

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4

Minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory and Support Services Committee
held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely
on Monday 29th February 2016 at 4:30pm

P R E S E N T

Councillor Anna Bailey (Chairman)
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith
Councillor David Ambrose Smith
Councillor Mike Bradley
Councillor Peter Cresswell
Councillor Neil Hitchin
Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Carol Sennitt
Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Jo Webber

OTHERS PRESENT

Councillor Mike Rouse
Jo Brooks – Director (Regulatory Services)
Maggie Camp – Legal Services Manager
Angela Parmenter – Housing Options Manager
Nicole Pema – Human Resources Manager
Rebecca Saunt – Planning Manager
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Hetty Thornton – Performance Management Officer
Annette Wade – Customer Services Manager
Dave White – Waste Services Team Leader

73. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions received from members of the public.

74. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Committee Member Councillor Sue Austen, Legal Services Service Delivery Champion Councillor Mark Hugo and Principal ICT Officer Mark Chadwick.

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

76. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

77. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman drew the Committee's attention to a recent report which highlighted the excellent work being done by the Council's Housing team, as it continued to lead the way over homelessness. Although the problems with homelessness was increasing, East Cambridgeshire continued to buck the trend by having a downward trend of homelessness in its district. Across the region authorities had been moving homeless people into private renting, all except this district. This Council was the only one doing that. The Council used to spend a huge amount in accommodating homeless people but now the Housing team were finding alternative ways to eradicate that problem. The team were to be congratulated on their work in this area.

Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith thought this achievement ought to be publicised.

78. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS**

It was resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the items no. 7 and 8 because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1 & 3 Part 1 Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as Amended).

79. **APPOINTMENTS, TRANSFERS AND RESIGNATIONS**

The Committee received an exempt report (Q205, previously circulated) which provided details of staff appointments, transfers and resignations for the period 1st January to 29th February 2016.

The Human Resources Manager advised the Committee that 5 appointments had been made, there had been 4 leavers and no transfers over that period. 2 people had resigned, 1 was made compulsory redundant and 1 left through a mutual agreement. The turnover was 2.2%, compared to 4.1% for the same period last year.

It was resolved:

That the content of the information report be noted.

80. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

The following items were open to the public.

81. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – QUARTERS 1 & 2 PERFORMANCE UPDATES**

The Committee received a report (Q206, previously circulated) which provided an update on progress made against the Council's Corporate Priorities, including the Corporate Plan, in the first two quarters of 2015/2016.

The Performance Management Officer advised the Committee that the report assessed progress against the Corporate Priorities and Plan for Quarters 1 and 2, with variations of plus or minus 10% highlighted. The Human Resources update had been included in the report summary due to a re-structure of that department in 2015 and its Service Delivery Plan only being agreed in December 2015. That department was currently meeting all its targets.

Housing Options Services

The Housing Options Manager advised the Committee that the team had been very pro-active in preventing homeless families using bed-and-breakfast accommodation. There had been 157 preventions with 99 families housed. Some of these had moved into private rented accommodation and the team was building trust with the private landlords. Over 85% of loaned monies to help these families had been recouped. Since Christmas there had been 101 cases presented as homeless. The Department provided a 'drop-in' service, which could be accessed daily, so the team could help people with their issues.

The district's gypsy and traveller sites were running smoothly and some increased security lighting had been installed at the Earith site. The Discretionary Housing Payment had been used to help keep families in their homes. Part of the work involved was educational.

Universal Credit commenced today, so the staff would receive appropriate training and this was being rolled out.

Councillor Mike Rouse, the Service Delivery Champion, was proud of the work that the small team had achieved. With housing associations withdrawing funding and not developing schemes, and with so many other changes, it was a challenge for the team. This department dealt with families when they were desperate and, with the support of other departments, were successful in helping them.

Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith asked whether the 101 figure related to individuals or families. The Committee was informed that this related to family

units. January tended to be a busy period for a number of reasons, but this January had been the busiest ever.

Councillor Alan Sharp questioned whether there was any particular reasons or causes for this increase and whether 'rough sleepers' were confined to Ely or were found in other parts of the district. Would attempts be made to get these people into secure accommodation? The Housing Options Manager stated that usually after Christmas there was an increase in domestic violence and families splitting up. The district was lucky with regards rough sleepers, as a multi-agency approach was taken to handle the issue and there was only one known person who was not engaging. Help was offered to these people, not just for housing but also to assist with other issues.

Councillor Neil Hitchin was concerned that owners of properties used to house the homeless could expel them, with proper notice, for no reason. The Housing Options Manager assured the Committee that the team did liaise with landlords to manage this matter.

Councillor Peter Cresswell reminded the Committee of the situation not so long ago, where the Council were providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation costing a considerable amount. This had been a big problem and the team should be congratulated for turning things around and solving it.

Councillor Anna Bailey noted a report had been circulated to Members and requested a copy be provided for Councillor Alan Sharp. The report was excellent and detailed.

Planning Services

The Planning Manager reminded the Committee that the Service Delivery Plan had been inherited, since taking on her new role in December. During the first two quarters of the year the department had undergone a review. This had led to weekly meetings across the whole team and consequent changes in the service. As well as a number of staff changes there had been some procedural changes to help the customer's 'journey'. So officers could now be contacted easier and off-duty cover was now provided all day.

The target to validate planning applications within 5 days had initially not been met due to staff shortages. However, the new team was working well and had managed to bring down the validation time to 5 days, so now there was no backlog. Some targets were out of the direct control of the Planning Department, such as appeal decisions, and these would be looked at.

The Enforcement Team had been re-located into the main Planning office and this had led to better working with the planning officers. Issues were now being dealt with more pro-actively.

The Director, Regulatory Services, thought that there had been a remarkable transformation since last August. Ideas from officers within the department to improve the service had been promoted and nothing was not considered. The focus was all about the customer. This was also the first time that the Council

was 'growing their own', with three new post holders being able to carry out their Masters degree whilst working in the department. There was a skills gap in design within the department but this was being tackled with an officer taking a Masters in Design. By the end of the week the review, with changes and recommendations for the future, would be seen by the Leader of Council and the Chief Executive and would be reported to the next Committee meeting. One thing that would be coming in was an online appointment system so plans could be checked.

In response to Councillor Mike Bradley's query, the Committee were informed that the figures relating to the number of applications received were presented to each monthly Planning Committee.

Councillor Peter Cresswell was delighted with the new Planning Manager and had been very impressed when she had attended a recent parish council meeting. He then asked for the numbers of full-time staff and those working part-time. It was revealed that of the staff only 2 were part-time, working for 2½ days each. Details were available on the Council's website.

Councillor Jo Webber noted that things had changed for the better. However, having direct dial numbers meant that the calls were reverted back to Customer Services when they were not answered. The statistics for those calls were not being picked up. The Planning Manager would look at that issue with the Customer Services Manager and would consider introducing voice mails.

Councillor Alan Sharp wanted to know what monitoring was being done relating to the sales of listed buildings. The Planning Manager acknowledged that some people did not realise what they were not allowed to do with such buildings. The Planning Department needed to be notified so those people could be contacted, but this would be hard to set up.

Councillor Anna Bailey asked after the local buildings of local interest list and the Committee was informed that this was still ongoing, as it was taking longer than anticipated to finalise the list.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith was very pleased with the really good performance with Enforcement and offered his congratulations.

Waste Services

The Waste Services Team Leader advised the Committee that there were two recycling targets: 50% by 2020 required by the European Union; 60% by this Council. During the first two quarters of this year those targets had been met, but this had been very reliant on the volume of green waste recycled. For the third year in a row the Council had been the third most improved across the whole country, so was now ranked 26th out of 320 councils. The 'It Pays to Recycle' scheme was still ongoing and had helped improve recycling.

Street Cleansing was still a problem and, as a result, the targets had been changed with a 10% year-on-year improvement now the aim. This was just about being achieved. This target had been affected by the delivery of black

sacks, as staff were taken away from street cleansing to provide this service, and the end of the financial year, as staff tended to take leave at that time. Efforts are being made to improve this situation. There were a number of anomalies within the report, as more reported cleansing complaints had been received than had been resolved. It was unsure how this had occurred, but the numbers of those complaints had been included and would be for the next six months. Attempts were being made to get to the bottom of this anomaly.

The Council were doing better with missed bin collections. The target had been set for a 10% year-on-year improvement with the aim to get back to a 90% resolution target next year.

One event had been cancelled so the target for attendance had not been met. The team were happy to attend events, including parish shows.

There had been issues over textile and plastic recycling banks, due to problems with the outgoing contractor. It was hoped to have replacement banks in place within the next few days.

The current waste contract with Veolia would end on 31st March 2018, after the original 7-year contract had been extended by 3 years. There was an option for a further 1-year extension, but this would have to be decided by Council. This extension would give an opportunity to make some savings but beyond that other options would have to be considered. This could include obtaining a new contract with new contractors, working in partnership with other local authorities or using the new Local Authority Trading Company.

Councillor Julia Huffer, the Waste Services Service Delivery Champion, noted that the Waste Team had worked very hard, particularly as working with Veolia was very challenging. Another meeting would be held with them shortly. The service overall was run well by this small team.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith commented that the collection of street bins appeared to be getting better, with less instances of overflowing. The Waste Services Team Leader acknowledged that this had been a concern for some time and was trying to get alternative sack colours so collections could be monitored.

Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith thought each waste bin would be numbered, to make it easier to report problems, but nothing appeared to have happened. It was revealed that a survey was being undertaken, including asking the parishes, of the actual number of bins in the district. Once that was known then they could be numbered.

Councillor Anna Bailey questioned the targets for missed collections and whether Customer Services could help. Councillor Alan Sharp asked how this was being resolved and whether people forgot to put out their bins in time and then complained they had been missed. The Waste Services Team Leader stated that the team were trying to reduce the number missed, but Veolia had re-scheduled its collections to reduce staff numbers of this, to free them up for other issues. It was a challenge to resolve the issues as each case had to be

looked at individually. Scripts were provided to Customer Services in an attempt to find out if there were general issues.

The Customer Services Manager stated that there was some set criteria that customers had to meet otherwise their complaint would not progress. Veolia did inform that Council if bins were not out for collection.

Councillor Mike Bradley asked about the events criteria for the Waste Team's attendance. In response, it was explained that provided there was a reasonable amount of people attending the event the team could attend, as it had a display trailer that it used. The team was trying to get around the district as much as possible.

Customer Services

The Customer Services Manager advised the Committee that the roll-out of the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system had been a challenge. Most of the issues had been resolved but some further testing was needed. The self-service portal online had suffered teething problems but a recent upgrade had seen an improved performance. A 'soft launch' was due shortly.

Customer Services had appointed some of its staff as service 'champions' to support back office staff with administrative support and the complaints system had been centralised.

Councillor Jo Webber, the Customer Services Service Delivery Champion, noted that the service dealt with a huge range of topics. The staff were young and retained new information quickly, but the staff needed to be retained. The new system had caused lots of problems, particularly the payments system.

Councillor Anna Bailey thought that 'avoidable contact' was a critical issue, as customers should be dealt with first time. This needed to be got under control, as it was very important. A paper should be brought to this Committee at its June meeting to consider this matter. The Customer Services Manager thought that reviewing it after six months was appropriate, as the new CRM system had only just started.

Councillor Peter Cresswell asked when the new tourism website would be up and running. The Committee was informed that it had been authorised about two to three weeks ago and was being 'soft' tested. The Performance Management Officer revealed that it was being built at the moment and would be considered by the Transformation Programme Sub-Committee in May. It was anticipated that the website would be up by then.

Legal Services

The Legal Services Manager advised the Committee that a lot of staff had been lost, so now there was only one fully qualified solicitor and two other staff in the team. A Service Level Agreement had been secured with Peterborough City Council, who could provide a physical presence in the office. It provided

specialist back-up, so some specialist requests were passed on, and the agreement was working well.

Overall the team was performing well, though some issues were taking a long time to resolve due to their complexity. It was expected that the team would be expanded by two new members, who would be trainees and would be trained up. There might be some knock-on effect on targets during the training period.

The Chairman read a statement from Councillor Mark Hugo, the Legal Services Service Delivery Champion:

“As your service champion, after studying the report and our discussion yesterday, I believe Legal Services is fulfilling its supporting role to ECDC in a professional manner and is under good management. The team clearly know their expected targets on delivery and where those targets are totally under their control are delivering to the highest standard. Where targets depend on other departments or outside agencies I also believe sufficient effort is being undertaken to chasing those tasks outside their direct control. I believe a “can do” attitude prevails and a good commercial awareness exists of the declared corporate and financial objectives of the Council.”

Councillor Anna Bailey considered Freedom of Information requests to be a high priority and should be dealt with as soon as possible, so it was very pleasing to see that 70% were deal with within 10 days.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) Services

The Performance Management Officer advised the Committee that there was only one major variance in the performance, relating to the replacement of street name plates. The budget had been reviewed and savings of £10,000 had been identified. The ICT Review was taking a significant amount of time and had the potential to produce a major change. Overall the ICT service was meeting its targets.

Councillor Mike Bradley, one of the Service Delivery Champions for ICT Services, thought the main thing was the ICT Review would be going out for discussion very quickly. In response to Councillor Peter Cresswell’s query, it was explained that the Review could lead to a strategic change and the Council had to get that right so, although the Review had been due for completion in December and then February, it was now expected during March.

It was resolved:

- (i) To note the progress made against the priorities of the Council including areas where the service has been under achieving and where outstanding performance was delivered in the following service areas:

- Housing Options Services
- Planning Services
- Waste Services
- Customer Services

- ICT Services
- Legal Services
- Human Resources

(ii) To note the emerging issues and challenges moving forward.

82. **APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICE DELIVERY CHAMPION**

The Committee received a report (Q207, previously circulated) which sought to appoint a Member to the vacancy for Planning Service Delivery Champion.

Councillor Lis Every was duly proposed and seconded for that position and unanimously agreed.

It was resolved:

That Councillor Lis Every be appointed to the vacancy for Planning Service Delivery Champion.

83. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee received its Forward Agenda Plan.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the ICT Review would be considered at its meeting on 4th April. An additional item for the June meeting related to the new waste and recycling contract, where a review group could be set up to explore potential options.

84. **DRAFT MINUTES OF TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Committee received the draft minutes of the Transformation Programme Sub-Committee meeting held on 8th February 2016, for information.

The meeting closed at 6.03pm