CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 18 June 2015.

PRESENT

Cllr D McVicar (Chairman)

Cllrs	D Bowater	Cllrs	J Kane
	F Firth		K C Matthews
	C C Gomm		R Morris
	Ms A M W Graham		

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs B Saunders

Substitutes: Cllrs D Shelvey (In place of B Saunders)

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	A D Brown	Deputy Executive Member for Community Services
		T Nicols	Chairman of Licensing Committee
		B J Spurr	Executive Member for Community Services
		B Wells	Deputy Executive Member for Community Services
		J N Young	Executive Member for Regeneration

Officers in Attendance:	Mrs E Anderson	–	Ecologist
	Mr M Coiffait	–	Director of Community Services
	Mr S Mooring	–	Environmental Policy Manager
	Mrs R Preen	–	Scrutiny Policy Adviser

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SCOSC/15/1 **Members' Interests**

None.

SCOSC/15/2 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed new Members of the Committee and provided details of possible changes to Committee dates later in the year. It was confirmed that Anglian Water had agreed to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 August 2015.

SCOSC/15/3 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 March 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/15/4 **Petitions**

None.

SCOSC/15/5 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

SCOSC/15/6 **Call-In**

None.

SCOSC/15/7 **Requested Items**

None.

SCOSC/15/8 **Executive Members Updates**

The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities, Services, confirmed that the Highways contract was on schedule, the appointment of the successful bidder would be recommended to Executive in August 2015 and officially announced in September 2015. The new contract would commence in April 2016 in time for the new financial year.

Due to new legislation from Central Government, the Council could no longer use vehicles fitted with automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) to enforce breaches in parking regulations although limited powers with regards to parking outside of schools still remained. This would result in long term pressures regarding parking enforcement throughout Central Bedfordshire. The Council would be requesting a review of this decision via the Minister for Transport, but in the long term it was necessary for the Council to develop a full parking strategy. In light of this update the Chairman felt it was prudent to add parking pressures to the Committee Work Programme, which was endorsed by the Executive Member and Committee Members.

The Committee were informed that a restructure of house-hold waste recycling centres (HWRCs) was on schedule and that Biggleswade would be the first site developed.

The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities, Strategic Planning and Economic Development, informed the Committee that the Council's Development Strategy had been rejected on the grounds that the Duty to Cooperate had not been met. The Council needed to overcome these challenges in order to move the Strategy forward and further actions would be considered over the next 7 days.

Members queried the progress of neighbouring authorities' strategies and it was confirmed that many were still in the early stages of development. Central Bedfordshire Council had been the first of a group of nine authorities to submit their strategy.

Members also discussed whether this latest decision would affect the Council's existing strategies. Officers confirmed that revised figures provided by the Office of National Statistics suggested there would be an increase in the number of homes Central Bedfordshire would need to provide. It was important that the Council could demonstrate a five-year land supply, which would help to resist hostile planning applications.

SCOSC/15/9 **Q3 Performance Report**

The Committee received the Quarter three performance report for the Community Services and Regeneration and Business Directorates. The Director for Community Services highlighted several aspects of performance that included a decrease in Anti-social Behaviour and the increase in recorded case of domestic violence, due to improved data capturing techniques. It was also highlighted that more than 1,690 full-time jobs had been created by Amazon, Lockheed Martins and at Millbrook.

In light of the report Members expressed frustrations at the timing of the performance reports as the data was historic and to 'note'. Members asked that Officers produce more timely data so that the Committee had as much up to date information as possible.

A Member of the Committee asked what action was being taken to address the skills shortage within the area, with concerns that local businesses would not employ people living in Central Bedfordshire as they did not possess the appropriate skills to fill the jobs available. Members were advised that the Executive Member for Children's Services had been tasked with reviewing this to ensure that young people in Central Bedfordshire were supported to ensure when they left education they were in the best possible position to secure the jobs that were available locally.

A Member of the Committee also asked for details regarding collaboration between the police and the Council and the manner in which crime figures were shared. The Director for Community Services confirmed that the police provided the Council with the necessary data for the directorate to be able to hold them to account for performance. Members suggested that the new policing plan for Bedfordshire be presented to the Committee in due course to enable a review of arrangements for sharing data.

RECOMMENDED

1. **that the Committee acknowledge the continuing overall strong performance in Quarter 3 and that officers further investigate and resolve underperforming indicators as appropriate.**

2. **that the Bedfordshire Policing Plan for Bedfordshire be presented to the Committee in due course.**

SCOSC/15/10 **Nature Conservation Strategy**

The Environmental Policy Manager delivered a presentation regarding the Nature Conservation Strategy and outlined the aims of the strategy, the benefits of this approach and the positive outcomes for Central Bedfordshire as a whole.

In light of the presentation the Chairman suggested that the strategy may be subject to planning and development constraints and asked whether this had been considered. The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities confirmed that the Design Guide met many of the Nature Conservation Strategy's criteria.

Members also raised and discussed the following:-

- The possible benefits of verge cutting programmes, which would support an increase in pollinating insects and wildlife habitat, whilst also reducing costs. Some Members expressed concerns regarding this proposal on the grounds of road safety and whilst the Committee supported the idea in principle, it was felt that road safety should be the overriding priority when considering any reduction in the number of cuts throughout the year.

- Clarification regarding the priority listings within the report and in response the Council's Ecologist confirmed that the Biodiversity Action Plan identified action to avoid the loss of meadows as a priority but said that the maintenance of verges could help counteract this.

- The relationship between local farmers and the Council with regards to shared environmental responsibilities and although payments made to farmers from DEFRA were modest and didn't always encourage them to be as environmentally friendly as they could be, the Council worked very closely and enjoyed a strong relationship with tenant farmers and land owners.

RECOMMENDED that:-

1. **the Committee endorse the draft document and that the Executive adopt the Nature Conservation Strategy.**

2. **the Committee support further investigation and discussion with regards to reducing the number of grass verge cuttings, with priority being given to road safety.**

SCOSC/15/11 **Work Programme 2015/16 and Executive Forward Plan**

RECOMMENDED that the Sustainable Communities OSC Work Programme be agreed subject to the addition of the following items:-

- **The Council's Parking Strategy;**
- **The Highways Contract and changes to procedures under the new provider;**

- **The recent Police restructure and forward plans;**
- **Changes to the Passenger Transport provision.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.02 a.m. and concluded at 11.40 a.m.)