

Minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory and Support Services Committee
held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Monday
29th June 2015 at 4:30pm

P R E S E N T

Councillor Anna Bailey (Chairman)
Councillor Sue Austen
Councillor Mike Bradley
Councillor Vince Campbell
Councillor Peter Cresswell
Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Carol Sennitt
Councillor Jo Webber

OTHERS PRESENT

Councillor Mike Rouse
Kathy Batey – Human Resources & Facilities Services Manager
Jo Brooks – Director (Regulatory Services)
Rob Fysh – Team Leader Building Control
Linda Grinnell – Financial Services Manager
Angela Parmenter – Housing Options Manager
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Hetty Thornton – Performance Management Officer
Annette Wade – Customer Services Manager
Dave White – Waste Services Team Leader

5. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions received from members of the public.

6. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Christine Ambrose Smith, David Ambrose Smith and Hamish Ross.

There were no substitutions.

7. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

8. **MINUTES**

Councillor Anna Bailey proposed an amendment to the minutes of 13th April 2015, relating to page 12, that the words “Commercial Services Committee” be replaced with the word “Council”.

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 30th March 2015, 13th April 2015 (as amended) and 28th May 2015 be confirmed as correct records and be signed by the Chairman.

9. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the no announcements.

10. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

The Committee received a report, reference Q18 previously circulated, that presented key performance outputs for 2014/15 and the new Service Delivery Plans for 2015/16.

The Performance Management Officer advised the Committee that the report was a synopsis of the key performance outputs for 2014/15 and set out the plans for 2015/16. New arrangements had been put into place in 2014 to set the plans against the strategic priorities, as shown in paragraph 3.7 of the report. Therefore, the service delivery plans reflected those priorities.

Councillor Mike Rouse joined the meeting at this point, 4:37pm.

Performance Management

Councillor Julia Huffer questioned the level of legal fees quoted for the service. Councillor Peter Cresswell wondered whether this figure gave a true reflection of the support provided by the legal department to this service and queried whether this figure could be challenged. The Performance Management Officer stated that the figure came from the Council's budget book, as all services had to contribute to the legal department's costs. There had yet to be any requirement for legal services to be used for this service. Councillor Anna Bailey noted this had been discussed before, about how these charges were calculated and whether they correctly reflected the true costs.

The Performance Management Officer reminded the Committee that she had only been in post since last February and there had not been a service delivery plan in place at that time. The service provided some support for the service delivery plans and there had been many areas where help had been given. All the Heads of Service had been met, to evaluate their service delivery plans so that they met the corporate priorities and were SMART (i.e. specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely). Workshops had also been held with staff to help write their plans and introduce new performance measures.

Councillor Anna Bailey was please to see the details and Councillor Peter Cresswell thought this was a good introduction to what was to follow.

Building Control

The Team Leader Building Control informed the Committee that Building Control had a good year, despite working in a very competitive environment. By working with neighbouring authorities the service had achieved added income and the service could now be considered good. Things were susceptible to fluctuation due to factors such as the weather or a decrease in the number of schemes coming up. However, the service had managed to secure a good market share when competing against private companies. This had been hard to achieve and it was proposed to continue the approach taken in the new plan, as the service had achieved a good reputation.

Councillor Jo Webber noted that people were happy with the service but asked whether there was any marketing done for warranties. The Team Leader Building Control replied that they could not provide a warranty for new builds. In the past the Council had joined Zurich, who could provide a warranty, but this partnership had ended. Attempts were being made to join up with another company who could provide warranties.

Councillor Anna Bailey asked whether the service had looked for commercial opportunities and whether fee earning could be offset against other costs. The Committee was reminded that the service had a statutory duty to provide services, including building safety, demolitions or care for dangerous structures, which took up around 40% of the service's time. Everything it did was up to standard, such as checking plans or completing site visits. Other companies did not have the same standards. This was within a market place of 220 approved inspectors, all competing against each other and the Council. The service was using as many tricks as it could to market its services, including using its links with the Council's planning department.

Councillor Mike Bradley noted the percentage figures in the plan for dangerous structure notifications, but wondered what the actual figures involved were and queried why there were discrepancies between other baseline percentages and the target ones. The Team Leader Building Control explained that there were around 20 to 30 notifications received per year, but this fluctuated from year to year. The target percentages had been set at lower rates than the baseline as there was a downward trend in market share. Although the service had a good previous year it was expected that the level of work would come down. Our competitors knew all about our service and would use this knowledge against us. On top of that, there were changes in legislation that would allow people to put applications in at the last minute.

Councillor Julia Huffer wondered why there was not a clause in contracts when working with other organisations to protect the Council's information. The Council needed to get more aggressive in protecting itself. The legal department should help achieve this, to stop loss of information.

The Team Leader Building Control informed the Committee that the service had to publish its fees, so commercial companies undercut these. The fee regulations had changed 3 to 4 years ago, which had meant that fees were now more competitive.

Councillor Anna Bailey noted that there was some information missing, relating to the Safety Advisory Group and having a qualified team. If this information was not useful then it should not be included. It was also noted that generally the targets had been changed to a lesser amount. 90% of inspections had been carried out, but what had happened to the remainder? The Team Leader Building Control replied that the Safety Advisory Group had been supported.

Financial Services

The Financial Services Manager advised the Committee that Financial Services was made up from a number of different sections, including accountancy, payroll and internal audit. It had just finalised the Council's accounts and the external auditors were in checking them. The service had achieved an underspend during the past year.

Next year the service would move forward on its many statutory and cyclical tasks. It would be offering support for the creation of the Trading Company and had approached tax experts for their help with this. It would also support the transformation programme by reviewing payment methods, including allowing payment of council tax by direct debit. Advice would also be offered regarding the extension to the Angel Drove car park. Paper based processes would be reviewed to see if they could be done electronically.

In response to Councillor Peter Cresswell's query, the Financial Services Manager explained that the London Interbank Bid rate (LIBID) had been used over three months and had overachieved on interest earned on investments.

Councillor Mike Bradley thought that the figures for services' spending were not very helpful and Members needed to know and understand the actual spends. The Financial Services Manager explained that all services had their own cost centres and re-charges were made across all services. This was in line with the Service Code of Practice which was required to be done by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Councillor Anna Bailey asked whether this information could be presented to Members differently, although this might be resource intensive. Also, the number of full time employed staff could be broken down by area. Were there any big issues on the horizon for the service and had any commercial opportunities been identified?

The Financial Services Manager stated that the biggest issue would be the shortening of the accounts deadline in around two years' time. The audit would have to be brought forward by two months. So over the next couple of years Financial Services would be foreshortening its time to prepare the accounts to be ready for the new timescale. Commercially the service had looked at its options, including being the payment provider for parish councils.

Councillor Julia Huffer, after being informed that the service had been successful in prosecuting benefit frauds, thought this should be acknowledged. Councillor Anna Bailey noted the target to promote fraud awareness, so

Members would need to know about the underlying data and how this would be tackled.

Customer Services

The Customer Services Manager advised the Committee that the majority of the service delivery plan centred around the new customer relationship (CRM) management system. The implementation of this had been difficult, as three members of staff had been off ill, there had been a 30% increase in web work and because of the instability of the new system, which had 'gone live' in April.

Self-service forms had been made available as of today's date and a new 'chip-and-pin' service had commenced in March. 67% of calls, equating to around 70,000, had been resolved at the first point of contact throughout the year.

Next year it was expected that the new CRM system would be developed, that the customer service transformation would be supported, the Anglia Revenues Partnership service would be improved by creating one team by joining with the Council and that the team's website work would be improved.

Councillor Jo Webber, the Customer Services Service Delivery Champion, noted that the service had gone through a hard time with the new CRM system, which had a lot of potential. The team itself was young and enthusiastic and it had to be seen as central to Council services. It was also possible for the team to offer lots of support to other services.

Councillor Anna Bailey queried whether there would be any commercial opportunities for the service. The Customer Services Manager stated that some ideas were going through the transformation programme, such as advertising on the Council's website.

Councillor Peter Cresswell, in acknowledging that two out of three queries were resolved at the first point of contact, asked whether Councillors could help. The Customer Services Manager expected the transformation programme to help identify how far the service could go. The service could do other things for the other services and would be looking at this for each service. Councillor Jo Webber thought it important that Customer Services could take on a lot more work. The service would have to learn from the other services, which would free them up to pursue more commercial activities.

Councillor Julia Huffer, in noting that 25% of the calls received related to planning issues, suggested someone from the Planning department could become part of the Customer Services team. It was revealed that a planning duty officer was available to take those calls already. The Director, Regulatory Services, explained that Customer Services had administration support and a duty planner on call all day. There had been some issues, which had resulted in Planning being lent a Customer Services Advisor. That had led to an increase in knowledge for those Advisors. Overall, feedback from customers showed that their requirements from the service were being met.

Councillor Anna Bailey reckoned that resolving calls first time for customers was important, whether by Customer Services or others. Some thought was needed how this could be reflected in the service delivery plan. The Customer Services Manager reminded Members that there was already a measure for 'avoidable contact' calls.

Housing Services

The Housing Options Manager revealed that the team had recently welcomed two new members, making a total of seven. Last year the service had collected £15,000 in rent deposits, with collections increasing monthly. During the last year 315 households had been prevented from becoming homeless. This had been achieved using a multi-agency approach, including tackling the problems with young people, with 'crash beds' being provided for 16 to 17 year-olds at no cost and a young parents' project being set up in Soham. The Council was the only one in the county to do this. The service had also worked with Sanctuary and the Lighthouse Centre, with both partnerships being strong.

The responsibility for gypsy and traveller sites had been passed over to the Housing team and attempts would be made to improve them. Work was also ongoing with Care and Repair to help people remain in their own homes.

The targets for next year included preventing over 350 households becoming homeless, addressing the potential problems following the introduction of Universal Credit and increasing rent deposit collection rates.

Councillor Mike Rouse, Housing Services Service Delivery Champion, stated that the service was at the sharp end when dealing with people's lives. Back in 2013 the service was in crisis and was costing the Council money. It was in a frightful situation but had since been transformed. It was difficult to maintain this progress but the service would continue to push ahead. Its success was down to its teamwork and its work with other organisations. A lot of the problems it dealt with were caused by the lack of housing supply, as the district needed more houses. The increase in workloads was impacting budgets more and more. In the short to medium term the small team was improving and their work should be commended.

Councillor Vince Campbell agreed that the work offered by the Housing Service helped people for the better. It had been so much in debt in the past but now was in a better position to help young people find housing. It was an outstanding service.

Councillor Carol Sennitt noted that lots of elderly people were living on their own in 3 or 4 bedroom houses, as there were no bungalows available for them to go to. This would free up more homes, which were needed for families. What people had used bed-and-breakfast and what sort of housing did the area need?

The Housing Options Manager stated that people who had used bed-and-breakfast had been a real mix, with youngsters and others. The area needed

one-bedroom, two-bedroom and four-bedroom dwellings, which were most in demand, though a lot more single people were being housed.

Councillor Anna Bailey thought that managing to prevent the relevant families becoming homeless during the year was brilliant, but would have liked more information about the time taken to make decisions and wondered whether this could be done quicker. The Housing Options Manager explained that some decisions were quite contentious and took longer to resolve. The Director (Regulatory Services) clarified that the deadlines were statutory and were set by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Decisions were usually made much quicker but some could require some investigation through other agencies.

Councillor Mike Bradley enquired about the number of people sleeping rough and wondered whether more information about this would be useful for Members. The Committee was informed that a multi-agency approach was taken towards people sleeping rough and they reported back to the service. Councillor Anna Bailey asked what happened at weekends. The Director (Regulatory Services) replied that other services could be asked to help in that situation.

Councillor Peter Cresswell complimented the service, which had come on a lot, with first class work now being done.

Waste Services

The Waste Services Team Leader reminded the Committee of the work the service did, including waste collections and street cleansing. The year just gone had provided some highs and lows. One of the highs was the over achievement with recycling rates, with a provisional rate of 56%. This had been helped by a successful grant application and the agreed extension of the Veolia contract to the end of 2018.

The lows included the attempts to resolve complaints about the waste service provided by Veolia, which had not been good. There had also been street cleansing issues, where targets had not been met. Dog fouling was a real concern and Veolia had been asked to improve its service for this and they would be monitored. Missed waste collections were also a problem with only 79% having been collected. The Council was looking for improvement in this area.

Next year the big challenge was to reach a 60% recycling rate. This would be a challenge and it was not expected that this target would be reached with the current resources available. A lot of different leaflets had been produced to try to encourage more recycling. The service may need to be reviewed, with any potential changes being brought back to the Committee.

Councillor Julia Huffer, one of the Waste Services Service Delivery Champions, reminded the Committee that Waste Services was unique in that it was very dependent on a third party to provide the service. No enforcement was possible, so the service was in a difficult situation. The Waste team would

need more resources to achieve the 60% recycling rate, but without this in the contract there was nothing that could be done.

The Waste Services Team Leader explained that the contract had been extended from the end of March 2015 to the end of March 2018, with an option to further extend for another year. Market testing had been undertaken and the current contractors had the cheapest cost. However, the way the contract had been set up was not good, as no penalties for poor performance had been included. The Council could withdraw from the contract, but this could make matters worse.

Performance measures were being put into place for Veolia, which should show that the contractors were not up to their targets. Customer Services would record any issues relating to the contractors' performance and were willing to produce relevant reports. Councillor Jo Webber stated that if detailed reports for this were needed, the facility was there within the customer relationship management system.

Councillor Peter Cresswell congratulated the service on achieving a 56.4% recycling rate and for the work it had done. This view was supported by the Committee. One problem related to more people having dogs and the available dog bins not being emptied regularly. This needed to be looked at. For the future, the county should have one contractor across the shire, as this would be more effective. This too should be investigated.

The Waste Services Team Leader revealed that the waste contract included for dog bins to be emptied as often as necessary but this obligation was self-monitored. Unfortunately, the Council had limited resources to follow this up, even though this was an important issue for the public. Contractually the Council was working through the Recycling in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Partnership to look at the optimum service design to discover the opportunities to merge services. Work was needed to determine what kind of service was wanted. This matter needed re-visiting to consider merging services, as there were benefits for a joint approach but also benefits for going it alone.

Councillor Anna Bailey wondered whether dog bin users could inform the Council when the bins were full, so they could be emptied, or whether parish councils could be called in to help. Councillor Jo Webber suggested a campaign to get the community involved, which might help the situation. The Waste Services Team Leader was concerned that this could raise public expectations that the service could not deliver with its current resources. Sadly there was no promotional capacity within the team, as there was no budget or resources for this. Councillor Mike Bradley thought this should be devolved to the parish councils to monitor and Councillor Sue Austen would be happy to take this suggestion to Ely City Council.

It was resolved:

That the Committee approves the outputs presented for 2014/2015 (noting any variances) and the new Service Delivery Plans for 2015/2016.

11. **ANNUAL REPORTS OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Committee received a report, reference Q19 previously circulated, that sought to appoint Council representatives to those outside bodies that come within the remit of this Committee and to receive the annual reports of the preceding representatives on those bodies.

Councillor Anna Bailey noted that the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter For Growth Steering Group had not notified the previous representative of any meetings during the year. This prompted Councillor Peter Cresswell to query whether a review of Outside Bodies needed to be done to justify Council representation. Councillor Anna Bailey informed the Committee that a large scale review had taken place during the review of the Council's committees.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the appointment of the proposed nominated representatives to those outside bodies which fall within the remit of the Regulatory & Support Services Committee, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be confirmed.
- (ii) That the Annual reports from appointed Council representatives on the activities and manner in which funding is spent by the outside bodies within the responsibility of the Regulatory & Support Services Committee, be noted.

12. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee received its forward agenda plan.

Councillor Anna Bailey revealed that the Housing Survey item scheduled for the July meeting had been re-scheduled for later in the year and that the Project Initiation Documents item for the same meeting had been deleted, as it was no longer required.

13. **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 items no. 10 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 and 2 Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as Amended).

14. **APPOINTMENTS, TRANSFERS AND RESIGNATIONS**

The Committee received an exempt report, reference Q20 previously circulated, that provided details of staff appointments, transfer and resignations for the period 1st March 2015 to 31st May 2015.

Councillor Anna Bailey suggested that this item ought to be moved up future agendas, so that the Human Resources & Facilities Services Manager was not kept waiting to present her report. The Democratic Services Officer reminded the Committee that this item would be exempt, meaning any public in attendance would have to move out of the room while the item was discussed. The item could be moved down the agenda, if required, at particularly meetings if there were public present.

The Human Resources & Facilities Services Manager advised the Committee about the staff matters, pointing out that 15 new staff had been appointed, 6 had left and 4 had transferred to different departments. Overall, the significantly high level of turnover was continuing. The report also detailed a list of staff members that were due to be leaving in the near future.

Councillor Anna Bailey asked whether the high turnover was due to the recent re-structuring. The Human Resources & Facilities Services Manager thought that there was an element of this but was concerned that the numbers leaving had not steadied.

Councillor Peter Cresswell was in favour of the report including details of jobs that were currently being advertised, as this would be very useful information for Members. Councillor Anna Bailey suggested this could be included in the new internal Connection newsletters.

It was resolved:

That the Committee noted the content of the information report.

The meeting closed at 6:31pm.