Lane, Ampthill. The Committee also received a presentation from George Gardner, Gardner Stewart Architects, that outlined previous consultation that had been undertaken and the technical constraints that had been identified in the brief. The Committee were also informed that the brief had been developed in line with national policy and that it presented a resolution to the constraints that had been identified.

Councillor Duckett told the Committee he had been then Chairman of a Stakeholder Group in Ampthill that had been consulted throughout the process. The development of this brief had been an exemplar for public engagement and the plans had the support of the local community. The Committee heard that there were infrastructure problems in Ampthill that needed to be resolved and whilst those should not prevent the approval of the development brief the Council needed to be mindful of these as the area expanded.

In response to the report, presentation and the issues raised by Cllr Duckett the Committee raised and discussed the following issues in detail:-

- The importance of the Council addressing current infrastructure problems throughout Central Bedfordshire, including Ampthill, that could be addressed through a range of means such as the Local Area Transport Plan or Town Plan.

- The use of the Planning Obligations Strategy to meet infrastructure requirements without unduly burdening developers with existing requirements.
- The continued operation of the Stakeholder Group if the development brief were approved.
- The importance of having an approved Development Strategy by 2014 as a means of receiving funding through the Community Infrastructure Levy.

RECOMMENDED TO EXECUTIVE

That the Development Brief for Land West of Abbey Lane, Amptill, be adopted as technical guidance

SCOSC/11/60 Quarter 2 Performance Report

The Committee received the quarter one performance for the Sustainable Communities directorate for 2011-12. In addition to the report the Committee was informed that significant improvement had been made in relation to SC4 (number of affordable homes created) and if assessed today it would be scored 'green'.

In response to questions from Members it was commented that the identification of 35% affordable homes in developments was deemed to be appropriate as schemes had to be commercially viable. It was also commented that increases in the percentage of waste sent to landfill in quarter 2 could be due to seasonal reasons.

NOTED the report

SCOSC/11/61 Draft Work Programme 2011-2012 and Executive Forward Plan

The Committee received their work programme and Executive Forward Plan. It was noted that in light of the Committee's earlier decision to receive all development plan documents at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee this would have an effect on their work programme. Members requested that a revised work programme be presented to them at their next meeting.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the work programme for the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be approved.**
- 2. That the Scrutiny Policy Adviser submit a revised work programme to the next meeting to include development plan documents that were required to be considered by the Committee at future meetings.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.56 p.m.)