

Minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory and Support Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Thursday 30th October 2014 at 4:30pm

PRESENT

Councillor Anna Bailey (Chairman)
Councillor Tony Goodge (as Substitute for Councillor Derrick Beckett)
Councillor Lorna Dupré
Councillor Colin Fordham
Councillor James Palmer (as Substitute for Councillor Tony Parramint)
Councillor Charles Roberts
Councillor Mike Rouse
Councillor Hazel Williams, MBE

OFFICERS

Amanda Apcar – Principal Solicitor
Jo Brooks – Director (Regulatory Services)
Liz Knox – Environmental Services Manager
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Sue Wheatley – Planning Manager
Dave White – Waste Strategy Team Leader

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Kevin Ellis
Councillor Lis Every

27. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from members of the public.

28. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen Alderson, Sue Austen, Derrick Beckett, Chris Morris and Tony Parramint.
Councillors Tony Goodge and James Palmer attended as Substitutes for this meeting.

29. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

30. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman noted that some Members had not received agenda papers and this was being looked into.

31. **SERVICE DELIVERY PLANS**

The Committee received a report, reference P104 previously circulated, detailing the proposed Services Plans for Services under the remit of the Committee.

The Director (Regulatory Services) stated that the Service Plans had been introduced with the Corporate Priorities in mind, with five strategic aims. The customer was at the heart of the Plans, with an eye kept on finances and performance measures included to help implement priorities.

Environmental Services Service Delivery Plan

The Environmental Services Manager advised the Committee that the Delivery Plan had been developed in consultation with staff and the Service Delivery Champion. The service was split into two main parts: commercial and domestic. Most of the services provided were statutory front-line services. The Plan tried to demonstrate that the services were open to engagement with business, looked to work with other departments, were customer focussed and looked to increase income.

The Environmental Services Service Delivery Champion, Councillor Hazel Williams, highlighted the range of functions the service covered and that it was important for the Service Plan to encompass all those activities. In common with the Housing Service Plan, the service had to be re-active. It had to ensure that it fulfilled its statutory duties and keep up-to-date as the Government frequently amended relevant rules and regulations. A question was asked about the level of staffing, as it was not shown in the Plan.

Councillor Anna Bailey agreed it was useful to know the number of staff. It was understood there had been some staffing issues and what was being done to address that? Was the post of Energy Efficiency And Sustainability Officer supposed to be self-financing and, if so, this should be reflected in the Plan. The Environmental Services Manager revealed that an interview was being held shortly to appoint someone to a vacant post, as this was the second time an attempt had been made to fill this technical post. Unfortunately, another officer was due to leave, so that post would also need filling. The other post mentioned was fully funded, so the Plan could be amended to show that.

Councillor Lorna Dupré noted there were no details about air quality and wondered whether enough monitoring was being done to measure it. Did the monitors measure particulates? The Committee was informed that there were eighteen sites monitored throughout the district, which was sufficient. The information from this monitoring was used to help make decisions, such as for the Ely southern link road. Particulates were not measured.

Councillor Tony Goodge queried how the service could assure Members that it was keeping up with the ever-changing legislation and was concerned about the level of staff. The Environmental Services Manager stated that the staff would identify any required changes and were in the process of looking at its licensing function.

In reply to a question about private water suppliers, it was disclosed that this referred to about forty to fifty water suppliers who obtained their water from bore holes or springs.

The service delivery plan was endorsed.

Housing Services Delivery Plan

The Director (Regulatory Services) advised the Committee that the Plan had been drawn up in conjunction with the team and Councillor Mike Rouse. Housing was a statutory service and its priorities were to prevent homelessness, ensure no homeless people were accommodated in and bed-and-breakfast establishments (something that had been maintained since August 2013), to roll-out a programme of education for young people in secondary schools about homelessness and to try and maximise its income.

There were four homeless hostels in the district, one of which was specifically for young families. To ensure that the Council did not incur costs, it offered spare places in these hostels to neighbouring authorities. Support plans were used and maintained, with involvement of other agencies. The rent-deposit scheme had been brought in-house. The Service now had the capacity to do home visits and provide drop-in surgeries. It wanted to target problems of violence by working with the anti-social behaviour group to help make people feel safe.

The Housing Services Service Delivery Champion, Councillor Mike Rouse, added that although it was a small team it was incredibly important. It had gone from being a re-active and failing service, to a pro-active and successful operation. It was a very close team with strong leadership which meant they achieved good results. It was pleasing that the Service was now doing work to help young people.

Councillor Hazel Williams was delighted with the work being done with young families. With regard recharging homeless clients and hostel charges, although these were understood, the targets set were a surprise. The Director (Regulatory Services) explained that this had been set based on her previous experience. When lending money:

1. Each applicant was assessed based on their individual circumstances and a repayment plan tailored to ensure they did not enter a poverty trap. The payment period could be as long as three years. If it was unaffordable, then:
2. The officers looked at other agencies such as Anglia Revenues Partnership to bridge the gap.

The Council did not want a situation where a hostel was shut for not being used and then needing it later. No profit was sought so work was done with

neighbouring local authorities to ensure that the rooms were not left empty. If there was space, this was offered to them and they were invoiced later, so the money was retrieved.

Councillor James Palmer asked how big a problem 'rough-sleeping' was in the district? It was revealed that, at the last count, there were two people. If a full-blown count was undertaken it was suspected that there would be more discovered. It was not considered a significant problem and the Committee was informed that, although the Council did not have a duty to provide accommodation or funds, help was offered by working with landlords to prevent rough-sleeping, alongside deposits and floating support to obtain and sustain accommodation.

Councillor Anna Bailey offered thanks to the Housing team, as the Plan gave re-assurance that issues were understood and pro-active measures were being taken.

The delivery plan was endorsed.

Legal Services Delivery Plan

The Principal Solicitor advised the Committee that the Legal team was fully supported by its Service Delivery Champion, Chris Morris, and the Service Plan had been put together by the whole team, taking on board the comments of Members and officers.

The main focus of the Plan was on continuing the support service for Council to meet its needs. A lot of the services provided were statutory and a lot supported the Council's corporate priorities, in which the Service was involved. A lot of back office support was also provided for all departments. Added value was also sought, such as in co-ordinating many aspects of the Council's work and project management. The Service was the first point of call for issue resolution and guidance.

Councillor Mike Rouse queried whether more could be done to reduce the number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by the Council, by being more open with its information. The Principal Solicitor reminded the Committee that current legislation allowed anybody to make a FOI request but the system was not used properly, as lots of businesses use the information provided for commercial interests. Unfortunately there was nothing that could be done about that. More and more information was being published on the Council's website, much more than the current Code of Practice suggested was necessary.

Councillor Hazel Williams queried the assertion that requests were on the increase, as the figures within the Plan showed otherwise, with the exception of FOI requests.

Councillor Charles Roberts asked what data had been used to measure the 'better environment' target and whether this was in fact irrelevant. Perhaps this target should be reviewed. As the Council needed to maximise its income,

what income was received via Section 106 agreements and other income? He was pleased to hear of the involvement of the Legal team in the corporate priorities and that it was being proactive and involved early. It was revealed that the target for this was in terms of the time taken to turn around requests. Since the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy there had been no income via Section 106.

Councillor Tony Goodge was concerned, as the Council relied on the advice and guidance provided by the Legal team on a large diverse range of topics, how it kept up-to-date with changes in legislation. The Committee was informed that the team had to ensure professional development to keep its professional certificates. To do this it attended relevant Local Government Association meetings and used an information technology package that gave weekly updates on legislative matters.

Councillor Lorna Dupré questioned whether there was an explanation for the number of car parking enforcement tickets issued. The Principal Solicitor explained that this had been affected by Waitrose taking over the Brays Lane car park.

Councillor Anna Bailey noted the Land Registry change and stated that the new Director (Support Services) would have to be made aware. She queried whether the target for FOI responses was ambitious enough, given that the target was the statutory minimum, and suggested this be considered. If people making a request gave a reason for a quicker response then the Legal team should try to accomplish that. Feedback on performance for this in detail was needed and should be collated from the work done throughout the Council, as this was not just a Legal team response.

The Principal Solicitor advised how the new system for Land Registry was supposed to work, what the Legal team would need to do and it was not yet known whether a new officer would be needed. FOI responses did come from various other departments and the Legal team had to chase them for answers. She offered a word of caution, as quicker responses to FOI requests could help generate more requests for information, thereby increasing the workload.

The service delivery plan was endorsed.

Planning Services Delivery Plan

The Planning Manager advised the Committee that the Planning department had spent a useful day preparing the Plan. This helped to see what a good service should look like.

The Planning Service had a number of responsibilities including planning applications and enforcement. It was a frontline service and was customer focussed. There was a range of customers with differing needs, so the Service aimed to balance those needs. Overall the Service was about sustainable development so the area looked good and was good for its residents. To do this, the Planning Service needed early involvement in applications to avoid rejecting them later. It could prove costly if wrong decisions were made, and

too many could result in the Government deciding the Council was failing and would take away its decision making authority.

The Service had coped with a number of temporary workers covering staff shortages, but now a new young team was in place who would be supported by the senior officers. In the past the targets had related to the speed of the decision but now the targets aimed to measure the quality of decisions.

The Planning Services Service Delivery Champion, Councillor Charles Roberts, was pleased to support the Plan. The team had faced a number of challenges with a high workload and without a full complement of staff until recently. The Plan was a solid starting point and there were hopes for rapid progress.

Councillor Mike Rouse thought it would be useful to know team numbers and the Services structure, as well as the categories of the applications and the case loads.

Councillor Hazel Williams questioned what 'other applications' referred to. The team did need to engage with parish council members and if a Parish Conference was held, that would be the ideal place to do so. The Planning Manager explained that 'other applications' related to smaller applications.

Councillor Lorna Dupré thought the timescales for determining applications should be more ambitious, particularly for minor applications. There was nothing in the Plan about keeping Members informed, but it was important that they knew what was going on. The Planning Manager stated that the targets were set nationally but, as performance would be monitored, they could be reviewed. The Government did allow an extension of these timescales on dealing with applications to resolve issues, which most applicants/agents were happy to do to produce a successful outcome.

Councillor James Palmer considered the Council's website was not simple to use when seeking information on planning applications and was frustrating. It should be the easiest way to keep in touch with applications, so it was important. Improvement for this should be focussed on. The Director (Regulatory Services) had been working with the Planning Manager and had already identified this as an area for improvement.

Councillor Anna Bailey suggested staff charts should be included in all Service Plans. The suggestion that it would be difficult to provide a forward plan was slightly negative, as there would be some foresight of major applications and workloads could be managed. Perhaps more thought should be given to this. Some targets had not been included in the Plan but should be. Pages 106 and 108 needed to be updated for consistency's sake.

Councillor James Palmer reckoned it would be useful for agents to be able to contact staff via a direct line, to prevent the loss of time and money to developers. This would also allow the Council to be 'open for business', so current ways of working needed to be looked at. Councillor Anna Bailey thought this should be looked at across the Council, as departments should provide cover and they could respond quickly. Councillor Charles Roberts

thought that if people needed to know about their application then the department needed to know what was happening with it so an intelligent, well-informed response could be given.

Councillor Hazel Williams would not want this to circumnavigate the Customer Relationship Management System used by the Council. Councillor Tony Godge stated a consistent system was needed for everybody and so would not like to encourage shortcutting the existing system.

The delivery plan was endorsed.

Waste Services Service Delivery Plan

The Waste Strategy Team Leader advised the Committee that this Service covered a wide area and its services were largely statutory. It mainly related to waste collections but included neighbourhood recycling and environment enforcement. The team were currently assessing new funding options. Councillor Kevin Ellis and the team had worked on the Plan and had decided to maintain a 50% recycling rate, although the European Union were talking about setting a 70% rate. The team were talking to Veolia about these targets and a continuation of promoting recycling was still needed. The temporary staff that had been in place had left but the team were bidding for more funding for more of this work.

The Waste Services Service Delivery Champion, Councillor Kevin Ellis, said the Committee was aware of the success following the introduction of the wheeled bin service, as there had been very few complaints. The biggest issue was over the emptying of the bins but over the last year this had gone well.

Councillor Anna Bailey stated that street cleansing was a problem, as she had received complaints about it. The actual Service Plan was well written and had already included some actual performance figures filled in. The Waste Strategy Team Leader reminded the Committee that 40% was the recycling figure for last year and, with only part of the current year complete, that the figure could reach 57% this time. If additional funding was achieved this could help that figure improve even more.

Councillor Mike Rouse asked what householders should do with dog waste. The Waste Strategy Team Leader stated it should go in the black sacks. Dog bins around the district were emptied a minimum of weekly.

Councillor James Palmer thought the Service had done well, as the Service covered every house in the district. The new bin service had rolled out successfully but street cleaning in Soham had to be sorted out.

The service delivery plan was endorsed.

It was resolved:

That the enclosed Service Plans for 2014-15 be endorsed.

32. **REVIEW OF WASTE COLLECTIONS POLICY**

The Committee received a report, reference P105 previously circulated, that reviewed the Council's Waste Collections Policy one year after introduction of service charges.

The Waste Strategy Team Leader advised the Committee that, as part of the new service, a new Collection Policy had been introduced.

Councillor Colin Fordham left the meeting at this point, 6:14pm.

There had been some significant changes with payments being made by people for additional garden waste bins and the introduction of charges made to developers of new properties for bins, both approved by the Waste and Environment Sub-Committee. Other minor amendments had been made to clarify a few issues. Additional recycling bins were wanted by residents meaning there would be an additional charge by Veolia, which could not be reclaimed. It was felt it would be better to retain single bins, as supplying additional ones was not quantifiable. Delegated authority was therefore requested, in consultation with the Service Delivery Champion, to make minor amendments to the Policy.

Councillor Tony Goodge queried what happened where highways were unadopted and bins had to be presented at collection points. The Committee was informed that this was covered in the Policy but perhaps needed clarifying.

Councillor Lorna Dupré asked about the licence for additional garden waste bins if more were requested. The Waste Strategy Team Leader revealed that they could be taken to new houses in the district and the Service would continue to collect them until the end of the year when a new licence would be required.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the suggested amendments to the Council's Waste Collection Policy be agreed;
- (ii) That officers be given delegated power to make further minor amendments to the Policy as necessary in consultation with the Service Delivery Champion for Waste.

33. **RECYCLING REWARD SCHEME FUNDING BID**

The Committee received a report, reference P106 previously circulated, that sought submission of a grant application through the Recycling Reward Scheme.

The Waste Strategy Team Leader advised the Committee that there was now another pot of money that could be used for recycling. The Council's previous bid and this new fund gave an opportunity for some other additional temporary resources. This new fund was aimed at incentivising people to increase

participation in recycling, increasing the materials recycled and avoiding contamination by offering a prize draw for those participating. It would also allow people to be educated on how not to contaminate their bins. However, the scheme would be resource intensive so additional resources would be needed. A bid of just under £200K would be made to cover the additional costs, at a high level for Year 1 and thereafter reducing so the scheme could be sustainable. The decision on who would get funding would be the Minister, who had recently highlighted East Cambridgeshire's success in increasing its recycling rate significantly. So it was thought the bid would be successful, as this Council was just behind other Cambridgeshire councils' recycling rates even though they had fortnightly collections.

Councillor Anna Bailey reckoned the end result would be great but was worried about what message this might give people, as the taxpayers would be paying for the draw prize. A message should be put out that this was about a sustainable future and saving money.

It was resolved:

- (i) That a submission of the prepared application to the Recycling Reward Scheme be agreed;
- (ii) That consideration of extending the proposed scheme beyond the grant funded period if costs can be covered by additional income generated be agreed.

34. **REVIEW OF PLANNING APPEAL DECISIONS**

The Committee received a report, reference P107 previously circulated, that provided a general analysis of appeal performance over the last 5 years, a more detailed snapshot in relation to the last 2 years and a breakdown by delegated and Committee decisions.

Councillor Anna Bailey noted the huge effort made to gather the information together in the report. An additional paper had been tabled with minor amendments and revised recommendations. It would be helpful for the Planning Committee to see this information.

The Planning Manager found it useful to look back at the performance on appeals and realised that it was pretty reasonable. Not too much should be read from the figures, particularly as the Planning Committee tended to deal with the more controversial applications.

Councillor Mike Rouse found it informative to consider the facts and evidence on appeals. This should be brought to the Planning Committee monthly, so that trends could be spotted. The figures were much better than feared.

It was resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.32pm.