

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 22 June 2010

PRESENT

Cllr J N Young (Chairman)
Cllr A R Bastable (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs D J Gale
Mrs R B Gammons
J Kane

Cllrs Mrs M Mustoe
P Snelling
P Williams

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Ms C Maudlin
D McVicar

Substitutes: Cllrs J G Jamieson (In place of Ms C Maudlin)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
R A Baker
P A Blaine
D Bowater
J A E Clarke
Mrs R J Drinkwater
Dr R Egan
Mrs S A Goodchild
Ms A M W Graham
T Green
D Jones
Mrs A M Lewis
H J Lockey
K C Matthews
J Murray
T Nicols
B J Spurr
J Street
Mrs C Turner
B Wells

Officers in Attendance: Mr D Bowie Head of Traffic and Safety
Mrs J Dickinson Head of Leisure Services
Mr R Fox Head of Development Plan
Mrs E Heaney Temporary Democratic Services
Officer
Mr J Partridge Overview & Scrutiny Officer
Ms S Wileman Service Development Officer

SCOSC/10/11 Members' Interests**(a) Personal Interests:-**

None.

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

None.

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

None.

SCOSC/10/12 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

Letters to and from the Director of Sustainable Communities regarding the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments on the Community Safety Plan had been received by members of the Committee. The Chairman advised that he intended to monitor performance relating to accident prevention.

SCOSC/10/13 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 May 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/10/14 Petitions

The Chairman announced that no petitions had been received.

SCOSC/10/15 Questions, Statements or Deputations

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 Chairman clarified at the commencement of the meeting that no other members of the public wished to register to speak.

A question was asked concerning the Gypsy and Traveller site consultation process, asking for details of how this consultation document would be considered by the Council following the letter from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The Chairman was also asked to provide

details of the bid submitted to the Homes and Communities Office for the Gypsy and Traveller Site Grant, whether there had been public consultation on this bid and how the recent spending cuts made by the Government would affect this.

The Chairman explained that a bid for traveller site funding of £2.3 million had been submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency on 30 April 2010 to allow for the renovation of the existing permanent pitches; consultation had not been required prior to this bid. The Council had received a letter from the Homes and Communities Agency stating that this fund had been closed as part of the measures to address the national budget deficit and that bid assessment would not be carried out.

The results of the consultation and draft submission Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document was scheduled to be considered by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 September 2010, who would take the consultation responses and emerging local needs into account before making a recommendation to the Executive. The Chairman referred to the Conservative Green Paper "Open Source Planning" and particularly comments contained in the paper relating to travellers. It was commented that further consideration of the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document would be undertaken by the Development Strategy Task Force prior to any report being submitted to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman provided a full response which is appended to these minutes at appendix A.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development commented that the Conservative Green Paper was no longer considered to be relevant following the recent general election and that MPs were working with Councils to develop clear guidance on housing needs and gypsy and traveller provisions. Urgent planning guidance was required from central government and guidance relating to housing numbers. The Portfolio Holder assured members of the public that he had seen many of the consultation responses on the preferred sites and that these would be taken into account when developing the Development Plan Document.

SCOSC/10/16 **Call in**

No items had been called-in for the Committee to consider.

SCOSC/10/17 **Requested Items**

The Chairman reported that no items had been requested under Procedure Rule 3.1 of Part D2 of the Constitution.

SCOSC/10/18 **Civil Parking Enforcement**

The Committee discussed the report of the Assistant Director Highways and Transport. Members noted that the Council had responsibility for on and off street parking and its enforcement, which was managed by the parking service. The parking service aimed to:-

- provide a safe and free-flowing road environment by discouraging injudicious on street parking;
- support economic regeneration and local businesses by providing safe, convenient and competitively priced off street parking;
- promote sustainable transport, and;
- provide residents with a fair opportunity to park within the street in which they live, free from commuters and shoppers.

Vinci Park undertook civil parking enforcement on behalf of Central Bedfordshire and their contract was due to expire 31 December 2010. Members noted that section 5 of the report showed the total amount paid to Vinci Park without VAT, while the income generated included VAT.

Income generated by off street parking in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard was currently used to support the more costly on street enforcement activities in other areas of Central Bedfordshire. A draft parking strategy was being developed and officers sought a steer from the Committee on the direction they would like this to take.

Members of the Committee discussed current problems relating to civil parking enforcement which included the following:-

1. the high cost of Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) monitoring on street parking compared to the relatively low income generated by enforcement of on street parking did not provide value for money;
2. car parks not being properly maintained as the income they generated was diverted to support Civil Enforcement activities for on street parking;
3. high levels of commuter on street parking in Flitwick, Harlington, Leighton Buzzard, Biggleswade and Sandy due to the cost of designated parking at train stations;
4. inappropriate and dangerous parking that prevented free-flowing traffic;
5. insufficient levels of enforcement including that undertaken by police officers;
6. deficient signs and lines preventing Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) being issued, Members stressed the importance of proper signage so that measures could be enforced properly;
7. not being able to enforce disabled bays if a traffic order was not in place;
8. the need to develop greater consistency of parking charges to minimise the confusion caused by varying costs in Council owned car parks;
9. potential mechanisms for Town and Parish Councils to manage their own civil parking enforcement and develop appropriate rural and urban solutions;
10. the use of consultants for developing a Parking Strategy for Central Bedfordshire and consultation with Members during this process;

Members discussed whether automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) was a viable option. This would allow a car to automatically register any cars parked illegally and they would be issued with a PCN by an authorised Civil Enforcement Officer, this would reduce the time CEOs spent on the street and would capture more parking offenses.

The Committee felt that ANPR should be considered for incorporation into the strategy and recommended that the Executive amend the appropriate Traffic Orders to allow possible ANPR and CCTV enforcement.

The Committee felt that the new parking strategy and any contracts for Civil Enforcement needed to recognise that the management of off street parking in towns were very different to the management of on street parking in rural areas, and suggested that CEOs in rural areas could carry out a range of community activities as well as parking enforcement. It was commented that parking enforcement solutions needed to be fit for purpose and should be appropriate for the local area.

The Committee requested that the consultant brief for the Parking Strategy be circulated to Members.

Members suggested that parking tickets should be transferable to other Council owned car parks in the area to allow motorists more flexibility and to promote economic regeneration of town centres.

RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE:

That the Executive be informed of the following views of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the current civil parking enforcement structure and options for future civil parking enforcement to be taken into account in developing a new parking strategy:

- 1. the Council should develop a common policy approach for civil parking enforcement across the whole of Central Bedfordshire and should consider the possibility of having a single paid car parking ticket that would allow you to park in any off street car park in adjacent local car parks;***
- 2. the Council should investigate the possibility of delegating powers to local Town and Parish Councils, where requested, to determine the method of civil parking enforcement in their areas to ensure that schemes were appropriate for the local area in which they were used. This would particularly enable different approaches to be adopted for rural and urban areas;***

- 3. the Council should investigate the feasibility of implementing traffic orders on all blue badge parking bays so that enforcement can be undertaken in an appropriate way. The Council should also review the misuse of blue badges and what measures can be taken where they are used inappropriately;**
- 4. the time for which a civil enforcement officer was required to observe a car as being illegally parked before they could serve a penalty charge notice should be reduced from 5 minutes to 1 minute;**
- 5. the Council should provide a mixture of paid parking bays and parking that was open to free residential permit holders only. It was important to provide an appropriate mix of parking that provided free parking to residents only, free parking in towns to maximise the potential for economic regeneration and provided greater restrictions for on street parking in commuter towns to encourage commuters to use allocated parking (for example at train stations) as opposed to using free on-street parking. A parking strategy for Central Bedfordshire should enable the identification of an appropriate mix of these types of parking depending on the local area;**
- 6. the Chief Constable should be requested to consider the use of enforcement powers by police officers and police community support officers (PSCOs) to assist with keeping roads free from obstruction;**
- 7. the Council should consider extending the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and CCTV enforcement in Central Bedfordshire where this was considered to be an appropriate parking enforcement solution.**

(NOTE: the meeting adjourned at 11:55 and reconvened at 12:10)

SCOSC/10/19 Value for money aspects of leisure and theatre facilities within the leisure management contracts for Central Bedfordshire

Members considered the report of the Director of Sustainable Communities regarding Value for Money aspects of leisure and theatre facilities within the leisure management contracts for Central Bedfordshire. The authority had inherited two contracts from the former South Bedfordshire District Council (SBDC) and Mid Bedfordshire District Council (MBDC) for the management of various leisure centres and the Grove Theatre.

Leisure Connection operated two contracts, one 25 year contract for the Grove Theatre Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre and Dunstable Leisure Centre and one for Houghton Regis Leisure Centres which end in December 2011.

Stevenage Leisure Ltd managed Flitwick Leisure Centre, Saxon Pool and Leisure Centre, Sandy Sport and Community Centre and Biggleswade Recreation Centre. The contracts for these facilities had been extended until 31 March 2012 in order to harmonise the contract end date with Houghton Regis at which time they would all be retendered as one group.

In response to a Member's question the Committee was advised that the government grant of £150,000 to fund free swimming for the over 60s and under 16s would cease from 31 July 2010. The Council could not find the funds needed to support free swimming and, with effect from 1 August 2010 free swimming for over 60s and under 16s would not be available. A member commented on concessionary rates for disabled swimmers and agreed to contact the Head of Leisure Services separately.

Members of the Committee discussed the report with officers and raised a number of concerns regarding the Grove Theatre in Dunstable including the following:

- The management practice of ticket sales which prevents the purchasing of circle tickets before the stalls are full;
- whether the Grove Theatre is still showing films;
- perceived lack of community engagement;
- the perceived high cost of hiring the Grove Theatre for functions
- the concessions policy for community and council use;
- lack of quality in the programming choice and not being varied enough to appeal to many members of the community;
- concerns regarding the length of the contract.

The Head of Leisure Services advised members that the Grove Theatre and each of the leisure centres had Customer Forums where concerns about pricing, ticket sales, publicity and programming could all be raised directly with the theatre or leisure centre. It was agreed that a list of these dates would be circulated with the minutes (attached at appendix B) and that Customer Forums would be publicised in the Members' Newsletter. Members of the Committee asked to see the comments from the previous Customer Forum which were to be circulated to Members outside of the meeting,

Members discussed the budget for the Grove Theatre. The budget for the Grove was broken down into £287,000 management fee plus £14,000 for RPI for Leisure Connection to run the Grove, £33,000 for utilities and a fee to the site management company of £50,000. The 25 year contract stipulated that in the 7th, 14th and 21st year Leisure Connections should approach the Council with investment opportunities or proposals. The Head of Leisure Services advised members that the Grove Theatre was meeting its contractual obligations.

Following a complaint from a member, Leisure Connection had tested the ticket sale policy and advised that there had been 19 enquiries for seats in the Circle, 14 of these people had accepted a seat in the stalls and only 5 had not; however, as the policy of allowing the stalls to fill before the circle had been

raised again as an issue of concern, the Head of Leisure Services agreed to ask the Grove Theatre to re-visit this policy by allowing ticket sales in the circle ahead of the stalls and request the artistic directors of productions for their feedback on the impact this has on the performance.

Members concluded that the Grove Theatre was a valuable asset which they were all proud of and were keen to see being utilised as much as possible.

The Committee discussed the Council's net spend per head of population on theatre and leisure facilities and noted that they were lower than most comparators, it was suggested that this may be due to out sourcing the management of leisure centres and the theatre.

It was noted that any future potential redevelopment of Houghton Regis Leisure Centre and Flitwick Leisure Centre would be accommodated in the negotiation of the new contract. Officers were liaising with Children's Service and Economic Growth regarding the new leisure facility in Houghton Regis as it was planned that this would be complementary to the education vision in the area.

In response to a question the Head of Leisure Services explained that the development of the new leisure facility at Flitwick was part of the capital programme review, and the project had already been successful in securing a grant from the Football Foundation.

Members raised some concerns about the cleanliness of leisure centres and agreed to raise these directly at Customer Forum meetings.

RESOLVED:

- 1. that the Director of Sustainable Communities be requested to discuss with the manager at the Grove Theatre:**
 - a. a review of the policy of not opening circle seats before the stalls are full at the Theatre during performances;**
 - b. how the customer forums could be promoted more widely to act as a means of discussion between the Theatre management, elected Members and the public; and**
 - c. further develop a broader range of programmes and an increase in the level of publicity and programme promotion for those events that are held at the Grove Theatre;**
- 2. that Members be encouraged to attend the customer forums at the theatre and leisure centres in order to discuss their concerns relating to these facilities in Central Bedfordshire;**
- 3. that the Director of Sustainable Communities be requested to ensure that the Council retains flexibility in its contracts relating to the potential future development of new leisure centres in Flitwick and Houghton Regis;**

SCOSC/10/20 Work Programme 2010-11 and the Executive Forward Plan

Members discussed the work programme. Members were asked to let the Chairman, or any member of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Panel, know of any issues that they felt should be considered at future meetings.

It was noted that the meeting in September would take place in two parts, breaking for lunch around 1pm and re-convening at 2pm to review the Highway Programme.

RESOLVED:

that the work programme be noted and received.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.25 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated

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Cllr Nigel Young – statement 22 June 2010
Sustainable Communities OSC

We are pleased to have received a clear message from the new Government that they intend to return to local councils the power to make local decisions on the issues that matter most to our communities.

Central Bedfordshire looks forward to the new legal framework that will make this possible.

For too long, councils have had their authority over the important issues such as planning eroded as unelected and remote regional bodies assumed increasing powers.

At the same time as the real power was being sapped away from us by expensive and undemocratic quangos, Councils have been bombarded with overwhelming regimes of audit and inspection that have by necessity created significant industries in box ticking.

It is great news that many of these restrictions will be removed.

However, we are realists and understand that delivering on this promise will take time. Until the new legal framework is in place, we recognise that we have to work within the existing law of the land.

Anyone who lived through the experience of the early nineties will know how important this is.

During that period, local authorities found themselves in the unenviable position of having no robust planning law with which to contest speculative planning applications or deal with illegal gypsy and traveller encampments.

We have no intention of falling into the trap of allowing this situation to arise in Central Bedfordshire and will work within existing processes until we have more information from the Coalition about the process of change.

I don't believe there is a single councillor at Central Beds who underestimates the strength of feeling that local people have about protecting the quality of life that they treasure.

We have urged the Government to act quickly on their commitment to abolish regional targets and confirm our freedom to act locally. We believe this will happen this Autumn. At that point we will develop our recommendation to the Executive on the way forward through our usual process of the task force and this committee.

And I know that every one of us looks forward to the time when we are able to defend this at a local level!

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Appendix B

Customer Forum Dates

Leisure Connections

Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre	14 September 2010	7pm
Houghton Regis Leisure Centre	22 September 2010	11am
Dunstable Leisure Centre	24 September 2010	1pm
Grove Theatre	29 September 2010	11am

Stevenage Leisure

Saxon Pool and Leisure Centre	13 October 2010	7pm
Sandy Sport and Community Centre	20 October 2010	7pm
Flitwick Leisure Centre	27 October 2010	7pm

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