

SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

Present:

Councillor Mick Smith (Chair) (in the Chair)
Councillor Heather Liggett (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Kathy Clegg
Councillor Ross Shipman
Councillor Christine Smith

Councillor Carol Lacey
Councillor Derrick Skinner

Also Present:

L Hickin	Managing Director - Head of Paid Service
J Dethick	Director of Finance and Resources & (Section 151 Officer)
S Sternberg	Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer
L Pepper	Assistant Director Communities
A Bashir	Improvement Officer
R Pope	Customer Services Manager
A Maher	Governance Manager
T Scott	Governance and Scrutiny Officer

SSC/ Apologies for Absence

9/23-
24

No apologies for absence were received.

SSC/ Declarations of Interest

10/2
3-24

Councillor Christine Smith declared an other interest in the Item 'Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Monitoring Report April- June 2023 (Q1)', but indicated she would participate in the Committee's discussion and determination on the Item.

SSC/ Notes of the Informal Meeting

11/2
3-24

RESOLVED – That the Notes of the Services Scrutiny Committee held on 11 July 2023 be noted.

SSC/ The Equalities Plan 2023-27

12/2
3-24

The Improvement Officer presented a report to notify Members and seek comments on the proposed Equality Plan and objectives for 2023-27. Members were informed that a draft Equality Plan and Objectives for 2023-2027 was attached to the report, and the document set out the Council's legal responsibilities, approach to equalities and equality objectives. The document also included profiles of the District and the Council's workforce.

Members enquired if the plan included marking World Prematurity Day. Members were informed that the plan focused more on protected characteristics.

The Committee discussed the equality Member training on 6 September 2023.

The Governance Manager informed Members that a recording of the event had been made and was available for all Members to view.

Members asked if the rising pension age had been considered in the plan. The Managing Director explained that the rise could impact the Council's staff because its workforce was getting older. The Director of Finance and Resources added that the workforce getting older presented a financial challenge, because the budget envelope for them was fixed.

The Chair asked if there were procedures in place for Members to make sure the targets were met. The Improvement Officer explained that public documents were regularly produced to monitor the meeting of targets. The Managing Director added that providing Members with the correct information was very important.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the report.

SSC/ Annual Ombudsman Report 2022-23

13/2

3-24

The Customer Service Manager presented a report on the Annual Review letter of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO).

The report explained that during the period 2022-23, two complaints had been upheld relating to:

1. a failure by the Council to notify the complainant of a change to the plans submitted for a housing development.
2. a failure by the Council to establish the planning position and resolve the unauthorised use of land next to the complainant's home

Members were concerned that both were in the Planning Service. The Customer Service Manager explained that one of the complaints was because the Council did not adhere to an aspect of the Local Plan, so there was no fine involved. She added that the number of complaints in this year was relatively small.

The Customer Service Manager explained that the other complaint was regarding something next to the complainant's home causing noise disturbance, and this was a genuine fault and the Council was fined. Members were informed that Planning issues could be very complex, which was why complaints like this were often made towards Planning & Development.

RESOLVED – That the Committee acknowledged the report and findings of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

SSC/ The Council's People Strategy

14/2

3-24

The Managing Director delivered a People Strategy Development 2024 presentation to Members.

The presentation explained that when Senior Officers were identifying the strategies and policies that would underpin the Council Plan, they placed the People Strategy underneath the priority of A great place to access good public services.

The presentation summarised the following:

- Council Plan development timeline (each step to follow for the Council Plan, including its approval at Council and the finalised service plans coming from it)
- Identifying the Strategies that underpin the Council Plan
- Early areas of focus
- Strategy development process
- Early Vision, objectives and high-level outcomes
- Scoping

The Chair asked if apprentices were employed by the Council from the beginning of their terms. The Managing Director confirmed they were employed by the Council immediately. The Director of Finance and Resources added that apprentices were on fixed-term contracts.

The Managing Director stated that the Talent Pipeline Strategy would be circulated to Members.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the presentation.

SSC/ **The Council's Engagement and Improvement Strategy**

15/2

3-24

The Director of Finance and Resources gave Members an update on the progress of the Engagement and Improvement Strategy. Similarly to the People Strategy, this Strategy was also identified underneath the Council Plan priority of A great place to access good public services.

The Strategy would aim to improve engagement with residents, partners and businesses.

Members were informed that the Strategy would be considered at the Committee meeting on 21 November 2023.

Members referred to closed rent offices in Killamarsh and Clay Cross. The Managing Director stated that a number of difficult financial decisions had to be made since the recession in 2008.

Members asked if a mobile office had been considered to pick up the areas missed by rent office closures. The Director of Finance and Resources stated that this option was being considered.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the update.

SSC/ **Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Monitoring Report April- June 2023**
(Q1)

16/2

3-24

The Director of Finance and Resources presented to Members a summary of the budget position for the first quarter of 2023/24 for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme. Members were advised that the report would also be considered by Cabinet on 21 September 2023.

Committee discussed the report. Members asked if the depot in Eckington was going to be closed. The Director of Finance and Resources responded that there were no plans to close the depot, but it was in need of an update.

Members referred to the recent financial troubles at Birmingham City Council and asked if there was a danger of the Council being in the same situation. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that the Council's finances were in better condition than Birmingham's.

Members referred to the national Local Government Pay Claim 2023/24 and asked if the Council was prepared for the impact. Members were assured that the Council would be as resilient as possible.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the report.

SSC/ Compressed Working Hours

17/2

3-24

The Assistant Director of Governance presented a report with more information on the possibility of the Council introducing four-day working weeks. This came as a result of Members discussing the subject at the informal Services Scrutiny Committee on 11 July 2023, where Members mentioned a pilot being carried out at South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The report included an attachment where Lee Rowley MP had submitted his concerns about the pilot scheme to South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Members felt they would like to consider the possibility in detail at some point in the future.

The Managing Director informed Members that Central Government had not yet issued any guidance on the issue (aside from the letter from Lee Rowley MP) so for the time being, the Council would monitor what unfolds at South Cambridgeshire District Council.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the report.

SSC/ Cabinet Business

18/2

3-24

The Governance Manager presented the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for the period 15 August 2023 – 15 September 2023, and informed Members that future Forward Plan updates to the Committee would be done in a digest style.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the information.

SSC/ Work Programme

19/2

3-24

The Governance Manager presented a list of suggestions in preparation for drafting the Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24. Members were asked to consider the suggestions after the meeting and present Governance with any amendments or additions to the list.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the information.

SSC/ Additional Urgent Items

20/2

3-24 None.

SSC/ Date of Next Meeting

21/2

3-24 10.00am Tuesday 21 November 2023.