

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Friday, 20 March 2015.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs D Bowater
C C Gomm
Ms A M W Graham

Cllrs K C Matthews
B Saunders
P Williams

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs A Shadbolt
B J Spurr

Members in Attendance: Cllrs A D Brown Deputy Executive
Member for
Regeneration
I Dalgarno Deputy Executive
Members for Community
Services
P Hollick Chairman of General
Purposes Committee
J G Jamieson Leader of the Council
and Chairman of the
Executive
Mrs P E Turner MBE Executive Member for
Partnerships
B Wells Deputy Executive
Member for Community
Services
J N Young Executive Member for
Regeneration

Officers in Attendance: Mr A Davie – Development Infrastructure Group
Manager
Mr J Longhurst – Director of Regeneration and
Business
Ms K McFarlane – Development Infrastructure Group
Manager
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Ms S Templeman – Senior Finance Manager

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SCOSC/14/83. Members' Interests

None.

SCOSC/14/84. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

None.

SCOSC/14/85. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 February 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/14/86. Petitions

None.

SCOSC/14/87. Questions, Statements or Deputations

The Chairman confirmed that three members of the public had registered to speak at the commencement of Item 10.

SCOSC/14/88. Call-In

None.

SCOSC/14/89. Requested Items

None.

SCOSC/14/90. Executive Members Updates

The Executive Member for Regeneration informed the Committee that a Judicial Review regarding land north of Luton would be held at the High Court in May 2015.

The Committee were also informed that the deadline for appeal of the variation of conditions placed on the application at the White Lion retail park was 6pm on 20 March 2015 and that construction of the A5/M1 link road was underway.

SCOSC/14/91. Anglian Water/Planning Update

The Chairman invited three speakers to address the Committee in relation to water supply problems in the Moggerhanger area. The speakers raised issues that in summary related to the following:-

- Residents suffering with water backwash and sewage.
- Inadequate surface drainage causing flooding in certain areas.
- Low to non existent water pressure.
- The impact of burst water mains elsewhere in Central Bedfordshire impacting on Moggerhanger.

- The lack of feedback provided by Anglian Water to planning applications in the area that would impact on the supply of water to Moggerhanger.
- The local water infrastructure was not fit for purpose and could not cope with further housing development.
- Public health concerns caused by improper water supply and service.
- An investment of £4000 that had been made to improve the village hall directly related to inadequate water supply infrastructure.

In response the Development Infrastructure Group Manager explained that residents had raised concerns at a planning Committee in 2014 regarding development in the Moggerhanger area. The planning department had approached Anglian Water on three occasions during the life of the application but they had not objected to the development and felt that the existing water infrastructure could cope with the additional demand. Anglian Water had provided the Committee a written response detailing their findings relating to Moggerhanger and had agreed to attend a future meeting, providing the Council with a presentation regarding their processes.

The Chairman extended the Committee's sympathy to the residents of Moggerhanger and asked if there was any recourse to action with regards to future applications in a known problematic area. In response the Ward Member for Northill explained they felt that the problem was not unique to Moggerhanger and that other areas were similarly affected. It was suggested that the Council would find it difficult to refuse planning permission as Anglian Water had not highlighted any concerns regarding the water supply.

Members of the Committee expressed their disappointment that Anglian Water could not attend the meeting and suggested that residents from other areas should be involved in future discussions. It was also suggested that the Council approach this issue from a Health and Safety perspective, not just from the perspective of planning and development.

The Executive Member for Regeneration offered support to residents who wished to challenge Anglian Water further and explained that the local MP was aware of the problems and could be called upon to lend support in this matter. The Leader of the Council also suggested that Anglian Water were failing in their duty to provide an acceptable level of service and highlighted that if the level of service was felt to be substandard then the regulator could intercede.

RECOMMENDED that the Director for Regeneration and Business write to Anglian Water inviting them to the next Committee meeting and that he liaise with the Director for Community Services with regards to health and safety concerns.

SCOSC/14/92. Regeneration and Business Forward Plan

The Director for Regeneration and Business delivered a presentation setting out the approach and focus of the Directorate including what had been

achieved and delivered in 2014/15 and detailing proposed future delivery for 2015/16 and beyond.

In light of the presentation Members raised queries relating to the following:-

- The challenge of attracting new businesses to the area and promoting the identity of Central Bedfordshire. The Director for Regeneration and Business highlighted the strong network links in Central Bedfordshire and that areas were well connected, which was attractive to new businesses looking for an area in which to invest. There was also a strong identity in Central Bedfordshire with regards to Market Town status, which was a positive selling point for the area.
- The levels of investment in Flitwick due to the apparent lack of development over the previous 10 years. The Director for Regeneration and Business confirmed that talks with Network Rail were underway to encourage investment in the area. The Business Investment Group Manager also explained that the Directorate were liaising with the Town Council and Clerks in order to better understand their requirements and how the Council could work differently to improve the area as it was acknowledged that it was necessary to attract people and businesses into Central Bedfordshire towns. The Executive Member for Regeneration also explained that more control was being taken to ensure schemes were delivered. Many historic plans had not been realistic or deliverable, as a result the Council were streamlining the process to focus on those deliverables that provided the best outcomes for Central Bedfordshire.
- Whether there were enough skilled workers to satisfy the housing, building and scaffolding market and whether young people were being taught these particular skills in schools and colleges. The Director for Regeneration and Business acknowledged that the people supply chain was a challenge and there was a shortage of skilled labour. The Executive Member for Regeneration also emphasised the importance of encouraging young people to take up vocational courses to promote an appropriate mix of skills for the labour market. The Business Investment Group Manager confirmed that apprentice numbers were growing and additional funds were being provided from Central Government to support this.

NOTED the presentation and the strong position of the Directorate.

SCOSC/14/93. Q3 Budget Report

The Senior Finance Manager delivered a presentation to the Committee, detailing areas of underspend, overspend and outstanding debt for the Council and highlighted that a shortfall in parking income would be offset by savings in staff salaries and library services.

Concerns were raised that although the income from planning applications was welcome, some highly experienced planning officers were leaving the authority. The Executive Member expressed a desire to understand why they were leaving and for the Council to do more to retain highly qualified staff.

RECOMMENDED that the strong financial performance of the Council be acknowledged.

SCOSC/14/94. Work Programme 2015/16 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 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.05 p.m.)