

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 17 March 2016.

PRESENT

Cllr D McVicar (Chairman)
Cllr B Saunders (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs D Bowater
F Firth
C C Gomm
Ms A M W Graham

Cllrs J Kane
K C Matthews
R Morris

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs A D Brown	Deputy Executive Member for Community Services
	J Chatterley Mrs S Clark	Deputy Executive Member for Regeneration
	E Ghent	Deputy Executive Member for Adult Social Care
	Mrs S A Goodchild C Hegley	Executive Member for Social Care and Housing
	P Hollick	Chairman of Social Care, Health & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee
	J G Jamieson	Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive
	R W Johnstone D Shelvey B J Spurr	Executive Member for Community Services
	T Swain M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Education and Skills
	B Wells	Deputy Executive Member for Community Services
	J N Young	Executive Member for Regeneration

Officers in Attendance:	Mrs S Childerhouse	– Head of Public Protection (North)
	Mr M Coiffait	– Director of Community Services

Mr P Cook	– Assistant Director Highways & Transport
Mr A Davie	– Development Infrastructure Group Manager
Mr B Finlayson	– Head of Capital Projects
Ms C Frost-Bryant	– Interim Local Planning Manager
Mrs S Frost	– Interim Head of Service for Place Delivery
Mr J Goody	– Housing Development Officer
Ms T Harris (Waste)	– Head of Waste Services
Mr P Keates	– Head of Development and Regulation
Ms L Kitson	– Green Infrastructure Co-ordinator
Mr S Mooring	– Environmental Policy Manager
Mrs R Preen	– Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Ms S Templeman	– Senior Finance Manager

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SCOSC/15/63 **Members' Interests**

None.

SCOSC/15/64 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Committee were informed that at a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Panel (OSCP) a new approach had been agreed in relation to OSC procedures, that a more concise and targeted approach would be adopted and that Executive Member updates would be tailored to brief updates centred around policy and strategy.

SCOSC/15/65 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 January 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/15/66 **Petitions**

None.

SCOSC/15/67 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

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

SCOSC/15/68 **Call-In**

None.

SCOSC/15/69 Requested Items

None.

SCOSC/15/70 Executive Members Updates

The Executive Member for Community Services provided an update into a criminal investigation, the outcome of which resulted in the Council receiving funds from goods seized. In addition, the new Flitwick Leisure Centre had recently opened to the public, the feedback of which was wholly positive.

The Executive Member for Regeneration outlined the positive economic growth in the area, the increase in employment locally and the ongoing interest from businesses in occupying units at the White Lion retail park.

SCOSC/15/71 Downs Road One-Way Scheme - Report on Consultation

The Chairman invited four speakers to address the Committee in relation to the proposed removal of the one way system in Downs Road, Dunstable. The speakers against the proposals raised issues that in summary related to the following:-

- The volume of cars using the road prior to the implementation of the one way system, described as a 'rat run' and the subsequent improvements to safety, pollution and quality of lives since the scheme was adopted.
- That the one way system had the desired effect of dispersing traffic across the area the outcome of which was that the volume of cars was not centred on one road.
- Concerns that residents from other areas were unaccepting of a compromise of shared traffic volumes.
- That any decision to remove the one way system be delayed until a full traffic assessment had taken place, due in 2017 during the de-trunking of the A5.
- Concerns that residents of Downs Road had not been informed of a recent public meeting.
- That traffic camera data figures were misleading.
- That cyclists and children had been vulnerable to dangerous driving in Downs Road prior to the one way system.
- That the proposal to remove the one way system was based on a flawed report.
- That the consultation had been too simplistic.
- That funds be put to better use and improvements made on existing measures already in place.

The speaker in favour of the proposals raised issues that in summary related to the following:-

- That there was universal support for the removal of the one way system in the areas surrounding Downs Road.
- That there were no unsustainable traffic volumes in Dunstable, including Downs Road.

- That the one way system had been designed to deter 'rat runners' but it hadn't reduced the traffic within the wider area, only dispersed it to other roads.
- Concerns at the suggestion to defer the decision until 2017.
- That the Council take action based on the majority view.

In light of the comments the Ward Member for Dunstable Manshead acknowledged the valid concerns of the speakers, highlighting the current and future costs of any change and the impact of any decision on all residents.

The Ward Member for Dunstable Central voiced disappointment that costs had not been factored into the report and highlighted concerns that moving the volume of traffic from one road to others had not solved the problem, simply moved it elsewhere. In addition there was no evidence that the de-trunking of the A5 in 2017 would have any effect on traffic in the area.

The Executive Member for Regeneration informed the Committee that the Freight Strategy had recently been implemented which would alleviate heavy goods vehicles from the area with immediate effect. In addition the Directorate were evaluating particularly difficult areas, the intention being to introduce measures to relieve traffic further.

Members discussed the proposed recommendations and the impact each option could pose, clarifying the different choices available to them.

RECOMMENDED that the Chairman of the Traffic Management Committee defer any decision until after the de-trunking of the A5 and a full traffic assessment undertaken.

SCOSC/15/72 The Environmental Framework

The Green Infrastructure Officer delivered a presentation which outlined details of the Environmental Framework, how it could be applied, the importance for Central Bedfordshire and how it demonstrated the delivery of national policy and statutory requirements, meeting targets within the 5 Year Plan in relation to ensuring Central Bedfordshire was a great place to live. The Committee were informed that a consultation was underway with targeted stakeholders, including the public.

In light of the presentation Members discussed key elements including any future strategy with regards to water efficiency.

RECOMMENDED:-

- 1. That the Executive endorse the document as technical guidance for the provision of interpretation of the Council's environmental evidence base.**
- 2. That a report regarding water efficiency be delivered at a future meeting.**

SCOSC/15/73 **Q3 Budget Monitoring Presentation**

The Senior Finance Manager delivered a presentation detailing the financial position of the Directorate along with areas of underspend, overspend and outstanding debt for Quarter 3, highlighting that School's Transport had recently become the responsibility of the Community Services Directorate, with figures reflecting the change.

NOTED the presentation.

SCOSC/15/74 **Quarter 2 Performance Report**

The Director for Community Services introduced the Q2 Performance Report, highlighting key elements which included a focus on serious acquisitive crime and a need to engage young people in order to minimise anti social behaviour (ASB). Concerns regarding a recent police restructure and the resource available to tackle these issues, with the Community Safety Partnership suggesting a possible rise in ASB over the summer of 2016. In addition the Director highlighted the strong performance in relation to satisfaction with Highways and Waste.

The Development Infrastructure Group Manager highlighted progress in relation to Superfast Broadband, fluctuations in staff figures across the Planning department and the positive direction of travel in relation to youth unemployment figures.

In light of the report Members discussed the need to ensure Parish Councils had access to relevant crime figures.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee acknowledge the continuing overall strong performance in Quarter 2 for the indicators being used to help support monitoring of progress against the Medium Term Plan priorities and that officers further investigate and resolve underperforming indicators as appropriate.

SCOSC/15/75 **Waste Procurement Strategy Update**

The Head of Waste Services delivered a presentation which outlined measures to procure waste disposal services and develop the required waste facilities for the future management of household waste in Central Bedfordshire, securing the necessary contracts and delivering the required infrastructure in order to meet demand.

In light of the presentation Members queried whether landfill tax would impact Council finances and whether collections to green and food waste would be unified across north and south Central Bedfordshire. In response the Head of Waste Services confirmed that the impact of landfill tax on the Council had reduced due to treatments turning black bin waste into fuel rather than going to landfill. There were difficulties in harmonising waste collection across the area due to the prohibitive costs involved.

In response to a Member query the Head of Capital confirmed that although there had been a few complaints during the time the Biggleswade Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) had been closed, the response from residents since the reopening of the site had been wholly positive. The Head of Waste confirmed that HWRC's would accept more recyclables than they had previously.

NOTED the presentation and the positive outcomes due to the redevelopment of the first HWRC in Biggleswade.

SCOSC/15/76 **Planning Enforcement Review**

The Head of Development and Regulation delivered a presentation which outlined those recommendations the Directorate had begun to implement in relation to Planning Enforcement and as requested by the Committee at a previous meeting.

In light of the presentation Members acknowledged that some progress had been made and that further improvements to the service would emerge over time.

RECOMMENDED that a progress monitoring report be delivered to the Committee in October 2016.

SCOSC/15/77 **Parking Strategy Overview**

The Assistant Director (AD) for Highways and Transport delivered a report outlining the progress and vision of the Parking Strategy, highlighting the policies which would help shape strategic development.

In light of the report Members expressed concerns regarding parking on verges, the damage caused as a result and the measures available to minimise the issue. In response the AD for Highways and Transport agreed that the financial implications and current measures would be assessed in order to ensure the best outcomes. The Director for Community Services confirmed that there were no additional financial implications for the strategy and that it was part of the existing budget.

A Member expressed the view that the strategy was centred around retail and urban need with not enough focus on rural areas. In response the AD for Highways and Transport cited similarities between urban and rural parking problems and the lack of parking spaces across the region, whereby a discussion arose around the need for better parking provision for schools and the need to encourage walking and cycling where possible in order to reduce the number of cars. Members agreed that improved communication with Network Rail could result in more parking provision at local train stations.

Clarification was sought with regards to the need for Park and Ride within Central Bedfordshire and it was confirmed that the current need was not high. The AD also confirmed measures relating to the graduated approach taken with regards to enforcement, that letters would be sent to offenders before full enforcement action was taken.

RECOMMENDED that an additional report be delivered at a future meeting.

SCOSC/15/78 Passenger Transport Strategy - Public Transport

The Head of Public Protection and Passenger Transport delivered a report which highlighted the three areas which would be subject to public consultation; they included subsidised bus routes, concessionary travel and Community Transport. Market research would be undertaken which would provide a detailed picture of need across Central Bedfordshire. The Director for Community Services highlighted the need to eliminate the disparity with regards to process and outcomes across the area.

Members expressed concerns that older people may struggle to access online applications and it was confirmed that paper application forms would still be made available upon request.

In response to a Member query it was confirmed that that the Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process would highlight the need for a Sunday service in any given area and if it were deemed necessary the service would be provided.

RECOMMENDED:-

- 1. That the Committee approve the policies relating to Subsidised Bus, Services, Concessionary Travel and Community Transport set out in Appendix A for public consultation.**
- 2. Approve the use of a Dynamic Purchasing Scheme (DPS) to procure transport providers.**

SCOSC/15/79 Affordable Housing Guidance Note (South Central Bedfordshire)

The Local Planning and Housing Manager delivered a presentation relating to the Affordable Housing Guidance note which outlined the purpose of the guidance, the evidence of the approach, that the guidance would support planning decisions, that it was compliant with national policy, the risks of not adopting the guidance and next steps which included an Executive decision on 5 April 2016. That the target and threshold would be carried forward into the emerging policy in the new Local Plan.

In response to a Member query the Local Planning and Housing Manager explained the reasons why the guidance for the South of Central Bedfordshire did not extend to the North. This was due to an adopted development plan policy in the north that sought a target in excess of the identified affordable housing need. There was therefore no advantage in extending the guidance to the north when a plan policy carried greater weight in decision making than planning guidance. In addition and with regards to any impact of the change to existing but as yet undetermined applications, the approach would be determined on a case by case basis until eventually all current cases had transitioned onto the proposed levels.

The Chairman queried whether developments of just 4 units would provide one affordable home as stated in the guidance and the Executive Member for

Regeneration confirmed that in exceptional circumstances, a commuted sum would be sought from the developer to provide an off-site contribution.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee endorse the proposals and a decision taken by the Executive.

SCOSC/15/80 **The Housing Strategy**

The Principal Housing Officer delivered a presentation on the Draft Housing Strategy for 2016-2021 outlining the Council's vision and plans for housing in Central Bedfordshire. The Committee were provided details of the approach to date, the housing challenges faced within Central Bedfordshire, the quota of need of affordable housing, also factoring in the need of neighbouring authorities.

Members agreed the importance of ensuring developers met the need of the area and the Executive Member confirmed that the Directorate had undertaken work in order to gather evidence regarding local housing requirements.

Members raised concerns that many local people would not be able to afford those homes within the affordable housing bracket as the price was still very high.

In response to a Member query the Executive Member for Regeneration confirmed that in relation to Council owned homes, the Council charged rents in accordance with government allowances.

NOTED the presentation and the proposed public consultation.

SCOSC/15/81 **Work Programme 2016/17 and Executive Forward Plan**

RECOMMENDED that the Work Programme be agreed subject to the addition of the following:-

- 1. Water Efficiency Report in August 2016**
- 2. Parking Strategy Update in August 2016**
- 3. Planning Enforcement Performance Monitoring Report in October 2016**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 2.25 p.m.)