

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 September 2014.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs D Bowater
C C Gomm
Ms A M W Graham
K C Matthews

Cllrs B Saunders
A Shadbolt
B J Spurr
P Williams

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
I Dalgarno Deputy Executive
Members for Community
Services
M A G Versallion Executive Member for
Children's Services
B Wells Deputy Executive
Member for Community
Services

Officers in Attendance: Mr L Baldry – Deputy Head of Service
Mr P Mason – Head of Highways
Mr S Mooring – Environmental Policy Manager
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Advisor
Ms J Taylor – Project Manager
Ms S Templeman – Senior Finance Manager

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SCOSC/14/29. **Members' Interests**

None.

SCOSC/14/30. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman announced that the Sustainable Communities OSC meeting scheduled for 11 December had been cancelled and the meeting scheduled for 12 March 2015 had been rearranged to 20 March 2015.

Members were reminded that a co-convened meeting of all OSC's would be held after 1pm on Tuesday 23 September 2014 to discuss Fees and Charges. A briefing on the Review of Healthcare Services in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes had also been scheduled for Monday 20 October at 2pm in the Council Chamber.

The Chairman explained that due to Cllr Maudlin having to attend another meeting, item 7 (Call In) would be moved to the end of the agenda to allow time for her to arrive.

SCOSC/14/31. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 June 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/14/32. Petitions

None.

SCOSC/14/33. Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

SCOSC/14/34. Call-In

The Committee received a call-in relating to Barford Road, the hill and High Street, Blunham in order to consider objections to traffic calming measures and waiting restrictions.

Cllr Maudlin addressed the Committee and explained that the Call In was necessary to ensure that the voices of the residents were heard appropriately. Blunham Parish Council had not wanted the consideration of the objections to traffic calming measures and waiting restrictions to be omitted as they were happy with this proposal as it made the path wider and supported the Safer Route to School Strategy along with slowing traffic where necessary.

Cllr Aldis acknowledged the concerns raised by residents but said that it was important for this item to be reinstated. Cllr Spurr also declared that he was willing to accept the Call In and for the decision to be looked at again by the Executive.

RECOMMENDED to refer the Call In back to the Executive Member to reconsider the objections to traffic calming measures and waiting restrictions.

SCOSC/14/35. Requested Items

None.

SCOSC/14/36. Executive Members Updates

Cllr Dalgarno provided an update in relation to the following aspects of Leisure Facilities:-

- Flitwick Leisure Centre was due to open additional Football pitches for participants to play on.
- There would be a leisure event in Tiddenfoot in October.

- Houghton Regis pool had been opened in time for the summer holidays and the remainder of the facility would be open in October 2015, the feedback from the public had been very positive.

The financial position of several leisure centres located within Central Bedfordshire.

In response to a Member query Cllr Dalgarno explained that it was difficult to provide the Committee with an update regarding Sandy athletics track at this time as the application for Academy status was still to be resolved. £180k had been allocated within the budget to resurface the athletics track at Sandy Leisure Centre but this could only be spent if it remained a community facility.

Cllr Wells provided an update in relation the following:-

- £500k had been allocated in the budget to pressure wash town centres, provide additional weed spraying and increase road sweeping.
- The responsibility for maintaining sponsored roundabouts. Rural weed spraying had increased and there would now be full width rural grass cutting four times per year.
- Measures to smarten up signage around Central Bedfordshire would be implemented.

Cllr Young confirmed to the Committee that an update on the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan had been circulated to all Members in response to a recent press release. The Government intended to produce guidance on how Local Authorities should assess the Gypsy and Traveller community's need, which was likely to have an impact on how the Council allocated pitches and where possible settlement envelopes were identified. It was confirmed that a consultation would conclude in November 2014.

SCOSC/14/37. Highways Contract Renewal Project: Authorisation to Proceed

The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport delivered a presentation which proposed to change the current model from a Managing Agent Contract (MAC) provider to a Term Maintenance Contract (TMC) approach. The presentation highlighted that this new approach would provide significant savings and give the Council more control over every aspect of Highways maintenance and management.

The Chairman clarified that the Committee was agreeing a new type of contract, not the detail of the report in the Appendices but whether the Council should retain the current method of contract delivery. The Chairman reiterated there may be a financial gain to the Council if it was agreed to change the type of contract. Public perception regarding who was responsible for road maintenance was very important as he felt that the public liked to see that the Council was accountable and not a contractor. The Chairman stated that the Council was doing well on the Asset Management Plan and so agreeing a new method of working for Highways could work very well.

Cllr Bowater queried whether enough information could be obtained under the proposed TMC approach to answer public queries. The Executive Member for

Community Services explained that under the TMC proposals the Area Stewards would come in house and work directly for the Council, therefore making them more accessible than at present. The MAC contract had worked well for the Council as the roads in Central Bedfordshire were of a high standard and the new contract would further enhance this by providing better innovation with regards to scheduled and future works.

The Committee commented that the performance of Amey had been of a high standard to date. Reassurances were sought that these standards would not deteriorate under a new contract. The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport confirmed that the department would continue to manage quality and standards so as to ensure continuing positive standards and relationships.

Cllr Williams highlighted specific cases where utility companies had undertaken works and upon completion they were not to a standard acceptable to the Council. The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport explained that Amey currently worked hard with the utility companies to ensure their work was of a high standard. In the future the department would consider alternative arrangements to improve this aspect further.

Cllr Graham stated that on occasion Amey had not rectified mistakes leading to the Council being blamed for poor quality. The Assistant Director for Highways and Transport explained that the bringing the inspection function back in house would help to address this challenge.

RECOMMENDED that the Sustainable Communities OSC support the proposal to proceed with a new Highways Contract Renewal Project.

SCOSC/14/38. Climate Change Strategy

The Environmental Policy Manager delivered a presentation regarding the Climate Change Strategy and outlined progress so far which included significant cost savings to the Council and schools along with overall reductions in carbon emissions from Council offices and the schools estate. It was highlighted that there were challenges ahead in reaching the target of a 35% reduction in emissions by 2015 and the Council may have to cut usage at a faster pace.

The Chairman commented that without schools in the scope of the Councils emissions, the Authority was no longer liable for the annual 'carbon tax' of approximately £144K and did not have to cover the other associated costs needed for participation as the Council no longer had a statutory requirement to reduce emissions. It was queried whether the Authority needed a strategy at all and if so whether it needed to move forward in a different direction to provide quantifiable benefits.

In light of the report the Committee discussed the following:-

- Concerns regarding the implications of removing schools from the scope of the strategy In response the Environmental Policy Manager explained there was a financial incentive for large organisations to make changes and improve their emissions output, schools were still an important part of this

and the Council was working closely with them to help achieve greater results.

- Concerns that the strategy had not addressed the issue of possible water shortages by 2020 other than acknowledging it might be a challenge. In response the Environmental Policy Manager explained it had been determined that Greywater systems were not viable and the Housing Standards Review stated it was possible only to have a certain amount of water allocation per person.
- Responsibility for deciding who received high priority for water allocation (for example businesses or rural landowners), which it was confirmed was the water board .
- Performance statistics with regards to emissions, which was shared with other Councils to assess comparable progress.

RECOMMENDED that the Strategy be endorsed however in light of the change in the Council's statutory responsibility, the Committee sought reassurances that in the future any Strategy only be implemented if it would lead to substantial cost savings.

SCOSC/14/39. Q1 Budget Report June 2014

The Senior Finance Manager delivered a presentation regarding the Q1 Budget Report which highlighted several overspends, however these were mitigated by forecast underspends thus balancing the finances overall.

The Chairman highlighted that any underspend would go back into the Corporate Budget and not necessarily spent within department.

NOTED the Report

SCOSC/14/40. Provisional Work Programme 2014/15 and Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan.

RECOMMENDED that the Sustainable Communities OSC Work Programme be agreed.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00a.m. and concluded at 11.50a.m.)