

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 18 January 2011

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

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

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
R A Baker
D Bowater
Mrs C Hegley
M R Jones
Mrs J G Lawrence
D J Lawrence
S F Male
K C Matthews
D McVicar
T Nicols
B J Spurr
Mrs C Turner
B Wells

Officers in Attendance:	Mr G Alderson	Director of Sustainable Communities
	Mr P Cook	Head of Transport Strategy
	Mr B Fong	Interim Senior Finance Manager (Sustainable Communities)
	Mrs J Keyte	Community Safety Manager
	Mr L Manning	Committee Services Officer
	Mr J Partridge	Overview & Scrutiny Officer
	Mr N Rance	Service Development Manager (Environmental and Planning Services)
	Ms S Wileman	Service Development Officer

SCOSC/10/62 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 14 December 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/10/63 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

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None.

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

None.

SCOSC/10/64 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reported that the Committee's Task Force on Parking Charges had held one meeting to date. At that meeting the Task Force had requested additional information be supplied and so a second meeting had been arranged. Unfortunately the second meeting could not be held until 24 January which meant it was not possible for its findings to be reported to the Committee for consideration. As a result the Chairman asked that authorisation be delegated to him to approve the Task Force response and submit it to the Executive as a recommendation. The Committee concurred with this request.

The Chairman then advised that he had agreed to take two items as matters of urgency. The first, which Members were aware of, was the Capital Programme Review, whilst the second dealt with the Directorate's draft budget 2011/12. Members noted that the latter had been referred to the Committee for consideration by the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting the previous day. The Chairman further advised that these urgent items would be considered prior to Item 12 (Quarter 2 Performance Information).

RESOLVED

that the Chairman of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be authorised to approve the response of the Task Force on Parking Charges and, on behalf of the Committee, submit it to the Executive as a recommendation.

SCOSC/10/65 **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/10/66 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

No questions, statements or deputations were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

SCOSC/10/67 **Call-In**

No decisions of the Executive were called-in to be reviewed in accordance with the Call-In Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

SCOSC/10/68 **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/10/69 **Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment, Identified Priorities for 2011 - 2012**

The Committee received a report by the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles which informed Members of the three priorities which had been identified for adoption by the Community Safety Partnership for 2011/12 as a result of the outcome of the Community Safety Strategic Assessment. As Central Bedfordshire Council was a statutory member of the Partnership the priorities had been submitted to the Council for formal approval before they were recommended to the Partnership's Executive Group for adoption. The Committee was therefore asked to comment on the priorities before they were submitted to the Council's own Executive for consideration.

To assist Members in their deliberations a presentation was made by the Head of Community Safety. A copy of the presentation is attached at Appendix A to these minutes. In addition a Bedfordshire Police representative was in attendance to provide additional information and answer queries.

Full consideration of this item took place with Members raising a number of issues for debate. The Committee expressed some concern that the adoption of the suggested priorities would lead to other areas of crime and disorder receiving substantially reduced police attention. In response the Head of Community Safety assured the meeting that work would not cease in these areas. Nonetheless, a Member sought assurance that identifying the priorities

would not lead to other types of offence, such as burglary, being ignored. He also asked if, in view of budget reductions, the police would be able to carry out their duties in an effective manner. In response the police representative stressed that other types of crime would continue to be dealt with and that the police service would continue to provide core services to the public. He added that a current restructuring would ensure that resources were allocated where required.

The importance of communicating both local policing priorities and the strategic priorities of the Community Safety Partnership to residents to enhance awareness was stressed. It was suggested that the Council's 'Let's Talk Together' meetings could be used for this purpose.

Members commented on the absence of weekend support services for offenders released on Fridays and the need to review this situation as a means of reducing reoffending rates. It was suggested that offenders could, instead, be released on Mondays wherever possible. However, the police representative advised that the release of prisoners on Fridays was determined by national policy. The meeting felt that the responsible body should be contacted with a request that the release day for prisoners should be changed to Mondays.

Comment was passed on the absence of any means of judging the performance of priorities due to the absence of targets. However, in response it was stated that performance against targets was reported in the Community Safety Plan and this could be reported to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members commented on the need for effective 'signposting' to encourage victims of domestic abuse to seek support. It was also suggested that practical changes in procedure would help address the occurrence of domestic abuse cases. In particular reference was made to the Middlesbrough initiative, under which both partners signed the tenancy agreement for homes.

A Member suggested that the fear of crime should be recognised as a major concern and adopted as a fourth priority by the Community Safety Partnership. In response the Director of Sustainable Communities assured the Committee that the fear of crime, and its implications for the community, was fully recognised and was given due attention. He stated that evidence of work undertaken to tackle the fear of crime would be submitted to a future meeting.

Concern was expressed by the Chairman that there were no specific priority relating to vulnerable adults and children or sexual violence. In response the Head of Community Safety stated that, whilst there was no specific priority, repeat victims of anti-social behaviour, which was one of the proposed priorities, were often vulnerable so such people would be supported through work on that priority. She added that children would receive support across each of the three identified priorities and other work with vulnerable children would also continue. She also added that sexual violence was a recognised concern and key actions were being developed.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Chairman of the Committee write to the Secretary of State for Justice requesting that offenders be released on Mondays rather than Fridays;**
- 2 that performance against the indicators and targets in the Community Safety Plan be considered by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting.**

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

- 1 that the three Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment priorities identified for 2011/12, as set out below, be approved:-**
 - a) Anti-social behaviour;**
 - b) Reduce reoffending;**
 - c) Domestic abuse.**
- 2 that the Committee's observations regarding the fear of crime be noted.**

SCOSC/10/70 Local Transport Plan 3

The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report by the Portfolio Holders for Sustainable Development and Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles which summarised the draft of the third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) for Central Bedfordshire. The draft Plan, which was set to be adopted in April 2011, covered the fifteen year period up until 2026 and provided a framework for investment in transport locally.

A Member expressed concern that the Development Strategy Task Force had not been given the opportunity recently to consider the detail of the local area transport plans and that the level of consultation with town and parish councils had, in some cases, been inadequate. In response the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development stated that copies of the relevant documents had been made available on the Council's website and in hard copy form at selected locations. In addition consultation events had been held and Members had been invited, though not all had been well attended. With regard to the Task Force the Portfolio Holder commented that he believed its role to be strategic and not one in which its members would focus on detail. The Chairman of the Committee added that both he and the chairman of the Task Force had felt that many meetings of the Task Force had been repetitive in nature.

Whilst welcoming the content of the Plan a Member sought clarification regarding cycle schemes and shared surfaces. In response the Head of Transport Strategy explained that the latter was to be given more prominence in the document before it was considered by the Executive.

Another Member was of the view that it was not possible for the Council to successfully implement the Plan in isolation and stressed the need to work with neighbouring authorities to ensure a degree of policy overlap. In response the Head of Transport Strategy stated that the Council had worked closely with other local authorities, including Luton and Milton Keynes, though he acknowledged the possible need to further extend the area of such working.

The Chairman referred to the need for the Plan to reflect emerging Government policy. The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development acknowledged this requirement, referring particularly to the Localism Bill.

Following comment by the Chairman it was felt that officers should review the references in the Plan to prioritising supported travel for pupils and consider if the use of the word 'subsidised' was, in that context, appropriate.

Whilst having raised comment on some aspects of the Plan's content Members were also of the strong and unanimous opinion that the Plan should be approved and adopted.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive:

- 1 that the Executive be strongly recommended to adopt the vision, objectives, priorities and Implementation Plan of the third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) and the areas of intervention through which these will be achieved;**
- 2 that the officers responsible for drafting the Plan be commended on the consultation and resulting document.**

(Note: The Committee adjourned at 11.35 a.m. for a short break and reconvened at 11.53 a.m.)

SCOSC/10/71 Statutory Review of Fees and Charges and Revenue Income Optimisation Business Cases

The Committee considered a report by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People which sought Members' comments on the report on the revised fees and charges for 2011/12 which had been submitted to, and approved by, the Executive on 11 January. In addition the Portfolio Holder's report contained a summary of the income generation proposals put forward by the RIO Project and the Directorate's response.

a) Fees and Charges

The Committee received a schedule of amendments and revisions proposed by officers to the fees and charges report.

The Portfolio Holder reminded the meeting that each overview and scrutiny committee was to examine only those fees and charges that lay within its area of responsibility.

Discussion then took place during which the Committee expressed the view that consideration should be given to the Council's fees and charges being fully reviewed in the new Council year by a scrutiny task force. The aim of the review should be to ensure that the fees and charges were appropriate, consistent and enabled full cost recovery. It was noted that the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed at its meeting the previous day to establish a task force in the new municipal year to look at this possible review. It was also noted the matter had been reviewed recently by a Member Task Force that met on six occasions and which had informed the setting of the 2010/11 fees and charges structure. The outcomes of the proposed Task Force should enable Members to see if the fees and charges associated to individual services led to full cost recovery.

The Committee commented that all proposed fees and charges should be rounded either up or down as appropriate.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

- 1 that the proposed fees and charges as amended be approved;**
- 2 that the amended fees and charges be rounded up or down.**

RESOLVED

that the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee be formally requested to consider establishing a task force in 2011/12 to review the Council's fees and charges and ensure that, wherever possible, such charges lead to full cost recovery.

- b) RIO Project business cases and pest control fees and charges

Members turned next to consider the related Revenue Income Optimisation (RIO) Project business cases. In addition to the Portfolio Holder's report the Committee received a commentary on the Environmental Business Case together with four options (a-d) relating to pest control fees and charges.

A Member raised concerns regarding charges for internet usage at libraries. It was commented that residents used internet facilities in libraries for work and studying and charging for this service may prevent some disadvantaged users from accessing the internet.

Concerns were also raised in relation to the proposed charges for replacement bins. The report detailed that this charge could be difficult to implement due to the difficulty of apportioning responsibility for loss or damage. It was suggested that any proposals deemed to be difficult to implement or requiring further challenge should not be included in the total known 2011/12 budget savings. However, whilst the Director for Sustainable Communities acknowledged that challenges existed, he felt

the proposal was realistic and achievable. He also commented that an undertaking had been provided by the Directorate to achieve these savings and Members were asked to consider which of the proposed charges they felt were appropriate.

A Member raised the possible introduction of a roof tax and queried why this was not being pursued further. In response the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development explained that this initiative was being driven by Central Government and that further consideration would be given to it at the appropriate time.

The Committee discussed the future use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software as a means of tracking customer usage of services. For example, with regard to waste collection, it was suggested that the use of the CRM system could make it simpler to record the first collection of items such as bulky waste. This would enable the Council to apply charges appropriately for collection of items when additional collections took place.

Members asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People to clarify if the figures presented were net of VAT. The Committee noted that some charges attracted VAT whilst others did not. It was suggested that the Portfolio Holder should ensure that the figures for savings presented to Executive were net of VAT.

The Committee queried why the income from the sale of bins to the public was included in the revenue budget rather than the capital. The Director commented that he would confirm with the Section 151 Officer that this was correct.

A Member queried whether a number of pest control treatments were actually unnecessary and suggested that a small increase in charges would deter spurious requests for treatment. In response the Director of Sustainable Communities suggested that the meeting consider the range of pricing options submitted for its consideration before adding that he believed very few of the treatments were unneeded. He stated, however, that should charges be substantially increased it could lead to individuals attempting to deal with the problem themselves or not taking any action thereby resulting in costs arising elsewhere in the Directorate budget as a result of the need to take enforcement action.

The Committee commented that all fees and charges proposed by the RIO business cases should be appropriately rounded up or down.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

- 1 that, subject to recommendation 2 below regarding the pest control fees and charges, the RIO proposals identified as being pursued by the Directorate to achieve £69,400 known 2011/12 budget savings be approved;**
- 2 that option C presented to the Committee in relation to pest control fees and charges be adopted and, given the need to**

avoid shifting costs to reactive work, the Portfolio Holder should adjust charges for non-public health services with caution, to reduce as far as possible the net expenditure of £23,574.

SCOSC/10/72 **Draft Budget 2011/12**

The Committee was aware that the Chairman, by virtue of the authority vested in him in accordance with Section 100(b)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, had agreed to allow this item to be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency. The Directorate's Draft Budget for 2011/12 had been considered by the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 January 2011 but had then been referred to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order that information could be secured and provided in response to Members' queries raised at that time.

Members were further aware that consideration of this item could not be delayed until the next scheduled meeting of the Committee as the closing date for the receipt of responses to the Executive was 25 January.

The Committee queried why the base budget for 2011/12 was £1.4m greater than the forecast actual for 2010/11. In response the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development advised Members of the legacy arrangements inherited by Central Bedfordshire and explained that the £1.4m variance was a result of several factors including the unexpectedly quick loss of the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant of £700K. Some of this loss would be retrieved in the future through the New Homes Bonus and an increase in planning fees. However, in the current year, and as a short term measure, this amount had been raised from revenue reserves and other sources such as the non-filling of vacant posts.

In response to further questions the Director of Sustainable Communities undertook to respond by providing information to the relevant Portfolio Holders who could then discuss the issues raised with the Chairman of the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

NOTED

the report.

SCOSC/10/73 **Capital Programme Review**

The Committee was aware that the Chairman, by virtue of the authority vested in him in accordance with Section 100(b)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, had agreed to allow this item to be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency. The revised Capital Programme for 2011/12 to 2014/15 had been considered by the Executive on 11 January 2011 and had been referred to overview and scrutiny committees for consultation purposes.

Members were further aware that consideration of this item could not be delayed until the next scheduled meeting of the Sustainable Communities

Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the closing date for the receipt of responses to the Executive was 25 January.

Turning to consider the report a query was raised on how the Football Foundation grant that had been obtained for the provision of football pitches at Flitwick Leisure Centre had been lost. A request was made that the circumstances be reviewed to prevent a similar event occurring in the future. It was further queried why there appeared to be no maintenance costs for the Centre in the revenue or the capital budgets.

In response the Director of Sustainable Communities stated that funds outlined in the capital programme for the leisure centre stock condition/asset management plan were sufficient to carry out essential 'health and safety' works at Flitwick Leisure Centre. He then drew Members' attention to the four options setting out potential ways forward for the Centre which had been included in a separate report to the Executive on 11 January. He added that if it was recommended to proceed with a scheme for redevelopment the Council would have to identify further savings elsewhere in the capital programme. Should the Council decide not to proceed with such a scheme at this time, then it had been recommended that an up to date condition survey be undertaken to determine the essential works required to maintain the Centre in a satisfactory operational condition. The Chairman undertook to examine the financial information relating to Flitwick Leisure Centre and agreed to address these concerns with the Portfolio Holder outside the meeting.

A Member raised the issue of what was considered to be essential expenditure and commented that this should be clearly defined. In connection with this issue he referred to the use of capital funding to upgrade street lighting to EU standards and whether such work was essential. It was suggested that, for example, lighting columns should only be replaced in circumstances where they were unsafe and should not be replaced unnecessarily. The Director of Sustainable Communities advised that the Council had inherited responsibility for 21,000 streetlights. Due to previous underinvestment the stock was aged and suffering from increased rates of failure. The continuing capital programme for street lighting would remedy all problems with the stock over a seven year period. This was based on a survey of all street lamps in 2009/10. The issues to be dealt with included replacement of street lighting columns as they became dangerous, progressively replacing electrical components in otherwise safe columns with high efficiency lanterns and modern control gear. The outcomes would be a safe well maintained stock, greatly reduced levels of failed lights, removal of a revenue pressure and revenue savings. Whilst acknowledging the reasons given for the upgrading the Member remained of the opinion that some of the work was either not required or of an unnecessarily high standard. The Chairman indicated that this matter should be discussed further elsewhere.

NOTED

the revised Capital Programme.

SCOSC/10/74 Q2 Performance Information

The Committee considered a report by the Directorate's Portfolio Holders setting out the Quarter 2 performance for Sustainable Communities.

NOTED

the report.

SCOSC/10/75 Work Programme 2010-2011

The Committee considered a report by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer which asked the meeting to consider the Committee's current work programme for the 2011-2011 municipal year and beyond and sought any comments and amendments. In addition the Committee was asked to consider the Executive Forward Plan and an indicative work programme for the Development Strategy Task Force for the same period.

RESOLVED

that the work programmes for both the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Development Strategy Task Force be approved.

NOTED

the Executive Forward Plan.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 3.15 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated