

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 24 November 2016.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs Mrs A Barker
D Bowater
J Kane

Cllrs K C Matthews
R Morris
G Perham

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Ms A M W Graham

Members in Attendance: Cllrs I Dalgarno Deputy Executive
Member for Community
Services
C C Gomm Executive Member for
B J Spurr Community Services
B Wells Deputy Executive
Member for Community
Services
J N Young Executive Member for
Regeneration

Officers in Attendance: Mr M Coiffait – Director of Community Services
Mr P Keates – Head of Development and
Regulation
Mr J Longhurst – Director of Regeneration and
Business
Mr S Mooring – Environmental Policy Manager
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Advisor

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SCOSC/16/38 Members' Interests

None.

SCOSC/16/39 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman informed the Committee that Councillor Barker would be replacing Councillor Maudlin as a Member of the Committee.

SCOSC/16/40 Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 September 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to amending Councillor Barker's title, incorrectly listed as Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

SCOSC/16/41 Petitions

None.

SCOSC/16/42 Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

SCOSC/16/43 Call-In

None.

SCOSC/16/44 Requested Items

The Environmental Policy Manager delivered a verbal update regarding the Council's future approach to water efficiency in Central Bedfordshire in light of growth in the area. The Committee were informed of a water cycle study for the region and that policies covering all aspects of water efficiency were currently being drafted and would form part of the Local Plan.

In light of the update Members discussed the following:-

- The need to encourage water saving initiatives both on small and larger scales and to work closely with strategic partners, specifically the Water Board to continue recent improvements in communication.
- The need for all three regional Water Boards to be included as statutory consultees on planning applications and whether a motion to Council to change the current policy would be appropriate.

RECOMMENDED that a full report be brought at a later date.

SCOSC/16/45 Executive Members Updates

The Executive Member for Community Services congratulated the emergency planning team regarding their response to a recent gas supply problem locally. A Gypsy and Traveler liaison officer had recently been appointed, tasked with tackling illegal encampments. The Committee were also informed the Woodside Link would be completed in January 2017.

The Deputy Executive Member for Community Services provided details of the calendar of works scheduled for the Household Waste Recycling Centers within Central Bedfordshire.

The Executive Member for Regeneration highlighted the benefits of speculative building works and the strong position in relation to local employment figures.

SCOSC/16/46 Planning Enforcement

The Head of Development and Regulation delivered a presentation which outlined progress regards changes to the Planning Enforcement Service, taking into account previous Committee recommendations, several of which had been implemented.

In light of the presentation Members discussed the following:-

- The benefits of a full time team leader position.
- Improvements in communication with Town and Parish Councils and Ward Members.
- The possible budget pressure resulting from the re-introduction of a dedicated out of hours service, due to the low volumes of reported breaches.
- Concerns that all reported cases were considered breaches until a full investigation had been carried out and that information was placed into the public domain immediately.
- That the Council should seek to take far more robust measures in relation to planning breaches and using injunctive measures where enforcement powers were not sufficiently rapid.

RECOMMENDED that the changes identified within the updated Planning Enforcement Plan be agreed by the Executive, ensuring the appropriate input via the legal and finance departments and any noted recommendations from the sub group delegated to review the service be taken into consideration prior to an ultimate Executive decision.

SCOSC/16/47 Economic Insight (2016)

The Economic Policy Manager delivered a presentation which outlined economic growth within Central Bedfordshire, highlighting the impact of the recent EU referendum, unemployment, the barriers to the labour market and those groups struggling to gain employment and the possible future impact of the introduction of Universal Credit. Concerns were raised with regards to the loss of business and revenue to areas outside of the region and figures were falling in relation to entrepreneurial business rates.

In light of the presentation Members discussed the following:-

- The need to ensure a strong work/life balance for residents and to maximise connectivity.
- The importance of effective Broadband connections for those business and individuals working within Central Bedfordshire.
- The link with the All Age Skills Strategy and the need for young people to be work ready including appropriate support for the growth of apprenticeships.
- That the visitor economy and leisure would grow in the near future with the current position for hotels and conferencing strong.
- The barriers for some business to do business with Central Bedfordshire, which were rents, rates, parking, public transport and connectivity.

NOTED progress to date and the strong economic position of Central Bedfordshire.

SCOSC/16/48 Q1 Budget Monitoring Reports

The Directors for Community Services and Regeneration outlined the financial position for their directorates at Quarter 1, detailing areas of underspend and overspend.

NOTED the forecast revenue outturn position and recommend to the Executive that officers continue to look for compensatory savings in order to deliver a balanced budget.

SCOSC/16/49 Work Programme

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

- **Schools Parking Task Force report – 12 January 2017**
- **Local Plan – 12 January 2017**

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