

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT  
CAPITAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE BOUGES/VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL  
ON 7 APRIL 2014**

- Present:** Councillors N Arculus (Chairman), L Serluca, J Peach,  
JA Fox, N Khan, N Thulbourn,
- Also Present:** Councillor Sandford, Group Leader, Liberal Democrats  
Jasmine Weedon, Youth Council  
Ellie Jaggard, Youth Council
- Officers Present:** Ian Phillips, Assistant Cohesion Manager  
James Fisher, Wildlife Officer  
Mike Kealey, Interim Head of Human Resources  
Jan Paxton, HR Analyst  
Belinda Evans, Customer Service Manager  
Mark Sandhu, Head of Customer Services  
Steven Pilsworth, Head of Strategic Finance  
Steve Winstanley, Team Leader, Research and Information  
Simon Machen, Director of Growth and Regeneration  
Paulina Ford, Senior Governance Officer

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Maqbool.

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

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

**3. Minutes of Meetings held on 20 January 2014 and 10 February 2014.**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2014 were approved as an accurate record.

The minutes of the Joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committees and Commissions held on 10 February 2014 to scrutinise the Budget 2014/15 and Medium Term Financial Plan to 2013/24 were 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.

The Chair had received a request to move item 9 on the agenda, Funding Peterborough's Future Growth forward. The Chair asked the Committee if they were in agreement with this. All agreed that this could be accommodated and it was therefore agreed to move item 9 to item 6 on the agenda.

**5. Scrutiny in a Day – Overview Report**

The report was introduced by the Assistant Cohesion Manager and provided the Committee with the overview report detailing the outcomes from the Joint Scrutiny in a Day event held on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2014. The event looked at understanding and managing the impacts of

welfare reform on communities in Peterborough. The approach had been an innovative one which had cut across the remit of all the Scrutiny Committees in order to look at welfare reform comprehensively and gain a deeper understanding. The Committee were asked to agree the recommendations made by the committee on the day and advise on how they would wish to take them forward.

Members thanked the Officer and the Senior Governance Officer for arranging an excellent event which had been both informative and interesting.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members asked what would be the next stage following the recommendations in the report. *The Assistant Cohesion Manager stated that if the recommendations were approved they would be developed into a detailed work plan which would come back to the committee for further action and scrutiny.*
- Members asked if a year was a proper timeframe for the work plan as the impact of welfare reform would be felt sooner. *The Assistant Cohesion Manager responded that the report and its delivery would be ongoing throughout the year.*
- Members asked with regards to when the 'return on investment' report would be ready. *The Assistant Cohesion Manager stated that Brenda Cook who was the Expert Adviser from the Centre for Public Scrutiny was still to provide observations in this regard which were expected to be available within the next few weeks. The Senior Governance Officer added that this would be incorporated into the work programme and come back to the Committee later in the year.*

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and approved the recommendations:

1. To consider the Council's response to gambling and to devise a holistic approach to combatting the economic threats posed by gambling and vice.
2. To understand the role that the voluntary sector can play in helping the council to deliver its key objectives. To foster closer links into and between the voluntary sector and review how the Council can support this.
3. To scrutinise the Affordable Housing Capital Strategy to enable the Committee to consider recommendations relating to social housing.

The recommendations would be taken forward and included in the work programme next year.

## **6. Funding Peterborough's Future Growth**

The report was introduced by the Director of Growth and Regeneration and provided the committee with an update on the current position and progress in relation to the planned investment joint venture between the Council and a new Peterborough Investment Fund. Members were informed that since writing the report the name of the investor had been confirmed which was Hume Capital.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members asked what the infrastructure around the financial plan would look like. *The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that a report later in the agenda on the Community Infrastructure Levy would deal in part with the issue of funding infrastructure to deliver growth. The onus was on those proposing growth to fund some of the infrastructure around that growth. Any development was subject to a Planning Obligations Implementations scheme whereby any development had to pay towards the cost of infrastructure. Historically new development had funded the whole cost of*

- infrastructure and the council has had to make up the gap. This was funded in various ways such as through the Local Enterprise Partnerships. There was however an element which was outside the control of the planning system such as a change of use.*
- *Members stated they would like to see more transparency regarding infrastructure appraisals so people were able to understand what could or could not be done in advance of something happening. The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that there were two levels: a strategic level of infrastructure and a neighbourhood level of infrastructure. The former serves the whole city and the latter deals with local levels e.g. a local road junction. Money could be secured through Section 106 agreements for development decisions which impacted at local levels e.g. road junctions or school places. However a new development would only have to pay towards the infrastructure development it creates.*
  - *Members sought clarification as to who the investors were and where the funding would come from. The Head of Strategic Finance responded that Hume Capital were the Fund Managers who would be seeking investment from various organisations. Once it was known who the organisations were then the details would be released. The fund was controlled by the Guernsey Financial Services Commission and the UK Financial Conduct Authority who could impose restrictions if there were international sanctions in place on individuals from undesirable countries.*
  - *Members sought clarification that even though there was no direct control over who invested that it was still possible for the council to cancel projects if the source of funds was deemed undesirable. The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that there was a deadlock arrangement in place which stated that the council cannot be made to do anything it did not want to do.*
  - *Members asked why the investment was going through an offshore account and why the fund could not be managed in the United Kingdom. The Head of Strategic Finance informed Members that this sort of investment commonly came through these sources.*
  - *Members followed-up asking if any income generated would be subject to UK taxation. Members were advised that there would be a range of income generated from the regeneration of the city through local taxation but there would also be elements from investors which would not be subject to UK taxation because they would be resident in Guernsey.*
  - *Members referred to page 174 which mentioned future use of the Town Hall and commented that keeping the Town Hall was not cost effective. The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that council had already made this decision. There were a series of assets across the city some of which were underutilised and any property rationalisation project would look at all assets within the city centre.*
  - *Members stated that one downside of the Peterborough Development Corporation was that all the infrastructure was deteriorating at the same rate and now there was significant expenditure in renewing them. Was there a danger that this scheme would lead the council into a similar position in the future? The Director of Growth and Regeneration said he hoped that this would not be the case. An example of why this might not be the case was given e.g. the recent bridge works on Nene Parkway was so expensive because the bearings on the bridges needed to be replaced. Technology would likely progress to a point which would make infrastructure regeneration a lot cheaper and easier.*
  - *Members asked what would happen to the area surrounding the library and Bayard Place if they were sold and the Market if it moved. The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that Bayard Place and the Library buildings were fine except nobody used them at night and this had a negative effect on the area at night. If there were a residential presence in the evening this would provide a much more welcoming area. Quality residential accommodation close to and around the city centre would improve the area.*
  - *Members referred to the alternative options being considered on page 187 which included the traditional Local Asset Backed Vehicle and asked if this had been considered to bring forward the development of the Peterborough District Hospital site.*

*The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that the local authority did not own the site so this had not been possible.*

- Members asked how much consideration had been given to the Local Asset Backed Vehicle route rather than the route that had been taken. *The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded it had been considered in some detail with a procurement exercise but it was concluded that it did not provide the wider benefit for the city.*

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and requested a similar report be brought back to the Committee next year.

### **7. City Councils Biodiversity Strategy: Progress Report 2012/13 and 2013/14.**

The report was introduced by the Wildlife Officer which provided the Committee with information with respect to progress against the actions and targets contained in the Council's Biodiversity Strategy (2010) and allowed feedback to be given by the Committee with respect to progress against the existing strategy.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members referred to page 89 of the report and asked if the Japanese Knotweed at Boardwalks Nature Reserve necessarily needed to be exterminated as it did not spread unless it was cut. *Members were informed that the areas of the Japanese Knotweed were small and isolated and it was best practise to control this as it could spread quite rapidly.*
- Members noted that the Boardwalks were currently closed and asked when there would be funding for it to reopen. *Members were informed that additional funding had been secured to replace the Boardwalks structure with more funding being sought. There had been severe flooding in the area but now the local authority was in a position to replace the structure in the coming months.*
- Members congratulated the officer on a good report and was pleased to see so many schools taking part in the eco-schools scheme referred to on pages 106-107.
- Members referred to pages 85 to 104 which summarised the progress against key actions and targets of the councils Biodiversity Strategy. Action 21 "was to continue to review the use of pesticides (including fungicides and herbicides) in the City Councils land management" with a view towards reduction of their use. Was this being implemented as many trees had unsightly brown rings around them which indicated the use of pesticides and herbicides? *The Wildlife Officer responded that Amey did abide by the relevant regulations in the use of pesticides and herbicides. The nature of the herbicides used was less damaging to the environment than it was historically and was more targeted to the area in which it treated.*
- Members referred to page 94, Action 11, 'the loss of trees, hedges and shrubs will be resisted unless there are sound horticultural or other reasons to indicate otherwise e.g. disease, structural damage or the shrubs are due for replacement'. There had been an FOI request asking how much shrubbery had been removed and the response was that 1000 square metres of shrubbery had been removed and converted to grass. They therefore asked how consistent this was with the objective. Members also asked when replacement trees would be planted as Amey had stated they would be planted by 30 June which was not a good time to plant trees. *The Wildlife Officer responded that a number of the trees removed had likely been due to standard maintenance and thinning programs. He added that 30<sup>th</sup> June was a late time to plant trees and he would recommend that Amey did not plant trees unnecessarily outside the usual planting season.*
- Members referred to page 91, Action 8: 'In the short-term reasonably significant areas should be identified for trialling new approaches to landscape management'. A small number of trials had been carried out but there had been no city-wide rollout. A reduction

in intensity in landscape management would also identify an element of cost reduction but this had not been identified in the report. *The Wildlife Officer responded that Amey was being worked with in order to identify areas in which green space could be managed less intensively which would have cost-saving benefits.*

- Members commented that some shrubs which had been planted during the Development Corporation time were looking very tired and it was beneficial to remove them as they were unsightly however some shrubs also have a noise-cancelling effect. *The Wildlife Officer stated that this sort of detail was dealt with in the Tree and Woodlands Strategy and was included less in the Biodiversity Strategy but it was a priority to ensure like-for-like replacements.*
- Members commented that the issue of shrubs was separate from trees as the shrubs were in areas outside woodlands. Whilst some might agree that removal of shrubbery was attractive the policy was nonetheless that removal of shrubbery should be resisted. *The Wildlife Officer responded that there was no general policy to remove shrubbery but there may be other reasons that it was removed such as safety. Replacement planting may take place elsewhere.*
- Members commented that the policy was difficult to understand as often what was called biodiversity was often areas that looked a mess. *The Wildlife Officer responded that areas needed to be carefully targeted and the benefits of biodiversity explained to the public. Areas needed to be well-managed and not just seen as an excuse for an unmanaged area.*

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report.

The Committee requested that the Wildlife Officer:

1. Provide a briefing note to update the Committee demonstrating what the Council and Amey planned to do to take the Strategy forward regarding identifying areas for trialling new approaches to landscape management.
2. The Committee requested that the Biodiversity Strategy be presented in an easy read format so that members of the public could understand the meaning of Biodiversity more clearly.

## **8. Human Resources Monitoring Report**

The Interim Head of Human Resources presented the report which provided the Committee with a means to facilitate scrutiny of staffing and workforce matters. Key points highlighted included:

- HR Developments \ Updates \ Priorities
- Reward and Policy
- Training and Development
- Investors in People
- Statistics/Analysis
  - Turnover
  - Absence
  - Employee Relations (cases)
  - Workforce Diversity
- Stress Absence
- Disability Ethnic Minority and Disability Diversity in the Workforce

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members referred to page 129 and the monthly sickness information and in particular the figures for stress. Members noted that there were two tables showing figures for stress and sought clarification as to the difference and why at the end of September stress levels were still quite high as were musculoskeletal problems. The tables were difficult to understand. *Members were informed that the figures in the report were for the last 12 months. The top table on the page showed from September backwards and the second table showed from November backwards. The total sick days lost by month for September of 1,084.83 was for total sickness not just stress. The total for stress was 2,500 and this may not have been clear in the report.*
- Members said that 1,084 days lost per month was still a large amount. *Interim Head of Human Resources responded that out of that figure 444 were from musculoskeletal, stress, depression etc. Within the context of the private sector average this was not a bad figure. The shape of the organisation had changed and now the two main chunks of staff incorporated areas such as Adult Social Care where many members of staff were prone to stress-related illness. A number of things were in place to provide support and assistance. There would be a stress audit where employees could complete a stress questionnaire in order to ascertain how many individuals were becoming more overloaded, overworked and stressed.*
- Members asked if any of the initiatives mentioned in the report to help people back to work had helped. *The Interim Head of HR advised that he did not have the information available but would look into it.*
- Members asked why the Christmas, Easter and Holiday period were the most stressful. *The Interim Head of HR stated that Christmas was known as a typical blue month period but it was difficult to understand why Easter would be a particularly stressful period.*
- Members referred to page 139 of the report pack and referred to the % of Workforce who are from Ethnic Minorities or Mixed Origins. In collecting this information was there a possibility that people were answering them incorrectly and this would account for the seemingly low result? *The Interim Head of HR responded that throughout the recruitment process there was a screening process to ensure that the information being presented to the officers recruiting was only information based on their abilities and experience.*
- Members asked why the issue around increasing recruitment of ethnic minorities or mixed origins had not improved from last year. Furthermore, the percentage of female workforce seemed to be very high compared to men. *Members were informed that one of the issues had been a lack of job opportunities and the fact that the council had been losing more people than they had been recruited. Ultimately it was about the best person for the job which was the decision of the line managers.*
- Members asked how involved HR was with Partner Organisations. *The Interim Head of HR responded that they kept a watchful eye on employee relations. The trade unions were the same reps that deal with partner organisations and they advised HR of any issues. There had been exploration of provision of training services to Partner Organisations in order to generate funds to cover costs of the team. In terms of setting policy and guidance there were questions around interpretation of policy in which guidance was offered. The day-to-day operational running however was left to the Partner Organisations themselves.*

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report.

### **9. Complaints Monitoring Report 2012-2013**

The report was presented by the Customer Service Manager and provided a summary of formal complaints monitored between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 which fell under the Corporate Complaints Policy. Furthermore, members were invited to comment on the annual

report from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about the council's performance on complaints. Key issues highlighted were:

- Complaint volumes have continued to decrease this year.
- More complaints are being resolved at Stage 1 with less escalation to both Stage 2 and Stage 3.
- Better compliance with the 15 day timescale at Stage 2.
- Speed of response to Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) enquiries has successfully been maintained at 15 days average response time against a target of 28 days for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year running.
- A change to the complaints process from 3 stages to 2 is currently being piloted.
- Compliments about council services continue to exceed complaints and have shown an increase on the previous year.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members noted the increase in compliments coming in. Many seemed to be internal and Members asked for clarification as to what this meant. *The Customer Service Manager responded that internal and external compliments had both gone up in the past year. Internal compliments were compliments given by Councillors and from one department to another.*
- Members felt that it was very positive that the number of compliments had gone up. *The Customer Service Manager responded that complaints had also been going down. Customer Services and the Planning Department were working hard to achieve a very high standard and there was a constant review of delivery of services in order to react to customer demand for change.*
- Members noted that Amey had a very low number of justifiable complaints for customer interactions and asked what 474,000 customer interactions per month meant. *Members were informed that this referred to the number of collections made from households. The data were provided by Enterprise and the complaints department did not have any role in scrutinising it. The Head of Customer services added that he suspected the number referred largely to bin collections. The Client Team had a quarterly meeting with the Partner and they scrutinised the complaints.*
- Members asked where a complaint gets logged regarding bin collections. *Members were advised that the customer could go straight to the Amey complaints team or go through the Local Authority's call centre which is where the majority of complaints are handled. The majority of issues would be for a request for service e.g. a one-off issue like the bin had not been emptied., However if it was an ongoing issue it would be logged as a complaint rather than a request for service. The complaints team do still get a large volume of Amey complaints because the customer still see the council website as the main port of call.*
- Members complimented the staff at Ameys complaints team.

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report.

### **10. Peterborough Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

The report was presented by the Team Leader, Research and Information and was intended to draw attention to important proposed changes to the way in which the Local Authority collected and administered developer contributions in the light of recent statutory and regulatory changes instigated at the national scale. The report set out the proposed timetable through to CIL adoption.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members asked if there was a way to take out of the main budget for infrastructure in a certain area and redistribute it and use it for the old wards. *Members were advised that once money comes in there was already a system in place called the Planning Obligation Implementation Scheme which requires the money to be used in a certain way. The CIL will generally be collected for a range of projects which generally were more strategic in nature. The bottom line was that a project would need to be related to supporting growth.*
- Members followed-up stating that the old part of the city where there was no development would not benefit. They asked if it was possible to direct monies from the main budget into wards where the money was needed to address an imbalance in the city. *The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that there would be benefit to other parts of the city because it would mean that development was more viable in those older parts of the city. The question however was more a question regarding how the Council allocates its budgets which was a decision for Council and not specifically about CIL itself.*
- Members referred to page 193, paragraph 5.4.2 and requested further explanation with regard to communities without a Parish Council. *Members were advised that this referred to a situation once CIL was in place and money has been collected how it would be allocated across the city. Regulations state that any money collected within a Parish that 15% of the money collected in that financial year as a CIL receipt would go back to the Parish council. If the Parish was covered by a Neighbourhood Plan that would increase to 25% in any one year. For those without a Parish Council the Local Authority would need to agree how the money would be distributed back to the Ward.*
- Members asked if the plan on page 146 regarding the draft residential charging zones was correct and not an oversimplification as a large part was in the low-value zone. *Members were informed that the regulations were clear that complexity should be avoided. A lot of feedback had been received that a flat rate across the city was not sensitive to the different areas in the city. The plan was simple and it was felt that the plan was right after reviewing the evidence and understanding the value of land transactions. It was impossible to be 100% accurate. The Director of Growth and Regeneration responded that the price difference from a developer's point of view was unlikely to have much of an impact.*
- Members asked what the next stages would be. *Members were advised that it would go to Cabinet and Full Council in July and the supporting documentation would be available. Then there would be a period of six weeks consultation. Comments would be collated and sent to an independent examiner who would give a date for a one or two day hearing which any member of the public can attend. The hearing was likely to be towards the end of the year. By 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015, the regulations would reduce how money could be used in section 106 agreements.*
- Members asked what would be the result for areas which don't use CIL. *Members were informed that if there was a delay in bringing in CIL there was a risk of not bringing in additional money. The system needed to be replaced in order to keep income coming in.*
- Members asked if not having a CIL would generate a return but in a different way. *Members were advised that ultimately location was important as a developer would simply develop where there was a market for their products and there was a demand within Peterborough. If another authority chose not to impose CIL this would not necessarily have an impact.*
- Members asked if a developer developed 15 houses but to do that knocked down one house and there was a net gain of 14 houses would this development be outside CIL. *Members were advised that it would not be outside CIL however a threshold of 15 houses was important as it related to the figure when you need to reach the affordable housing criteria. If a developer was providing affordable housing there would be less CIL to pay. CIL would be higher if the developer were not providing affordable homes.*

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The committee noted the report.

### **11. Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Committee received the latest version of the Forward Plan of Key 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 four months. Members were invited to comment on the Forward Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

Members requested further information on the following key decisions:

- Play Centres.
- Temporary Agency Framework.
- Approval of Community Asset Transfer of Gladstone Park Community Centre.
- To award a contract for the installation of District Heating Scheme System.

### **12. Work Programme 2014/2015**

The Senior Governance Officer presented the report which provided the Committee with a list of possible items to be included in the Committee's 2014-2015 work programme.

## **ACTION AGREED**

The Committee noted the report.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 9.25pm

CHAIRMAN

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