

**MINUTES OF THE GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT 7PM, ON
THURSDAY, 6 JANUARY 2022
ENGINE SHED, SAND MARTIN HOUSE**

Committee Members Present: Councillors C. Harper (Chair), J. Allen, C. Burbage (Vice Chair), G. Casey, N. Day, Judy Fox, I. Hussain, E. Murphy, O. Sainsbury, L. Sharp, C. Wiggan
Co-opted Member: Parish Councillor Michael Samways

Officers Present in Steve Cox – Executive Director, Place and Economy
David Beauchamp - Democratic Services Officer
Sue Grace – Director of Customer Services and Digital
Sam Smith – Assistant Director, I.T. and Digital Services

Also Present: Councillor Marco Cereste, Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation (attending virtually)

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brown and Moyo. Councillors I. Hussain and J. Allen were in attendance as substitutes.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of interest were received.

32. MINUTES OF MEETINGS HELD ON:

32a 3 November 2021 - Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee

The minutes of the Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 3 November 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

32b 17 November 2021 – Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committees

The minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 November 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

33. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Due to the deferral of agenda item 6, this item was not needed.

34. CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBR OR KEY OFFICER DECISIONS

There were no requests for call-in to consider.

35. 'SAVE BRETTON OAK TREE' PETITION – ACTION TO BE TAKEN

With the prior agreement of the Chair, Vice-Chair and Group Representatives, this agenda item was deferred.

36. PORTFOLIO PROGRESS REPORT – FOR THE CABINET MEMBER FOR DIGITAL SERVICES AND TRANSFORMATION

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation (attending virtually), the Director of Customer Services and Digital and the Assistant Director, I.T. and Digital Services. The report provided an update on the progress of IT which is under the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation.

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members commented that they had found it difficult to report I.T. issues as the Service Desk email address was no longer in operation and requested that the Director of Customer Services and Digital produces a user guide for Members on how to access I.T. support.
- Members referred to section 4.2 of the report and requested an update on the workspace booking app and hybrid meetings. Officers responded that the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 had disrupted plans in this area. Feedback on hybrid systems had been mixed and different technology might be required for bigger rooms. Hybrid meetings presented greater challenges than both fully physical and fully virtual meetings.
- Members requested information on how I.T. budgets had changed in recent years. Officers responded that savings of £711,000 had been planned for 2021/22 and this figure was improved upon by an additional £300,000 due to the reduction in overheads generated by exiting the Serco contract.
- Members requested that the Director of Customer Services and Digital provides the Committee with details of I.T. budget savings in recent years and a breakdown of how hosting servers for Cambridgeshire County Council in Sand Martin House benefited Peterborough City Council. The financial benefit to the council was approximately £100,000 and was variable. Officers would provide the exact figure outside the meeting.
- Savings targets had been exceeded by analysing external spend to identify less expensive ways of delivering services that had become apparent after the exit from the Serco contract, as well as identifying contracts that could be ceased entirely.
- Areas identified for possible future savings in the next financial year included the reduction of unnecessary landline telephony and transitioning from Chromebooks to Laptops in light of the continued need to facilitate home working.
- Members highlighted that bringing services in house had resulted in significant savings and asked if there was scope for local providers to provide I.T. services. Officers responded that the majority of contracts were for niche systems and software which necessitated achieving good value and economies of scale with Cambridgeshire County Council. Opportunities for local provision would be pursued if there were appropriate opportunities however.
- Members requested that the Assistant Director, I.T. and Digital Services provides the Committee with a breakdown of the £6m I.T. budget.
- Budget risks for the future included commodity prices and the limited number of suppliers for some systems, limiting opportunities for savings in procurement.

There was also a transition in the I.T. industry towards purchasing cloud-based services, rather than capital spend on infrastructure and a different budget model might be needed to support this. Work was underway to identify how this transition would affect the true cost of providing I.T. services.

- Members commented that transitioning to cloud-based services might increase the risk of data being intercepted and that security would therefore be of critical importance. Officers acknowledged this point and stated it was important that security measures were appropriately located to deal with threats.
- Members asked if the Council had sufficient resources in-house to deliver I.T. services or if additional staff had been recruited. Officers responded that Serco staff were transferred to Council employment via TUPE. The senior leadership team was strengthened by sharing the capabilities and wider skillset of staff across both Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. External expertise had occasionally been sought for specific systems, although Council staff would be trained to support these systems in the future.
- Members asked if the 'FixMyStreet' app was the responsibility of the Council's I.T. team. Officers responded that this app was linked to other systems and responsibility varied depending on the nature of the issue. Communication between the responsible parties was possible for Waste but not for other services.
- Members commented on the social and added value provided by local suppliers and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Officers responded that social value was becoming an increasingly significant factor in the procurement process and it was possible to differentiate between suppliers on this basis. A dedicated member of staff in this field would soon be employed across Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council.
- Members asked if software could be developed in-house to reduce expenditure on niche software packages that commanded a premium price. Officers responded that other Councils had examined this and it was not considered viable for certain large systems, e.g. in Social Care. However, opportunities would be employed to utilise digital tools in-house to wherever possible. For example, an ineffective Freedom of Information (FOI) system had been replaced with a system based on Microsoft Office 365 using in-house skills. The opportunities presented by the Council's investment in Office 365 would be utilised whenever possible.
- Officers were examining the possibility of replacing phones with Microsoft Teams for some members of staff, although this would not be suitable for everybody.
- Members referred to section 4.3 of the report and requested that the Assistant Director, I.T. and Digital Services provides the Committee with information on I.T. capital expenditure and which schemes had been withdrawn due to budgetary constraints.
- Apprenticeships were planned as part of the new I.T. shared service.
- Members commented that did not always receive responses to reported issues, e.g., in relation to Crescent Bridge. Officers responded that this was the responsibility of the Place and Economy directorate.
- Councillor Murphy, seconded by Councillor Wiggin, proposed that the Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Council continues to work collaboratively in I.T. and investigates joint procurement with public sector partners wherever practical. This recommendation was UNANIMOUSLY agreed.
- The Cabinet Member apologised for not being present in person and commented that Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) was an area of opportunity for the future. Work was underway to examine how procurement could be done differently. Internal systems were being improved to enhance the FixMyStreet app.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Cabinet that the Council continues to work collaboratively in I.T. and investigates joint procurement with public sector partners wherever practical.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered the report and resolved to:

1. Note the contents of this report.
2. Request that the Director of Customer Services and Digital produces a user guide for Members on how to access I.T. support.
3. Request that the Director of Customer Services and Digital provides the Committee with details of I.T. budget savings in recent years and a breakdown of how hosting servers for Cambridgeshire County Council in Sand Martin House benefits Peterborough City Council.
4. Request that the Assistant Director, I.T. and Digital Services provides the Committee with a breakdown of the £6m I.T. budget.
5. Request that the Assistant Director, I.T. and Digital Services provides the Committee with information on I.T. capital expenditure and which schemes had been withdrawn due to budgetary constraints.

37. MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which enabled the committee to monitor and track the progress of recommendations made to the Executive or Officers at previous meetings.

Members requested an urgent response to the recommendation made at the 3 November 2021 meeting in relation to bulky waste and recycling.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the responses from Cabinet Members and Officers to recommendations made at previous meetings as attached in Appendix 1 to the report.
2. Request an urgent response from the Cabinet Member for Waste, Street Scene and the Environment to the recommendation made at the 3 November 2021 meeting in relation to bulky waste and recycling.

38. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Chair introduced the report which invited members to consider the most recent version of the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and identify any relevant items for inclusion within the Committee's work programme or to request further information.

Members requested an update on the City Market, asked how many market traders would be able to transfer to the new site and requested information on the possibility of using the Town Hall as part of the new market. The Executive Director, Place and Economy commented that the design drawings from the market demonstrated how units would be positioned and the new location would be good for both the Town Centre and the Market. Additional information would be provided by the relevant officer outside the meeting.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Consider the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and;
2. Request an update from the relevant officer on the City Market, including how many market traders would be able to transfer to the new site and information on the possibility of using the Town Hall as part of the new market.

39. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Chair and Democratic Services Officer presented the report which considered the work programme for the municipal year 2021/22 and asked Members if they had any further items to add to the work programme.

It was noted that some items had been deferred from this meeting. An extraordinary meeting would be organised to discuss the agenda item 'Save Bretton Tree – Action to be taken.

40. GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE START TIME 2022-23

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the item which invited Member to agree the start time for all Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee meetings for the Municipal Year 2022-23

An informal discussion took place around the possibility of holding meetings during the day. This proposal was abandoned after a show of hands made it clear this would not be suitable for all Members.

The Committee **UNANIMOUSLY** agreed upon a start time of 7pm.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to agree a start time of 7pm for all Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee meetings for the Municipal Year 2022-23.

41. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9 February 2022 – Joint Scrutiny of the Budget

1 March 2022 – Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee

It was clarified that the Bretton Tree agenda item would be considered by the Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, not the Planning and the Environmental Protection Committee.

The Chair commented that this was his last meeting in this role and felt the Committee had developed well and had asked good questions.

7pm – 8.01pm

CHAIRMAN

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