



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT  
CAPITAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE BOUGES/VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL  
ON 17 MARCH 2015**

**Present:** Councillors Y Maqbool (Chairman), S Allen, R Brown, A Iqbal, JA Fox, R Herdman, N Thulbourn,

**Also Present:** Councillor JR Fox, Group Leader, Werrington First  
Alan Skeels, Chair of the Tenant Farmer's Association  
Cllr Harrington, Group Leader, Peterborough Independent Forum  
Cllr Murphy  
Andy Denman, Business Manager, Skanska

**Officers Present:** Simon Machen, Corporate Director of Growth and Regeneration  
Jonathan Lewis, Service Director for Education, Resources and  
Corporate Property  
Jo Gresty, Farms Manager  
Mandy Pullen, Acting Head of HR  
Jan Paxton, HR Analyst  
Mike Kealey, Head of HR  
Belinda Evans, Customer Services Manager  
Mark Sandhu, Head of Customer & Transactional Services  
Andy Tatt, Head of Highway Services  
Paulina Ford, Senior Governance Officer

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Arculus and Councillor Fletcher. Councillor Allen and Councillor Herdman were in attendance as substitutes.

**2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations**

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

**3. Minutes of Meetings held on**

- 13 January 2015
- 3 February 2015 – Call-in
- 9 February 2015 – Joint Scrutiny Committee and Commissions Meeting – Scrutiny of the Budget
- 16 February 2015 – Call-in

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 January, 3 February, 9 February and 16 February 2015 were all approved as an accurate record.

**4. Call in of any Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Key Officer Decisions**

There were no requests for call-in to consider.

## 5. A Draft Strategy for the Council Farms Estate – Final Report of the Task and Finish Group

The report was introduced by the Service Director for Education, Resources and Corporate Property and provided the Committee with the final outcomes report from the Task and Finish Group and draft Strategy for the Councils Farms Estate. The report was in response to questions asked by the Committee at its meeting on 20 January 2015. Also in attendance was the Chair of the Tenant Farmers Association who provided context regarding the Tenant Farmers involvement in developing the Strategy. Councillor Harrington and Councillor Murphy who were members of the Task and Finish Group and also in attendance addressed the Committee providing background information and context as to the importance of the Strategy.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members noted that that the current leases were long term leases and wanted to know if this could be changed or done differently going forward to allow more new entrants. An example would be to stagger the leases. *The Farms Manager responded that there was some land that would be available for reletting after harvest this year. There was however a legal obligation to existing tenants who had long term leases. In some instances there may be opportunities to negotiate early termination of leases if it suited both parties to release more land. It would be a gradual process of change.*
- Members referred to page 35 of the report and sought clarification regarding the statement “On occasion quick decisions are required to take advantage of events”. *Members were informed that events could be any of the following: if land became available, if the council was in a position to invest in the farm land and borrowing was cheap. There were many variables that had to be taken into account when considering the farms estate e.g. variable weather conditions, prices could half within a season, and prices could go up or down for land within a season. It was therefore important to be reactive to the changing circumstances.*
- Members felt that more emphasis should be put on agricultural educational opportunities through the university for new entrants wanting to go into farming. *The Service Director advised that raising the profile of the strategy and developing educational opportunities would be worked on in more detail and he would come back with a further report to the Committee. Councillor Harrington informed Members that there should be a focus on encouraging a university campus with a farm focus to encourage students to go into farming.*

The Chair thanked the Members of the Task and Finish Group and Officers for their work on developing the Strategy.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee endorsed the Strategy for the Management of the Farms Estate and recommend the strategy to Cabinet for approval.
2. The Committee recommend that the Service Director for Education, Resources and Corporate Property investigate and develop further the option of staggered leases and educational and social opportunities for the Farms Estate.

### ACTIONS AGREED

The Committee requests that the Service Director for Education, Resources and Corporate Property bring back a further report on progress of the Strategy for the Management of the Farms Estate in nine months.

## 6. Human Resources Monitoring Report

The report was introduced by the Interim Head of HR and provided the Committee with an annual update on key workforce data and HR activity since last reporting to the Committee on 7 April 2014.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members congratulated officers on an informative and detailed report.
- Members were concerned that the sickness absence days due to stress had increased to 2238 for current employees compared to 2049 days reported in November 2013. This figure had increased despite actions being taken to impact on better stress management. *Members were informed that the take up by employees for some of the measures that had been put in place had been low. HR were working with the Communications Team to raise awareness of what was available to support employees.*
- Members sought clarification regarding the disciplinary and grievance graphs on page 74 which was provided by the HR Analyst.
- Members referred to the section on disability and noted that “*standards in respect of disability were met in the recent assessment*” and asked which of the standards had not been met. *Officers advised that they did not have the information available at the meeting but would provide it outside of the meeting.*
- Could Members have access to the E Learning modules which provided awareness on dementia, learning disabilities and mental health that had been launched this year? *Officers advised that they would look into this to see if it was possible.*
- Members noted that the information provided did not compare statistics with previous years and requested that future reports include this information.
- Members noted and were pleased to see the initiatives that had been taken to try and increase the diversity of the workforce but still felt that more work could be done. Members requested further detail on how this area of work was being developed.
- Members requested a report on training, development and retention of staff highlighting issues and challenges.

### ACTIONS AGREED

The Committee noted the report and requested that the Interim Head of HR provide the following information to the Committee:

1. Information on the standards that had not been met in the recent assessment as referred to in section 11, Disability in the report.
2. Whether Councillors could have access to the E-Learning modules on dementia, learning disabilities and mental health.
3. Provide detailed information on the work being undertake to develop the diversity of the workforce.
4. Provide a report via email on training, development and retention of staff highlighting issues and challenges.
5. A further report to be presented to the Committee in one year and to include historical comparative data for all statistics presented within the report.

## 7. Corporate Complaints Annual Monitoring Report

The report was introduced by the Customer Services Manager and provided the Committee with a summary of complaints monitored between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 which fell under the Corporate Complaints Policy. The report also included details regarding the new two stage complaints process which had been piloted over the past year. The Head of Customer and Transactional Services was also in attendance.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members noted that the highest category of complaints were for Strategic Resources (268) and that this was due to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme being introduced. Would this number of complaints reduce over time? *The Head of Customer and Transactional Services responded that the introduction of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme had increased the number of complaints. The Government had not funded the introduction of the scheme fully and therefore this had created a mismatch between increased demand and resources available. Many of the complaints had therefore been due to delays in dealing with customers. The scheme had been maintained for a third year at 30% reduction and therefore people had now become accustomed to this and the complaints had therefore reduced.*
- Members were informed of the new two stage complaints process and advised that the pilot in the Neighbourhoods team had shown an improvement in dealing with complaints.
- Members welcomed the new two stage complaints process as it appeared that customers would be more likely to be called at the earliest opportunity to resolve their complaint and this would be welcome. *The Customer Services Manager responded that feedback from the Neighbourhoods department managers was that they felt the new process encouraged them to make contact with customers to resolve complaints more quickly and this had been very successful.*
- Members commented that residents with housing benefit problems often had to call several times and repeat the same information. Could this be resolved? *Members were advised of how the complaints system worked and that the issue may be that the housing benefit staff had not identified the call as a complaint. Training would be given to the housing benefit staff on the new complaints process.*

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and detailed report.

#### **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and requested that a further report be provided in one year.

#### **8. Peterborough Highway Service Annual Report 2014**

The Corporate Director for Growth and Regeneration provided context and background to the report and introduced Andy Denman, Business Manager for Skanska. The Head of Highway Services then introduced the report which provided the Committee with an annual report on the performance of Peterborough Highway Services between January 2014 and December 2014. Members were informed that Peterborough City Council and Skanska formed a partnership in October 2013 and was responsible for improving and maintaining Peterborough's highway network including roads, drainage, street lighting and bridges.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members congratulated officers on winning the Contribution to the Environment Capital Award at the Peterborough Green Awards.
- One Member commented that there had been a lot of street lighting faults reported recently and they seemed to be taking quite a long time to rectify. *Members were informed that this was due to cable faults caused by old network cables laid in the 1970's. A large amount of investment was being put into a new infrastructure however some of the cables did not belong to Peterborough Highway Services and delays were often as a consequence of third party delays and traffic management issues. Consideration was also being given to replacing all of the street lights with LED lighting.*
- Members were concerned at the amount of parkway lighting that had been removed or turned off. *The Corporate Director responded that the policy was to light junctions, slip roads and roundabouts. The parkways had some of the oldest street lights. Research had shown that there was fewer accidents on parkways where the lights were turned off as people drove more carefully.*

- Members commented that the KPI's should be in plain English to enable people to understand what they meant and requested that the description of the KPI's be translated into plain English.
- Why were so many of the KPI's in the Performance report red. *Members were informed that they were stretching targets. The Business Manager, Skanska clarified why targets were red and what actions were being taken. He also informed Members that in some cases the target had been exceeded and therefore needed to be re-evaluated. The KPI's were industry standard and public safety driven and set at challenging targets for this reason.*

The Chair congratulated officers on an informative and well presented report.

### **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and requested the following:

1. An update on the issues regarding street lighting via email to the Committee.
2. That the KPI's are looked at with regard to writing them in plain English and emailed to the Committee for comment.
3. That a further report be brought back to the Committee in one year.

### **9. Forward Plan of Executive Decisions**

The Committee received the latest version of the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions, containing key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the following month. Members were invited to comment on the Forward Plan and where appropriate identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

### **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8. 40pm

CHAIRMAN

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