

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 1 March 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **1 March 2023** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr S A Wilson
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs J E McPherson

Cllr R P Constable	Cllr G W Myers
Cllr A H Eves	Cllr L J Newport
Cllr Mrs E P Gadsdon	Cllr D W Sharp
Cllr J R F Mason	

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllrs D S Efde, A L Williams and S E Wootton.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J N Gooding, Mrs J R Gooding, R Lambourne, R Milne, J E Newport and M G Wilkinson.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr I A Foster	- for Cllr R Milne
Cllr J E Cripps	- for Cllr J E Newport

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Campbell	- Director of Policy & Delivery
T Lilley	- Director of Communities & Health
Y Dunn	- Planning Manager
S Worthington	- Principal Democratic & Corporate Services Officer
H Boyd	- Civic Officer
K Sims	- Corporate Services Officer

ALSO ATTENDING

M Elliott	- Station Manager, Rochford & Hawkwell Fire Stations
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56 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2023 were not yet available and would be taken to the meeting scheduled for 4 April 2023.

57 UPDATE ON GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ENCAMPMENTS

The Committee considered the updates on gypsy and traveller encampments received from the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU) dated 26 November 2022 and 3 February 2023.

The Committee requested that they receive updates on a quarterly basis.

Resolved

That the ECTU updates on gypsy and traveller encampments within the county be noted. (DP)

58 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Communities & Health providing an update on the delivery of the joint Castle Point and Rochford District Council Community Safety Partnership (CSP) priorities and actions.

It was noted that in future there would be 6-monthly meetings involving the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's (PFCC) office, Police Service, Fire Services and officers. Future reports would also contain more detailed information in an appendix.

The following points were noted during debate of the report:-

- The Rochford District received £12,337.00 funding from the PFCC for 2022/23; this was separate from any CSP funding for the Castle Point borough. There were other sources of funding for which the Council could apply for funding. In addition, the PFCC would allocate additional funding for specific projects which were identified by the Council, subject to PFCC approval.
- It was likely that the District would receive a similar level of funding for the Community Safety Partnership for 2023/24 of around £12,337.00 but this was yet to be confirmed.
- The priority areas for action set out in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.8 of the report mirrored the CSP priorities. It was likely that the priorities for 2023/24 would be the same but this would be confirmed in due course by the PFCC.
- The Bar 'N' Bus provision was not District- wide; it did not, for example, cover the Great Wakering area.
- Members should be provided with a detailed breakdown of how the CSP funding for 2022/23 had been spent.
- The report should include a glossary at the end of any acronyms used.
- The Fire Service undertook a variety of activities for the CSP, including: safety risk visits to homes, using trained volunteers, school educational visits covering firework safety, cyber security and gangs, sensory inspections in homes due to, e.g., hearing loss.
- The Fire Service work was funded by the Fire Service.
- Fire breaks were still ongoing.

Resolved

That the progress made by the Rochford District Community Safety Partnership during 2022/23 be noted. (DCH)

59 **ONETEAM TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL QUARTER 4 UPDATE**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Policy & Delivery providing a quarterly update on the progress of the OneTeam Transformation Programme.

In response to a Member question as to how many staff there were across both councils in the context of the 200 staff that had two face to face staff meetings in December, officers confirmed that there were around 400 staff working across the two councils.

Officers advised, in response to a Member query relating to the timescale for approval of business cases, that the third column of the table set out at paragraph 3.1 of the report included anticipated timescales for the completion of relevant business cases.

Members emphasised that there was interest from other local authorities in the OneTeam Transformation Programme as it was unusual for such joint working to take place across two councils that did not have adjoining geographical boundaries.

Responding to a Member question as to whether risks associated with the Project were moving in the right direction, officers confirmed that this was on track. One new risk that had been identified was one relating to ICT.

Recommended to the Executive

That progress of the OneTeam Transformation Programme be noted. (DPD)

60 **REVIEW OF IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Place providing details of the previous reviews to improve the service within the Development Management team conducted in 2019 and 2021.

In response to concern raised by Members about ongoing issues with the Council website access to planning application information which wasn't user friendly and was taking too long to resolve, officers agreed that this was frustrating; the service was provided by a third party. IT had inherited this problem and were searching for a fix for it.

It was noted that the Council had created its own web page on the website to which new planning applications were uploaded each week in an attempt to try and address this particular issue. There was a link on the planning portal web page to this new RDC web page. Unfortunately, the page was not searchable; however, it was possible to see all uploaded planning applications by application number/address.

Members requested that all Members be provided with details of how to access this RDC web page.

During debate of pages 9.2 and 9.3 of the report and specifically around keeping Members informed of planning applications within their wards, Cllr I A Foster moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs J E McPherson, that an additional recommendation that for large and controversial planning applications officers should seek Ward Councillor comments on conditions, particularly if they vary from the planning application and this was carried on a show of hands.

(10 Members voted in favour and 1 Member abstained).

In response to a Member question relating to under funding of planning enforcement, it was noted that a report on planning enforcement had been considered by this Committee in December and a recommendation had been made for additional resource in Planning Enforcement.

Officers confirmed that issues identified within appendix 1 of the report relating to officers not being able to view plans on site visits and some staff, similarly, not being able to access Google Earth, had been resolved.

The Leader emphasised the importance of reviewing planning enforcement performance measures as part of the OneTeam service review to ensure that the right level of resource was identified to meet these performance measures. In addition, he advised that the planning portal website issue would be raised at the Executive.

Members requested that they receive regular reports on planning enforcement breaches broken down by types of cases by ward, with detailed timelines of when breaches of conditions were reported and subsequently addressed.

In response to a Member question as to when the planning software was last changed, officers confirmed that two different software packages were used, with regular software updates applied for both. As part of the service review work it was planned to align software across both councils to increase efficiency. The software used by BBC was used more widely.

Recommended to the Executive

That the following actions be implemented:-

- (1) Arrange a follow up review of the Development Management service by PAS, to assist with the #OneTeam service.
- (2) That further options are explored within the #OneTeam partnership to create additional capacity across both Councils.
- (3) Continue work on improving the customer experience through online improvements and digital technology.
- (4) Provide a full pre-application service from April 2023 as a discretionary service.
- (5) To provide Members with planning application decisions in their wards.
- (6) Implement quarterly performance and monitoring reporting to Members.
- (7) That for large and controversial planning applications officers should seek Ward Councillor comments on conditions, particularly if they vary from the planning application. (DP)

61 KEY DECISIONS DOCUMENT

The Committee noted the contents of the Key Decisions Document.

62 WORK PLAN

The Committee discussed and noted the work plan.

A status report on the Local Plan would be scheduled to go to the Planning Policy Committee on 16 March 2023 and could be added to the O&S work plan after that.

It was agreed that 6-monthly reports on the cost of living, which would consist of the information contained in the 2-monthly reports received by the Executive, should be included in the work plan.

Before closing the meeting the Chairman thanked the Vice-Chairman for her support over the past year and also thanked Members and officers for their support. He also thanked the Principal Democratic & Corporate Services Officer and Democratic Services Officer for their support during the year.

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The meeting closed at 8.29 pm.

Chairman

Date

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