



EAST
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4
REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on 19 March 2018 at 4.30 p.m.

P R E S E N T

Cllr Julia Huffer (Chairman)
Cllr David Ambrose-Smith (as a Substitute)
Cllr Elaine Griffin-Singh
Cllr Chris Morris
Cllr Carol Sennitt
Cllr Stuart Smith (as a Substitute)
Cllr Jo Webber

OFFICERS

Jo Brooks – Director Operations
Julia Atkins – Senior Environmental Health Officer (Domestic)
Jason Johnson – Senior Building Control Surveyor
Liz Knox – Environmental Services Manager
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Hetty Thornton – Performance Management Officer
Dave White – Waste Services Team Leader
Members of the public - 0

37. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

38. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Sue Austen, Anna Bailey, Neil Hitchin and Hamish Ross.

Councillors David Ambrose Smith and Stuart Smith attended as Substitute Members.

39. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declaration of interest.

40. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the Regulatory Services Committee meeting held on 22nd January 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

41. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman did not make any announcements.

42. **HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2018-2021**

The Committee considered a report, reference S264, previously circulated, that detailed the draft refreshed Health and Wellbeing Strategy prior to consultation.

The Environmental Services Manager reminded the Committee that the first Strategy had been agreed in 2015 to cover the years 2015 to 2018, with its performance reported last year. In January a Members' seminar had been held to review the Strategy's approach and refocus it.

In general the health of residents in East Cambridgeshire was good but there were some areas of concern, as set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report. Two priorities were identified to address those concerns: physical activity/lifestyles and partnership working. The revised Strategy reflected how this would work and the Action Plan concentrated on the priorities.

Members were asked for comments before the draft Strategy went out to consultation to various stakeholders such as health professionals, parish councils and neighbouring local authorities.

Councillor Chris Morris joined the meeting at this point, 4:32 p.m.

Councillor Jo Webber asked how the Council was getting on with Living Well. If support or advice was needed in the community should they be contacted? The Environmental Services Manager stated that there was very good interaction with them and jointly they were working out the best way forward to improve matters. They could be contacted directly or via the County Council.

Councillor Julia Huffer was astonished that 10% of children were designated as living in poverty in the district, with 24% of children in Littleport alone. What was the definition of poverty, as it was a large figure for an area that was fairly affluent? The Committee was advised that the wider definition included for safeguarding children, but further information on this would be sought and reported back. This issue was recognised in the county-wide strategy, as it was found across Cambridgeshire where there were pockets of high deprivation.

It was resolved:

That the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy and planned actions for 2018-2012 be approved.

43. **NEW FINES FOR FIXED PENALTY NOTICES**

The Committee considered a report, reference S265, previously circulated, that proposed new financial penalties for specified Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs).

The Senior Environmental Health Officer advised the Committee that changes to FPNs and fees would be coming into force on 1st April. Approval was sought to put in place a regime to deter littering and abandonment of vehicles through the proposed fee levels. It was also requested that the opportunity to pay reduced fines for early payment be removed.

Councillor Stuart Smith had been waiting for an enforcement area so the Dog Warden could issue fines for dog fouling. The Senior Environmental Health Officer stated that was a separate issue but protection orders could be issued.

Councillor Julia Huffer asked how many FPNs had been issued. The Senior Environmental Health Officer said that her department had only just taken over this service, so only one had been issued so far. A campaign would be run to highlight the issue.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the proposed levels of financial penalty for separate environmental crime offences be agreed;
- (ii) That the option of reduced fines for early payment of FPN be removed.

44. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE AND NEW SERVICE DELIVERY PLANS**

The Committee considered a report, reference S266, previously circulated, that provided Members with the end of year performance outputs for 2017/2018 and the new service delivery plans for 2018/2019.

The Performance Management Officer asked Members to agree to the end-of-year performance reports and new service delivery plans.

Building Control

The Senior Building Control Surveyor advised the Committee that during the past year the department had consolidated its work within the district and had reported a 64% market share. Since drafting the report further work had been secured meaning that figure could reach around 80%. A 'lean' audit had been conducted, that had gone well and had resulted in disposing of wasteful processes, though improvements were still to be made. The Department was attempting to raise its identity through a new logo and by making payments easier. The budget would be balanced this year, though a profit would have been made if a new trainee had not been needed. They had been employed in August and were progressing well. So the team was at full capacity, the first time in a while.

Councillor Julia Huffer asked whether the Council's Information Technology (IT) team could look into simplifying the payments procedures. The Director, Operations acknowledged the potential for that, but the Finance and Customer Services teams would have to be involved. The IT team was currently going through a review, so there might be a delay in that work until vacant posts were filled.

The Senior Building Control Surveyor then set out the Department's plans for the upcoming year, which included raising the Department's identity, making the customer service easier, opening a Twitter account, and obtaining an application allowing bookings of inspections remotely. The quality standards of Building Control were being looked at nationally, so this would require a lot of work to ensure the Department met those standards. This was tied in with the Grenfell Tower disaster, with the initial report expected later this year. Although it would refer to high-rise buildings, it was expected to impact on the overall regulatory system to help pinpoint builders' responsibilities. The current standards would be stripped back and a new regulatory system introduced, with new technological guidance and competency cards included.

Inroads were being made into the commercial sector, most recently through a couple of local contracts. The Department would be working hard to connect with other developers.

Councillor Julia Huffer congratulated the officer on a very comprehensive report. What was the situation about building standards due to poor inspections by Approved Inspectors? The Senior Building Control Surveyor explained that those Inspectors did not always go to the buildings to inspect and some accepted self-certification.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith was concerned that there was a danger of over-complication. Costs could increase, so the team had to be careful. He asked why some work had not achieved a fee. If fees could not be charged, could money be obtained back via fines? It was explained that the Council had a statutory duty to provide enforcement work and this was paid for by the Council. Enforcement action could relate to almost anything but it did not always result in going to court, as the Department preferred to use intervention to prevent further problems.

Councillor Jo Webber thought the Department had a fantastic reputation and its staff had a realistic attitude. Would there be opportunities to target more builders to get them on board, using the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) warranty scheme? The Senior Building Control Surveyor informed the Committee that the LABC was underwritten but had different requirements to that of the National House Building Council (NHBC), so it would be difficult for a surveyor to do both. NHBC had presented a problem with a recent development due to the low level of their fees, which the Council would not compete with.

Environmental Services

The Environmental Services Manager advised the Committee that it had been a busy year that had seen a number of staff changes. Income had increased over the year, which reflected the amount of capital funding that had been made available through the Better Care Fund. This had meant that more disabled facility grants (DFGs) work had been completed. Increased air quality data had been received, because of an additional monitor installed at Haddenham. Other achievements included 100% food premises inspections completed and 14-day planning applications consultations.

The time to complete DFGs had decreased but there was still room for improvement. The targets had been set by Cambridgeshire County Council, but it had been acknowledged that those targets had been unachievable and would be amended for next year. The implementation of new processes should also help. Commercially the Department had offered to provide advice at cost, but so far there had been no take-up.

Next year poor performing businesses would be looked at. There were a number of new service targets for next year, focussed on environmental crime. A promotional campaign would be held followed by increasing enforcement action. Fixed Penalty Notices would be issued where there was sufficient evidence and houses in multiple occupation would be looked at, with reports brought back to the Committee later in the year. A Warmer Homes funding bid would also be made in September.

Commercially Members had agreed to charge for re-rating businesses. A number of Freedom of Information requests had been received from businesses with a low rating, wanting to be re-rated. There would also be a health and safety project, run with the Health and Safety Executive.

Licensing Services

The Environmental Services Manager advised the Committee that the Licensing Department had dealt with and processed 899 applications during the year. This included an increase in online applications, which had accounted for around 50% of the total. Fees and charges had been increased, with the aim of being a cost neutral service in 5 years. A Taxi Policy had been introduced that had made enforcement easier. The Market Street Ely taxi rank would be moved by the end of March.

Next year would be mainly 'business as usual', though a new draft Gambling Act Policy would be revised.

Housing and Community Safety Services

The Director, Operations advised the Committee that another year had passed with nobody housed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The Department had again prevented homelessness and all relevant decisions had been made within the timeframes. Government funding had been obtained for homelessness prevention, which had enabled the employment of additional officers. Negotiations with a charity had secured an additional 3 rooms to help with accommodation for people with mental health/learning disabilities/addictions. Other work had been undertaken for mental health support and a community hub had been opened in Littleport on 1st March and that was going well.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith thought that the results of the Department were good for the district and had been achieved by a wonderful team. It was understood that 8 community hubs throughout Cambridgeshire was the target. The Director, Operations confirmed that a further 2 hubs had already been identified.

Councillor Stuart Smith was concerned about the reports of rough sleepers in the district, but did not think the area had any. Were these homeless people

who had not come forward? The Committee was informed that the Council, like every other Authority, had a homeless issue but this Council was fairly unique in that it prevented the majority of homelessness from occurring. Part of that included preventing rough sleeping, as anyone approaching the Council was given help, though some people did not wish to engage. The Council would always find a solution for them, as it worked from the start of the problem to prevent homelessness. The Department was not aware of any genuine rough sleepers and officers went out daily to check. Begging in Ely was very lucrative for the perpetrators and reports had been received that the first 'professional' beggar had arrived. Daily these people were invited in and offered accommodation, which they refused as they were not actually sleeping rough. Messages were being put out not to give those people money and that if they wanted to help genuine rough sleepers they should donate to a relevant charity. There was also provision for rough sleepers during bouts of severe weather, but nobody had taken that offer up.

Councillor Elaine Griffin-Singh noted the work of the Council in helping these people, but questioned the participation of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), who should be involved with this issue. The Committee was reminded that the Council gave grants to CAB and this could be reviewed in the light of their performance.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith asked about the traveller/gypsy site review. The Director, Operations explained that a new Traveller Liaison Officer had been appointed and he was undertaking a review, with a report due back to this Committee in June. In addition, 2 tenancy support officers were in place to help with budgeting for people affected by the change to Universal Credit. The Department was also looking for a jointly-funded post between Housing and Customer Services to assist people with their enquiries on that issue.

Planning Service

The Director, Operations advised the Committee that the Planning Department had done a phenomenal amount of work over the past year, as there had been an unprecedented level of applications. Despite this the Department had achieved application determination times better than Government targets. This had also resulted in revenue income of just under £1million. Some targets were not achieved, due to the volume of work, including validation of planning applications and discharge of conditions. There would be a concentration on these areas, plus work on listed buildings, during the next year. A paperless notification system would be used that would give instant notification of applications that had been processed. The Department would be trialling the use of tablets plus a jointly-funded planning lawyer would be sought.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith queried the rapport with the County Highways Department, as it appeared to hold up applications due to consideration of matters further away from the application sites. The Director, Operations stated that there was a certain amount of rapport with Highways but although it was not brilliant it was getting better. Highways officers had visited the Planning Department and would continue to do so.

Councillor Julia Huffer questioned the Section 106 contributions used for county education. This could be checked out and reported later.

Councillor Stuart Smith asked whether there were plans to expand the presence of the Planning Department on social media, as there was hardly anything on Facebook. Facebook tended to be more local than Twitter. The Director, Operations stated that the Planning Department intended to go further by publishing leaflets and using YouTube, to supplement the followers on Twitter.

Waste Services

The Waste Services Team Leader reminded the Committee that it had been an interesting year and there were only a couple of weeks to go before the Waste Services were transferred. The focus in the past year had been on what the Service would be doing next year. So the Service was trying to get through the remainder of this year intact, as the current waste providers were less than enthusiastic to provide that service. Maintaining services was a challenge and the street cleansing service had not been achieved. Next year would see efforts to improve the service, but it would involve hard work to turn it around.

Overall performance has not been brilliant, as recycling rates have dropped, not helped by the loss of two local newspapers and contamination of the recycling bins. All local authorities in the country had struggled to maintain their recycling levels. Around 230 extra blue bins had been purchased that should help recycling rates recover.

Councillor Stuart Smith noted that fly-tipping appeared to be getting worse. The Committee was informed that there were a multitude of problems with the current service, due to staff expected to be transferred over having to complete their annual leave before the end of the contractual year. So operating staff numbers were down, some had also left, affecting the service. Next year new staff would begin and there would have to be a culture change for the old staff. The fly-tipping vehicle had not been used, caused by an error from the current providers. Ideally someone would be responsible in a designated area and could call on support when needed, but it would be a while before that would happen.

Councillor Carol Sennitt noted that the recycling centre at Witchford was being more choosy over the materials it was willing to deal with. Could this be a cause of increased fly-tipping? The Waste Services Team Leader thought it was a worry, as small businesses would have minimum opportunities to get rid of small amounts of trade waste. The County Council recycling centre policies were under review again, though there was no awareness of a policy change. This would be looked into.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith was very concerned about street cleansing, as the district was in a poor state. It was to be hoped that this issue would be cleared up soon and the Council needed to work with parish councils, Councillors and the public to identify relevant areas that needed cleaning. The Waste Services Team Leader thought having someone responsible for an area would highlight problems and it would be useful to liaise with parish councils and others. There would be two machines available for street cleansing, one based in Ely and the other being mobile throughout the district. These would help improve the situation but it would be a gradual process.

Councillor Carol Sennitt left the meeting at this point, 6:05 p.m.

It was resolved:

That the end of year performance outputs and the new service delivery plans for the following services be approved:

- Building Control
- Environmental Services (including Licensing)
- Housing and Community Services
- Planning
- Waste.

Councillor Carol Sennitt returned to the meeting at this point, 6:07 p.m.

45. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee noted its forward agenda plan with the addition of a report to the 5th November meeting relating to an update on the Waste and Street Cleansing Service.

The meeting concluded at 6:08 p.m.