

DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Minutes of a Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Tuesday 20th November 2012 at 2:00pm.

P R E S E N T

Councillor Peter Moakes (Chairman)
Councillor Allen Alderson
Councillor David Ambrose Smith
Councillor Kevin Ellis
Councillor Colin Fordham
Councillor Sheila Friend-Smith MBE
Councillor Tony Goodge
Councillor Tom Kerby
Councillor Neil Morrison
Councillor Mike Rouse
Councillor Robert Stevens

OTHER ATTENDEES

Councillor Ian Allen
Councillor John Palmer
Shirley Blake – Principal Sustainable Development Officer
Louise Duffield - Accountancy Assistant
Tracey Harding - Team Leader Tourism & Town Centre Services
Darren Hill - Business Development Manager
Jane Hollingworth – Head of Housing
Giles Hughes – Head of Planning & Sustainable Development
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
John Tanswell - Principal Environmental Health Officer (Domestic)
Members of the Public - 2

71. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The following statement was submitted by Mr Hazelwood of Isleham:

How long and where will the suggested travellers sites be located? This must be well advertised as we all have to know.

The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development stated that this referred to the investigation of potential sites near Isleham. These sites were no longer being considered. A report would be received by this Committee next month which would set out the future provision of such sites for the district. A full written reply would be made to Mr Hazelwood.

The following was received from Yvonne Thresh, Manager of Care & Repair:

Item 16 Review of Provision of Home Improvement Agency Services for East Cambridgeshire District Council

The Care and Repair Agency management committee welcomed the comments made by Councillors at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 15th October when they discussed this report.

At the Scrutiny Committee, Councillors expressed the view that it was important to look after the service and that maintaining local connections would be vital. Liz Knox, Head of Environmental Services, confirmed that if the Agency moved in house, the name would be kept and the Council would want the Agency to operate in the way it does now. Care and Repair management committee and staff will do all they can to help the District Council achieve this outcome.

Consequently, we would like to suggest that to achieve the aim of keeping the best service possible for the local community, an in-house Agency would need to stand apart from the Council Grant Service. We would like to ask if this separation could be supported by a direct telephone line, which would encourage vulnerable people to contact the service. A direct number could be used to publicise the Agency, in order to reach those most in need and a separate database would preserve confidentiality and encourage continuation of a service close to that currently provided by Care and Repair.

These comments were passed to the Principal Environmental Health Officer to address at the relevant agenda item.

72. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

No apologies were received.

73. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Colin Fordham declared a personal interest in item 16, as he was a member of Care and Repair.

74. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

Area Joint Committee

At the July Council meeting Councillor Gareth Wilson raised the question of whether the Area Joint Committee for East Cambridgeshire could be re-instated. This joint committee was organised by Cambridgeshire County Council and covered traffic matters. The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development had been in contact with senior staff at the County Council to discuss this suggestion. The County Council did not support this request and was proposing to phase out area joint committees for other parts of the county. In future traffic matters would be dealt with by the relevant Cabinet Member in

consultation with the local County Councillor. The County Council was also proposing a restructure of its highways and public rights of way sections. This would provide a lead officer contact for East Cambridgeshire.

Community Infrastructure Levy

In October there was a public examination into the Council's proposed Community Infrastructure Levy. We have now received the report from the Planning Inspector confirming that our proposal is acceptable subject to one amendment to the schedule, to have a single retail rate. This would be reported to committee and Council in December. The current plan would be to implement the Levy from 1st February 2013. The Levy would also eliminate the need for Section 106 agreements on small developments thereby streamlining the application process.

75. **ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN THE NEW ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

The Committee considered a report; reference M141, previously circulated, which detailed the development of a new allocations policy, for social housing, for the district.

The Head of Housing advised the Committee that paragraph 3, of the report, set the legal background and the changes coming in. Paragraphs 3.9 to 3.12 picked up the items for consultation relating to the local connection issue. The issue related to the wording used with regard to nomination agreements for people living in the parishes now but not those people who had moved away. Those people would have received a lower priority, so the wording had been changed. This would be added to the draft policy.

The choice-based lettings system had not been disposed of, as it had been of great use. It showed what was happening on each allocation and also enabled early challenges to potentially strange decisions. It had also been more popular with the public and could be accessed by the housing support agencies.

Further changes were coming to meet the legislative amendments. These would start from April. This would provide a model for all applicants to fit to and would reject people who were ineligible.

Councillor Tom Kerby questioned whether there was a timescale for applications and suggested 3 years. Pressure should be put on the housing associations to get them to bring their empty housing stock back into use. He asked that officers obtain a list of those empty properties to check them out.

Councillor Ian Allen stressed the importance of family and locality but queried how this could be resolved in policy terms. There should be a mechanism where people placed elsewhere should be given priority to move back to their home location. Some other people undertook a mutual exchange of dwellings and he wondered whether they could be offered different types of housing.

The Head of Housing stated that Government policy should address this. Housing associations were under pressure to move people out of bigger houses, so moves from 3 bedroom dwellings to 3 bedroom dwellings were not

expected. A meeting had been held with Sanctuary Housing 2 weeks ago and the Council was informed that they would be pulling services out of the district. Sanctuary only ran the allocations policy for this Council and it was causing them problems. If they got rid of this obligation then the Council would have to employ an allocations team to deal with the issue. Some income could be gained from Sanctuary but this would only be enough for 1 member of staff. This needed consideration as a possibility.

Councillor Allen Alderson was concerned about Sanctuary moving away. This meant that people had to deal with officers farther afield and issues were not dealt with quickly.

Councillor Allen Alderson also asked why the Home Link magazine was ending. In response the Committee was informed that it would still be available online. Most applications were now being made online so people were not using the magazine. The Allocations Team at Sanctuary monitored applications and contacted people who were not bidding to see if there was a problem.

Councillor Neil Morrison questioned Home Link and asked whether it was still wanted and whether the Council had the capability to deal with it.

The Head of Housing advised that Home Link effectively covered 7 local authorities and they all used the umbrella policy over their own. There was interest in the possibility of sharing arrangements, which was a good reason to remain in the scheme. If the Council pulled out then Sanctuary might pull out sooner than anticipated.

The allocations policy had been looked at by officers from all 7 authorities over the last few months and had taken previous and new legislation into consideration. All wanted the other housing associations to use their stock without rigid rules or discrimination. They were also asked to amend their policies to build in flexibility to allow under-occupancy. Consequently the draft policy had been drawn to meet all legal requirements.

Councillor Ian Allen wanted to know how work was defined, was it based on hours worked per week? For example if a person was in work and on the list as Band A and then lost their job and their partner became ill, would they be demoted from the list and lose their priority? Was housing used for those most in dire need or to be used as a policy for forcing people into low waged employment? With the forthcoming changes to council tax and housing benefit and the introduction of universal benefit, was it likely that tenants would be put out of private tenancies at the end of or during the rental agreement terms? This could have a devastating effect on the presentations for bed-and-breakfast accommodation, so what plans were in place to cope with this? Was there any evidence that local rent levels were dropping as a result of benefit reductions or was it the assumption of the Coalition Government? Had the Council considered building houses, if enabled to do so by legislation. It would be reasonable to assume that people in need would be given more priority than a leisure centre in terms of social investment. Even in economic terms the rise in the bed-and-breakfast bill might make this a sound investment. People in work should not have a priority over those who cannot work.

Councillor Peter Moakes stated that the Council had to prioritise a sustainable community. Therefore it should provide housing for people in work. He accepted the points Councillor Allen had made but said there were always exceptions to consider.

Councillor Kevin Ellis did not want to disadvantage people who worked so this would be only one of the priorities to consider. These people should have access to housing.

Councillor Robert Stevens thought that point 3 under paragraph 3.10 could lead to perverse effects. Someone from a neighbouring parish over the district border could be denied a house in East Cambridgeshire if they worked in Newmarket and vice versa. He proposed that the 'local connection' should include people from an "adjacent parish". With regard priority for housing, he also wanted the phrase "or seeking work" included. These suggestions were put to, and agreed, by the Committee.

It was resolved:

That draft allocations policy be noted and the following revisions be included:

- 'local connection' and 'strong local connection' should include persons in the administrative are of the Parish **or in an adjacent Parish**;
- a priority should be given to those who are working **or seeking work** in the district.

76. **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY PRESENTATION**

The Committee considered a report, reference M142, previously circulated, which detailed the development of a new homelessness strategy for the district.

The Head of Housing reminded the Committee about the changes in the benefits system. This had resulted in more homelessness, though the volume of cases had recently dropped, and it was likely to increase in January. The main causes were the loss of private sector tenancies and the lack of 2 bedroom houses. This had lead to more use of bed-and-breakfast, which was predicted to cost over £350,000. This was the number 1 priority and work was being done on that. There were also longer-term concerns about 'affordable' rent, as all those on Housing Benefit could potentially fall into a benefit trap.

People were now beginning to be placed in private rental tenancies as some landlords had returned. Discretionary Housing Benefit payments had increased to be used to prevent homelessness. The Council needed to spend this to enable more funding to be obtained or the payments would reduce. The Housing Strategy included action plans to deal with these problems, but it would require some capital expenditure.

Councillor Mike Rouse reminded the Committee that there had been talk of a hostel around a year ago but nothing had yet happened. The Head of Housing explained that it had been delayed due to the wait for a new employee to deal

with the matter. It had taken 3 months for officers at Sanctuary Housing to authorise this and negotiations had been continuing since then. Other properties in Ely and Soham were also being considered. Councillor Tom Kerby thought that the Committee should invite Sanctuary Housing, and other housing associations, in so they could be questioned over their performance.

Councillor Sheila Friend-Smith queried whether the 'bedroom tax' related to sheltered accommodation or housing benefit. The Committee was informed that this would not affect the over 65s but the changes to the benefits system may mean some people would have to pay more.

Councillor Ian Allen considered that, with the rising loss of private sector provision, Sanctuary Housing should manage its stock better, although 75% of empty stock was in the private sector. Action Plan 3, to 'guarantee rent direct', was a national policy to target people in work. Who would be looking at rent levels if it were paid directly to the landlord? Relating to Action Plan 4, could the Council use its resources to build affordable housing?

The Head of Housing contended that paying rents directly to landlords could bring back private landlords. The Council was encouraged to provide more affordable housing but had limited land resources to build its own.

In response to Councillor Neil Morrison's question, it was revealed that the Universal Credit pilots had only just started last month. It had been predicted that this could increase homelessness. However, the scheme would likely be changed before it reached this district.

It was resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

Councillor Ian Allen left the meeting at this point, 3:57pm.

77. CAR PARKING REGULATIONS

The Committee considered a report, reference M143, previously circulated, which detailed the new East Cambridgeshire Off Street Parking Order Places 2012 Order to create additional parking spaces in Barton Road and permit the parking of Motor Homes vehicles in Fisherman's Car Park.

The Tourism and Town Centre Team Leader reminded the Committee that it had reviewed the Order at its last meeting. Since then consultation had been undertaken and no relevant objections had been received. Therefore it was recommended that the Order be approved.

Councillor Mike Rouse had been concerned about motor homes using Fisherman's Car Park and wondered who had been consulted about the Order. Had other councils or Members been consulted? The City of Ely Council had not been consulted and this was not good enough.

The Tourism and Town Centre Team Leader stated that the statutory policy procedure had been followed. So statutory organisations had been consulted,

as stated in the original report, including the Highways Department, the Police, Fire and Ambulance Services.

Councillor Sheila Friend-Smith noted that none of the statutory consultees had objected, so there was no reason to delay implementation of the Order. Councillor Robert Stevens also noted that no residents had objected either.

When put to the vote the recommendation was declared carried.

It was resolved:

That the changes made to the new 2012 Order be approved.

78. **DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS FEBRUARY 2011 - DATE**

The Committee considered a report, reference M144, previously circulated, which outlined the process for expenditure of developer contributions collected under the Supplementary Planning Document arrangements February 2011 to date.

The Principal Sustainable Development Officer advised the Committee that monies were being received under new management. There was a need to look at the process of how to deal with this money. The monies were separated into different categories and were still restricted by geographical areas. This Committee would decide where the money could be spent. It could be amalgamated with the new Community Infrastructure Levy monies and consultation with the parish councils could be undertaken.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith did not agree that the emergency services should just be given an amount without this Council overseeing what they spent that money on. He proposed that the emergency services forward proposals for expenditure of their allocated funding and for it to be approved by this Committee. This amendment was agreed.

It was resolved:

That the process for agreeing expenditure of developer contributions collected under Supplementary Planning Document arrangements February 2011, as set out in paragraph 5.1 of this report, be supported except that the emergency services are to put forward proposals for expenditure of their allocated funding for approval by this Committee.

79. **SOHAM STATION**

The Committee considered a report, reference M145, previously circulated, which gave an update on progress with Soham Station.

The Business Development Manager advised the Committee that a lot of studies had been completed. Consideration needed to be given on what else the Department of Transport would require in the business case. Guidance was being sought for this.

The engineering feasibility study had been reviewed and the costs of the double track, from Ely to Soham, had been increased. A car park for 75 spaces had been included. A Masterplan was needed for the whole area. The outcome of the timetable study was still awaited. The issue would be raised with the Local Enterprise Partnership in the hope of obtaining some funding.

Councillor Peter Moakes wondered whether there was any indication from the train operators about train frequencies. The Committee was informed that the issue related to the comparison of new fares against fare extensions. This would need clarifying by Atkins. From the County Council perspective, any further stations would need to be funded on a 50/50 basis.

Councillor Mike Rouse queried how dependent this issue was on the Felixstowe to Nuneaton upgrade. It was revealed that there would be some delays on the freight line loops. The double platform was the only way forward and plans had to be worked out on how to find the money for it.

Councillor Robert Stevens said this was brilliant news but thought that 2 or 3 trains would be needed to run an hourly service. He was worried that there was no current service directly from Soham to Cambridge nor from Soham to Burwell. Would there be a demand for this and would it be affected if a bus service were introduced?

Mr Geraint Hughes, Partnership Manager for Greater Anglia, was invited to contribute by the Chairman. He stated that scheduling of services was a concern if the existing timetable was used. This had to be improved to provide an hourly service. All the local authorities had advocated the station but the Department of Transport had to be targeted.

Greater Anglia would run through to 2014, when a new operator would take over. It was hoped that the new timetable would be in the new operating specification. A delay in awarding the franchise should benefit Soham, as it would allow time to include the necessary information. The Ely station would be key to the improvements, as connecting from Soham to Cambridge was not good because of the delay in connections to Cambridge at Ely. Rolling stock was also part of the same equation, as more units would be needed.

Councillor John Palmer thought the station would be a big help to Soham and a double track would allow goods trains to go through unimpeded.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith noticed that 75 parking spaces would be included but reminded the Committee that the Soham Masterplan stated 200 would be needed. The amount of parking could be changed and linked to the space available and the number of new houses.

Councillor Neil Morrison asked about the costs for a double platform and access across the tracks. Mr Hughes stated that the costs would include for a bridge with a ramp for disabled access. The station itself, based on predicted use, would not be staffed.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) That officers be instructed to report back to this Committee following a meeting with Cambridgeshire County Council/Department of Transport/Greater Anglia on the 26th November on any additional feasibility work required and the cost/resource implications of submitting a full business case;
- (iii) That feedback be provided on the outcome of the wider timetabling study once made available.

80. **JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING**

The Committee considered a report, reference M146, previously circulated, which updated Members about the arrangements in place to address strategic planning and transport issues in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and to consider a joint position statement on the development strategy for Cambridgeshire.

The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development advised the Committee that the Council had a duty to co-operate, following the Localism Act, and it could build on the previous work it had done. A Joint Member Group had been set up with Councillors Peter Moakes, Philip Read and Gareth Wilson representing this Council. It would be a useful forum to discuss strategy issues and to produce a non-statutory framework. The Terms of Reference for the Group were listed at Appendix 1 to the report and a Joint Statement at Appendix 2.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the terms of reference for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Strategic Planning and Transport Member Group, which are attached at Appendix 1, be noted;
- (ii) That the Council's representation on the Joint Member Group is provided by Councillors Peter Moakes, Philip Read and Gareth Wilson;
- (iii) That the updated Joint Statement on the development Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, which is attached at Appendix 2, be endorsed.

81. **MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE AGAINST AGREED KEY COMMITTEE INDICATORS**

The Committee considered a report, reference M147, previously circulated, which presented the performance against key committee indicators and a commentary on proposed actions for specific items.

The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development advised the Committee that performance was summarised in Appendix 1. The Committee was

updated on the figure for the approval of Mandatory Disabled Facility Grants, which was 100%. Planning Applications dealt with within 5 weeks were not meeting its target due to staff turnover, through staff leaving or being on maternity leave.

Councillor Kevin Ellis thought the information was useful but asked that written explanations be given, if there was a failure to meet targets, and on the proposed actions to be taken to address the problems.

It was resolved:

That the 2012/13 mid-year performance against key committee indicators be noted and any proposed action be agreed.

82. **BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee considered a report, reference M148, previously circulated, updating on the Council's current financial position for 2012/13.

The Accountancy Assistant advised the Committee that since the last budget report a further overspend had been identified. There had been an overspend on Building Regulations, as the savings target had not been met. There was more overspend on provision of bed-and-breakfast accommodation and for the Trees and Landscaping Service, due to annual inspections. There had been one underspend, where increased parking fees from car parks had been received.

Councillor Mike Rouse raised the issue of the ash tree disease, additional closed churchyards and open spaces and how they could affect the budget.

The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development advised that the Trees Officer was focussed on the ash tree issue. A report would be made outlining the situation and the risks involved. The Council had an obligation to take on closed churchyards and open spaces, although it received no extra funding for this. Section 106 agreements should be used to negotiate money for maintenance of these responsibilities.

It was resolved:

That it be noted that since the last report a projected overspend of £1,600 had been identified giving an overall overspend across the Committee's services of £298,423 against the original budget.

83. **TOWN CENTRES WORKING PARTY MINUTES**

The minutes were received.

84. **NORTH ELY DELIVERY BOARD MINUTES**

Councillor David Ambrose Smith asked whether the Board was talking to the Drainage Boards, as there were potential service issues with north Ely. The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development stated that representatives

from Anglia Water had been involved and that it was accepted that the Board would have to work with the Internal Drainage Boards. Councillor Mike Rouse revealed that the Cawdle Fen Drainage Board had raised the issue of north Ely and the possible sustainable schemes. He suggested that an engineer could offer advice to the Delivery Board. Councillor Robert Stevens also emphasised the need to get more input from the Drainage Boards, as it appeared that drainage issues were not being taken seriously.

The draft minutes were received.

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

It was resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining item no. 16 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 Category 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

86. **REVIEW OF THE PROVISION OF HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SERVICES FOR EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

The Committee considered a report, reference M149, previously circulated, which detailed the draft improvement plan for the provision of Home Improvement Agency services for East Cambridgeshire District Council in light of the finding of the review undertaken.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer advised the Committee that the review had been triggered by Care and Repair. The home improvement service linked into the Council's Corporate Objectives and enabled people in need to access help to stay in their own homes. It was anticipated that, with the increasing elderly population, demand for the services provided would increase. A number of options for future service delivery were considered and an Improvement Plan had been drawn up. This Plan was recommended for approval and was agreed by the Committee.

It was resolved:

That the draft Improvement Plan be agreed.

The meeting concluded at 5:16pm.