

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 12 December 2013.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs Ms A M W Graham
R W Johnstone
K C Matthews

Cllrs T Nicols
B Saunders
P Williams

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
D Bowater
A D Brown
C C Gomm
D Jones
A Shadbolt
N J Sheppard
B J Spurr
B Wells
J N Young

Vice-Chairman of the Council
Deputy Executive
Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
Deputy Executive
Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Officers in Attendance: Mr D Bowie – Head of Traffic Management
Mr M Coiffait – Community Services Director
Mr J Partridge – Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Ms S Templeman – Senior Finance Manager
Ms S Wileman – Service Development Manager

SCOSC/13/72 Members' Interests

None.

SCOSC/13/73 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman informed the Committee that as a result to timetable changes for the development of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan a Special meeting of the Committee had been arranged for 14 January 2014 at 2pm to consider proposals prior to a report being submitted to the Executive.

SCOSC/13/74 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

- 1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 October 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the addition of Councillor P Williams in the list of attendees.**
- 2. That the minutes of the Special meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

SCOSC/13/75 **Petitions**

None

SCOSC/13/76 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Chairman informed the Committee that a question had been received from a resident asking why the Development Strategy had not yet been adopted or submitted to the Secretary of State. In response Cllr Young stated that he was frustrated at the lack of progress during 2013, which was due to the need to revisit the population and household projections underpinning the draft strategy as new information had been published by the Office for National Statistics.

Professional consultants had been engaged to support the process in addition to analysts at the Department for Communities and Local Government. Once the Council had produced an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) the Council would consider the implications for the draft strategy. It was possible further changes would be required, which would be reported to the committee in due course. In the meantime, as an emerging strategy produced in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and having been subject to local consultation, the draft strategy was a material consideration and carried some weight in planning decisions, although it did not have formal status.

Members were reassured that the Executive Member was doing all he could to make progress with the Development Strategy but he asked for patience while it was ensured that the evidence base was accurate. Cllr Young also informed the Committee that the preliminary work on the SHMA indicated that that numbers previously proposed in the draft Development Strategy were slightly higher than necessary although that did not mean the Council would now be looking to allocate fewer houses. It was indicated that the required numbers of

homes for Luton had increased substantially. The Council had a duty to consult and further consultation would be required prior to a final Development Strategy being submitted to the Inspector.

SCOSC/13/77 **Call-In**

None.

SCOSC/13/78 **Requested Items**

None.

SCOSC/13/79 **Executive Member Update**

The Committee raised questions with regards Cllr Young's response to the public question on the Development Strategy. Cllr Nicols felt the numbers that had previously been put forward in the Development Strategy had been too low and he commented that the council should be realistic about the numbers of homes that were needed in Central Bedfordshire. Cllr Nicols also stated that he felt Luton had underestimated the level of housing required in their area, Central Bedfordshire should propose a slightly higher figure but it must be realistic and based on the level of need.

In response Cllr Young stated that the numbers of homes needed to take account of the whole SHMA area, Luton's recent decision to consider building east of Luton might ease the need to find space for development. Cllr Young felt the present likely number of homes required in Central Bedfordshire was 28,500 to 32,000.

Cllr Spurr informed the Committee that £800k had previously been allocated during 2013/14 to remedy category two potholes at the same time as category one potholes. This had been a success and Members hoped it would continue in 2014/15. A report on works on potholes had been produced by Amey, which could be provided to Members on request. Cllr Spurr also advised the Committee that announcements would be made regarding Houghton Regis Leisure Centre in January 2014 and a report had recently been approved by the Executive to abandon the procurement on the BEaR project.

In response to further questions the Executive Members commented as follows:-

- The Council would encourage commercial bus operators to consult locally prior to making any changes to service routes.
- Highways would be asked to confirm that they were no longer surfacing concrete roads with tarmac and to provide a response to Councillors.
- Briefing notes and A-Z of services that were provided to Members should have also been circulated to Town and Parish Councils, Executive Members would confirm if this had been the case.
- Further detail on the BEaR Project was available in the report to Executive dated 10 December 2013.
- There were currently no plans to cut subsidies to rural bus services in the budget for 2014/15.

NOTED the update.

SCOSC/13/80 **Parking Strategy**

The Committee received a report regarding the financial performance of the parking service, which had been requested at a previous meeting. The Head of Traffic Management apologised for the delay in providing the report and highlighted the financial performance of the service, which included car park ticket sales, on street resident parking permits, and penalty charge notices (PCNs). In addition the Head of Traffic Management thanked Councillors for their support of the previous transformation of the service. In addition the Chairman commented on the importance of issuing PCNs to ensure the movement of traffic.

In response to the report and further clarification the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- Whether third party payments included costs for bailiffs. The Head of Traffic Management confirmed that third party costs included bailiffs, there were also back office support costs that included maintenance and cash collection. *Following the meeting it was clarified that the third party payments were for works undertaken by Amey.*
- Profit from the Council's off-street car park ticket sales, which went into the Council's general fund, other funding was ring-fenced for highways. Cllr Spurr highlighted that approximately £9 million had been spent on highways during the previous year.
- The numbers of agency staff employed to support PCN appeals. The Head of Traffic Management informed the Committee that agency staff had previously been employed to deal with a backlog of appeals that had arisen due to IT problems. There was presently one FTE member of agency staff supporting appeals.
- The scope that might exist to amend the level of car parking charges in the fees and charges report that would be provided to the Committee in January 2014.
- Whether costs related to parking appeals were charged to the loser. The Head of Traffic Management informed the Committee that the Council paid for an adjudicator to rule in appeal cases, there were no powers to award costs against the Council.

Following the discussion the Head of Traffic Management informed the Committee that a recent policy announcement regards parking on verges was an 'opt-in' scheme. The Council would work with Town and Parish Councils (TPCs) to identify instances where parking on grass verges created a problem. TPCs would take a lead in identifying whether they would wish for parking on specific verges to be made an illegal act.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee consider level of charges for off-street car park ticket sales and suitable car parking charges when they received a report on fees and charges in January 2014.

SCOSC/13/81 Capital Budget Monitoring - Regeneration & Business Services

The Senior Finance Manager provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast capital expenditure and external funding for 2013/14 for Regeneration and Business Support. The attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £1,216k underspend and that funding relating to Pratts Quarry was not envisaged to be totally spent until 2025.

In response to a query the Executive Members commented that an update regards regeneration of Leighton Buzzard South of High Street would be provided at a forthcoming partnership meeting.

NOTED the report

SCOSC/13/82 Revenue Budget Monitoring - Regeneration & Business Services

The Senior Finance Manager provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast revenue outturn for 2013/14 for Regeneration and Business Support. The attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £97k underspend.

NOTED the report

SCOSC/13/83 Capital Budget Monitoring - Community Services

The Senior Finance Manager provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast capital expenditure and external funding for 2013/14 for Community Services. The attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £5,114k underspend.

NOTED the report

SCOSC/13/84 Revenue Budget Monitoring - Community Services

The Senior Finance Manager provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast revenue outturn for 2013/14 for Community Services. The attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £153k underspend.

NOTED the report

SCOSC/13/85 Performance Monitoring

The Director for Community Services advised the Committee of concerns regards performance on serious acquisitive crime and domestic burglaries, many incidents of which could be attributed to a small number of individuals. Improvements in performance were highlighted in relation to road maintenance and the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting. In addition Cllr Young highlighted recent good performance in relation the number of people in employment aged 16 to 64.

In response to questions Cllr Young commented there had been some minor incidents relating to the guided busway, many of which had occurred at the Luton end and further signage may be required. The route for the busway had been designed to make the journey as quick as possible and whilst there were some suggested amendments to the route many of these were not feasible. Extending the busway to Leighton Buzzard was a long-term suggestion that was already being considered.

NOTED the report.

SCOSC/13/86 Work Programme 2013/14 and Executive Forward Plan

The Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Manager introduced the current draft work programme for the Committee. In response a Member requested that a report be received at a future meeting regards the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP). The Councillor raised concerns that the funding available to SEMLEP was significant but there had been no update for Councillors on the progress of SEMLEP or where this money would be spent. The Councillor had concerns that SEMLEP had developed a strategic plan that identified the growth required in the area and the location and extent of that growth. This strategic plan suggested that higher numbers of jobs should be allocated in the Luton area but this was not matched by an equal increase in housing stock to meet the growth in employment. It was requested that the Chairman and/or an officer attend a meeting of the Committee to provide a report and answer questions.

In response Cllr Young agreed that a report should be provided and suggested that Cllr Jamieson, as the Council's representative on SEMLEP should also be invited to attend.

RECOMMENDED that the work programme be approved subject to the addition of an item regarding the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, as detailed in the body of the Minutes.

SCOSC/13/87 Arrangements for Service Areas

The Chairman informed the Committee that by virtue of the Local Government Act (1972) he had agreed to add an urgent item to the agenda regarding the currently proposed service areas of Community Services and Regeneration and Business Support. This item was felt to be of urgency due to the importance of advising Members of current management arrangements so as they would be able to fulfil their roles as locally elected representatives.

The Director of Community Services outlined the management arrangements and agreed to circulate the slides to Members of the Committee outside the meeting.

NOTED the presentation.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.00 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....

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