

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 13 September 2018.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs D Bowater
F Firth
Ms A M W Graham

Cllrs K C Matthews

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs C C Gomm
J Kane
Cllr M Liddiard

Substitutes: Cllrs G Perham, substitute for J Kane
M A G Versallion, substitute for M Liddiard

Members in Attendance: Cllrs I Dalgarno Executive Member for
Community Services
Chairman of Children's
Services Overview and
Scrutiny Committee
K Ferguson
Mrs S A Goodchild
B Wells Deputy Executive
Member for Community
Services
J N Young Executive Member for
Regeneration

Officers in Attendance: Mr S Barratt – Community Safety Operations
Manager
Mr M Coiffait – Director of Community Services
Ms C Frost-Bryant – Head of Strategic Growth
Mr P Keates – Head of Development and
Regulation
Steve Lakin – Principal Highways Officer
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Advisor

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SCOSC/18/95 Members' Interests

None.

SCOSC/18/96 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised the Committee that item 11 would be moved to the beginning of the agenda in order to facilitate the public speakers who were in attendance.

SCOSC/18/97 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 July 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/18/98 **Petitions**

None.

SCOSC/18/99 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Committee were advised that one written statement had been submitted and that two members of the public had registered to speak at the commencement of Item 11.

SCOSC/18/100 **Call-In**

None.

SCOSC/18/101 **Requested Items**

None.

SCOSC/18/102 **Executive Members Updates**

The Executive Member for Regeneration delivered a presentation which outlined progress to date in relation to phase one of the Dunstable High Street regeneration project and anticipated works for phase two. A detailed report on phase two would be delivered to the Committee at a future meeting. Members were appraised of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway, with the preferred route corridor announced on 12 September 2018 following an extensive consultation. In response to a Member query the Head of Strategic Growth advised of the progress to date in relation to the Local Plan. Currently there was no timetable for examination of the Plan by the Planning Inspector. The Council was continuing to work closely with all neighbouring authorities, demonstrating its commitment to its duty to cooperate.

The Executive Member for Community Services provided an update on works to Dunstable leisure centre which were progressing well and within the expected timescales. Dunstable library would operate reduced opening hours due to their move to a new site in December 2018.

SCOSC/18/103 **Parking Management Strategy**

The Director for Community Services delivered a presentation which set out the policies required in order to create a new parking strategy for Central Bedfordshire. There was a need to consider the landscape of towns and villages within the region and the impact of the increase in car use and ownership. Following the outcome of a public consultation there was a requirement to revisit school travel plans in order that parking around schools could be managed more effectively. There was also a requirement to provide bespoke solutions for verge parking as there were differing needs in each area. It was vital that the Council took a proactive approach to the issue, that stakeholder expectations were managed and that timelines for delivery were clear.

In light of the presentation Members discussed the following in summary:-

- The importance of supporting residents where parking was particularly challenging and the use of an area based, flexible approach where the design of a town or village did not facilitate major changes in the delivery of future parking solutions.
- The need for greater partnership working with the police to address instances of footway parking and obstructions.
- The need for additional lorry parks to address the issue of lay-by parking and effluence and waste being deposited in residential areas.
- The need for a joined-up approach with planners to mitigate parking around schools and the importance of any concerns in this regard being reported so that they could be addressed in a timely manner.
- That timelines for delivery be made available via the Minutes of the meeting.
- The importance of progressing the implementation of those residential parking zones (RPZ) that had already been agreed.
- That need to give consideration be given to one way systems where appropriate.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee support the next steps as set out within the presentation.

SCOSC/18/104 **Unauthorised Encampments**

The Chairman invited two public speakers, Mrs P Mitchell and Mr M Gibson to address the Committee, who raised the following points in summary:-

- Examples of inappropriate development on greenbelt land and a subsequent lack of enforcement. The speaker requested that the Committee receive details of instances of non-enforcement on greenbelt land.
- A specific example of hardstanding created on a Traveller encampment however works continued with no enforcement action taken.
- The Committee ought to request a table of unauthorised encampments within Central Bedfordshire, specifically referencing sites at Kingswood, Tilsworth.
- The lack of improvement in the Council's approach to planning enforcement despite a report in 2015.
- The importance of addressing challenges at a particular site in Billington.
- The timeline for the recruitment of additional enforcement officers.

- Whether the Committee would support the implementation of a cross directional steering group comprising officers of the Council, community experts and appropriate partners and that any such group should report to the Executive.

The Executive Member for Community Services delivered a report which outlined the differences between unauthorised Traveller encampments and breaches of planning enforcement regulations. Members were advised of the legal obligations faced by the local authority and the need to support all residents, including those from the Gypsy and Traveller community. Council leaders met regularly with local MP's in order to discuss changes in legislation to try and address the problems faced by unauthorised encampments and the Executive had supported the formation of a coordinated group to work with Gypsy and Traveller community, recognising the need for joined up approach.

The Chairman advised the Committee that a written statement had been received referencing Appendix B of the report and requesting that a similar court injunction as applied in Marston Moretaine be obtained in order to address instances of unauthorised encampments in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. In response the Executive Member provided details of the differences in approach to challenges faced in Marston Moretaine and the agreed methodology in relation to the court injunction, highlighting that there was still a need to undertake more work within Dunstable and Houghton Regis before a similar injunction could be applied for.

In light of the report Members discussed the following in summary:-

- The differences between unauthorised encampments and breaches to planning conditions on established sites.
- The enforcement process did not favour rapid action and often involved the planning inspector or the courts, with members of the public often reticent to provide the courts with the required evidence in order to progress a case.
- The need to consider temporary stopping sites within the region and the disparity of facilities across the country in relation to Gypsy and Traveller provision.
- The changes in the Government definition of the ethnicity of Gypsies and Travellers and the associated number of pitches local Councils were required to make provision for as a result.
- That there were no specific sites identified within the Local Plan and that having demonstrated the ability to meet the 5-year land supply there were no plans to allocate sites at this stage. Instead sites would arise as a result of windfall development. In response to a Member query the Executive Member confirmed that a specific application refused for six pitches would not be treated as a windfall site and that any development on that specific land would continue to be refused with enforcement action taken as appropriate.
- Concerns that the process involved in reporting instances of unauthorised encampments was laborious and did not meet the needs of local residents.
- The need to appropriately assess areas experiencing instances of unauthorised development, the associated impact on crime and the need to prioritise as necessary.

- That the Customer Services team would be working closely with the directorate in order to alleviate pressures on front line staff in relation to call volumes received by the Council regarding unauthorised encampments.
- That local MP's were lobbying Government in order to make trespass a criminal rather than civil offence, thus increasing the powers of the police.
- The need to carefully consider all equalities implications in relation to a protected ethnic group.

RECOMMENDED:-

- 1. That the Committee support the directorate's continued efforts to address unauthorised encampments within Central Bedfordshire.**
- 2. That the Executive continue to work closely with local MP's in order to bring about changes in Government legislation and increase the powers of the local authority and the police.**
- 3. That the Committee include an item in its future work programme encompassing a wider report on unauthorised development and planning enforcement.**

SCOSC/18/10 Work Programme 2018/19 and Executive Forward Plan

AGREED the Committee Work Programme subject to the addition of reports as follows:-: -

- **Planning enforcement and unauthorised development, to include:-**
 - i. The consideration of a Gypsy and Traveller steering group including as permanent members at least two informed residents and that Ward Members be made aware of the timings of meetings and invited where appropriate.**
 - ii. That ownership of sites be verified.**
 - iii. That occupants of sites be verified.**
 - iv. Include the rationale behind a decision not to remove unoccupied and unauthorised caravans at Kingswood, Tilsworth.**
 - v. To provide the total numbers of authorised and unauthorised developments.**
 - vi. The timeline for planning enforcement action be included.**

The Committee determined that all future relevant reports presented to the Committee ought to detail all instances of planning enforcement or unauthorised development within Central Bedfordshire and not just those cases relating to the Gypsy and Traveller community.

- **An update on the Billington Gypsy and Traveller site.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.35 p.m.)