

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

13 JULY 2015 - 2:30PM



PRESENT: Councillor Yeulett (Chairman), Councillor Hay (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Bligh, Mrs Bucknor, Buckton, Davis, Garratt and Mason

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Butcher, Clark, King, Murphy, Sutton and Tanfield.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Miss Hoy and Councillor Humphrey

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jane Bailey (Member Services and Governance), Rob Bridge (Corporate Director), Gary Garford (Corporate Director), Geoff Kent (Head of Customer Services) and Paul Medd (Chief Executive)

OSC7/15 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 1 June 2015 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising:

Councillor Mrs Hay stated that during the last meeting Hate Crime Reporting centres were discussed, and she was reassured that although she had not known about the introduction of these, there were in fact three in Chatteris, at the Town Council, Leisure Centre and the Hub. Following the meeting she enquired at these sites and nobody knew about Hate Crime Reporting or had any information, she added that nobody at the town council knew anything and the local PCSO did not know either. She confirmed that she contacted Councillor Oliver and received a reply from David Bailey an FDC Officer who explained that further training was taking place on 17 July 2015, he forwarded a copy of a leaflet which listed reporting centres in the district, and there are none in Chatteris. She expressed her concern as we need to feel confident in the details that we are given at meetings. Councillor Yeulett asked for clarification of this matter before the next meeting.

Councillor Yeulett referred to the recommendations made at the last meeting with regards to the Safer Fenland Partnership, and asked for feedback on these moving forward.

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

OSC8/15 SHARED PLANNING PROPOSAL

Members considered the Shared Planning Proposal Report which was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel as an additional item for consideration.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Buckton referred to 5.4 - staffing structure, 5.8 - Performance Monitoring and 5.9 - Democratic and Governance arrangements and asked who gets to see this information. Paul Medd stated that at this point we would never share staffing proposals due to employment law, we could not be seen to pre-empt any staffing decisions.

If the proposals are agreed a Staff Committee Report will provide more of the detail of the scheduled staffing proposal moving forward. Rob Bridge confirmed that performance indicators will need to be developed and agreed by Cabinet, and as with the Anglia Revenue Partnership (ARP) we will come and talk to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel about how the partnership is working. He explained that with regards to governance there are legal routes to shared working with exact wording. In September there will be a report setting out the democratic process that would go to Council to be agreed. Paul Medd added that he was keen to clarify that there will be no noticeable change to the planning function at this council, FDC will retain its Planning Committee as it is now, there will be no substantive change;

2. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if we know how many Section 215 notices have Peterborough issued and what expertise they have with regards to listed building. Rob Bridge agreed to investigate further and feedback to the Panel;
3. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification with regards to ICT upgrades and costings. Rob Bridge confirmed that there will be no additional ICT costs. He explained that there is no need to upgrade as we are on the same ICT platform as Peterborough, however Peterborough are further ahead using it than we currently are. We will need to put in some staff time to learn some processes from their staff. Councillor Sutton stated that if we go back 12 months following the PAS review, there has been a giant leap in the way that IDOX is used and this is just another step forward for our staff;
4. Councillor Yeulett asked if investment costs will be shared. Rob Bridge confirmed that redundancy costs will be shared however investment costs are still under discussion, he added that most of the costs are for back scanning documents which we were planning to do anyway as part of our own paperless project. Councillor Yeulett asked about future investment costs. Rob Bridge stated that each quarter the partnership will meet to talk about this type of issue, and we will agree how to split this type of cost;
5. Councillor Mason stated that he is concerned about the lack of detail, and although he is clearer about the ICT issues he is still concerned about the redundancy aspect of the proposal. Councillor Yeulett stated that we must be careful when discussing specific staffing issues. Paul Medd agreed, stating that we cannot be specific about staffing, there is still lots to be worked out, we will do what we can to protect employment;
6. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked how many FDC staff could lose their jobs. Paul Medd reiterated that he cannot be specific about those numbers;
7. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for a breakdown of the £137k savings and asked about costs to those savings. Paul Medd confirmed that the savings will come from the new staffing structure that will be set out at Staff Committee, he added that we have already built up reserves to account for redundancy costs and future investment in ICT;
8. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked how many administrative staff are currently employed in planning. Paul Medd stated that he understands that there are 7 administrative staff in the planning team, but agreed to confirm this number is correct following the meeting;
9. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that the report says that the planning processes have improved following the PAS review and that it is now in the upper quartile, she asked what it was before. Councillor Sutton confirmed that it has gone from the lower quartile to the top quartile;
10. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked why we have not made any considerations for such a relationship with any other Council, perhaps one who has similar comparisons such as King's Lynn. Paul Medd stated that we want the best partnership for FDC, to deliver savings and to have the confidence that the service can maintain the current standards if not improve on those moving forward. Peterborough have been recognised as having the best Planning Team in the Country;
11. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if Peterborough were to be interested in merging with other Councils, how can we be an equal partner. Rob Bridge reassured members that we would be an equal partner with Peterborough, they would not be able to add partners and dilute our partnership with them without our agreement, it is an equal 50/50 partnership;

12. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if in the future Peterborough are required to absorb costs as they expand their structure or take on other Council's planning services, for example to move to other offices, update systems etc. do we have an agreement in place that FDC will not be required to contribute or will we be required to contribute a percentage. Rob Bridge stated that by changing the way we deliver this service we will get more income, and ultimately we will get our proportion of the costs too. Paul Medd stated that we would not be looking to make this type of commitment if we did not feel that it was the best arrangement for this Council;
13. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that we need to look at what we can gain from this partnership including staff development. She asked for clarification as to whether there will be a break clause and also asked for an explanation with regards to 5.2 of the report that refers to each Council will 'buy' services off each other, as the salaries will be higher in Peterborough. Councillor Yeulett agreed stating that if there is an issue with something like poor performance we do not want to be hampered by this partnership and do need to consider a break clause. Rob Bridge confirmed that we will finalise a partnership agreement to include this type of thing but stressed to members that if we have to break this partnership we have failed, we would have a year built in to this agreement and we would have to be in a very bad place if after that time we were looking to break up the partnership. We will be making every effort and will be working very hard to make this partnership successful. Paul Medd reassured members that flexibility and safeguarding will be built in to this agreement. Rob Bridge stated that with regards to 'buying' services we will not make it complex, it will be simple, each year Peterborough will pay half of the costs, it is only complex when you are looking at people on different grades so doing it this way, it should work well. Paul Medd confirmed that the fact that we have not gone down the tupe route and have retained our staff should make this arrangement simple;
14. Councillor Hay stated that we know that the head of planning is to be a joint post and asked for clarification on a salary for that role she also asked what other positions will be on a joint basis and where will they be based. Rob Bridge stated that a lot of the staff will be in the same roles and will remain in the same place, not huge changes to the team. Paul Medd stated that the shared head of planning role is likely to evolve, in recognition of the traded service opportunities that the partnership might provide. Rob Bridge stated that with regards to other positions that might be shared in the future they would include the Technical Team but we are not sure yet where they would be based, this would need to be determined. He added that following the ARP we still have most of our staff here, but some managers move from site to site, it is a much more fluid arrangement that is working well. Paul Medd added that just because we are the smaller Council in the Partnership we will not be subservient, we have demonstrated that we know our services and have been clear about what we want to see for this Council moving forward, we will be going into this partnership as an equal;
15. Councillor Hay asked for clarification with regards to the recommendations detailed within the report and asked are we are being asked to consider both of the bullet points or should we be choosing between the 2. Rob Bridge confirmed that members would have to agree both, not choose one;
16. Councillor Bligh stated that she had the same concerns as other members around the table today, and that is that as the smaller Council we might be swallowed up, she confirmed that she is happy with the explanations officers have given.
17. Councillor Mason asked if negotiations between Peterborough and Lincolnshire will have any effect on our proposal discussions with them. Paul Medd stated that nothing in the discussions compromises this proposal, but if that situation changes we have the flexibility to review our position;
18. Councillor Garratt asked officers to keep the Overview and Scrutiny Panel up to date with the progress of the proposal. He stated that the need for this Council to retain planning staff with local knowledge of Fenland was very important;
19. Councillor Yeulett asked for clarification of the word scalable, 3.4 in the report refers to 'To be scalable'. Rob Bridge stated that we can increase or decrease the team, scale the service up or down;

20. Councillor Yeulett asked about the level of planning fees and asked how they compare to other areas. Councillor Sutton confirmed that the fees are set nationally, we have a discretion on the pre-application fees but do not charge at this time;
21. Councillor Yeulett stated that Peterborough has the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), he asked what effect this will have. Councillor Sutton confirmed that Peterborough will carry on with it. Gary Garford stated that they currently have a tiered approach, we will review in 2 years. This links into each authorities Local Plan, and will be regularly reviewed;
22. Councillor Yeulett asked how the proposals will affect the Local Plan. Gary Garford confirmed that our policies will in the main be separate and brought to members separately for approval;
23. Councillor Yeulett asked for clarification with regards to the finance model. Rob Bridge stated that again this is something that we learned from the ARP, we both have very clear budgets and they are monitored to ensure that nobody is picking up costs that they should not be;
24. Councillor Sutton stated that the discussions have been taking place for some time but even if there were to be zero savings from this proposal I would want it to go ahead as it will enable us to offer a better service to our customers, the fact that this also offers a saving to this Council and will offer a resilience that we do not currently have means that it is the right thing to do. He added that we want our planning team to be delivering a gold service and this is a step closer to getting to that;
25. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that her only concern would be that if she were looking at obtaining a service she would be looking at getting at least 2 quotes for the work. She added that although she understands why we have gone to Peterborough and appreciates everything that has been said today, but asked why officers have not consulted anywhere else. Councillor Sutton stated enquiries were made in the private sector but with no interest, he added that Peterborough are the premier team and we already have close links with them;
26. Councillor Yeulett asked the Panel 'from what we have heard today were there any reasons that we should not support the proposal?' There were no reasons given not to support the proposal. All members of the Panel fully supported the proposal.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to:

- **Note the content of the report and the efficiency savings generated;**
- **Recommend to Cabinet:**
 - **that the Council agrees to join a Shared Planning Service with Peterborough City Council and deliver an estimated annual saving of £137k for Fenland District Council;**
 - **the Council receive a further report on democratic and governance arrangement for the Shared Planning Team in September.**

OSC9/15 PROGRESS IN DELIVERING THE ECONOMY CORPORATE OBJECTIVES 2015-16

Councillor Yeulett stated that members have commented that there appears to be a lack of data or detail in reports. He added that members have raised this issue previously and suggested that members and officers should meet at a future date to discuss these issues with a view to overcoming this in the future.

Members considered the Progress in Delivering the Economy Corporate Objectives 2015-16 presented by the Portfolio Holders.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Yeulett asked what the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Butcher is hoping to achieve moving forward. Councillor Butcher stated that he is new to this Portfolio role but is very much looking forward to seeing Fenland busier than it has ever been, he would like to see more businesses here and more educational options for young people in the area. He confirmed that his Portfolio responsibility now includes the Port of Wisbech and with a crossover with tourism would like to see better use of this asset;
2. Councillor Yeulett asked what you hope to be able to demonstrate in 2 years from now. Councillor Butcher stated that quite simply, he would like to see an improvement on where we are now;
3. Councillor Yeulett stated that work on the Sutton Bridge moorings has been delayed and asked for an update on this. Gary Garford stated that there have been delays with the land deals at Sutton Bridge, but we have a fixed sum agreed for the work to replace the moorings and this will not affect that sum;
4. Gary Garford stated with regards to the comments from the Chairman at the start of this item referring to lack of detail or data he explained that the Economy Portfolio is different from some of the other Corporate Objective reports as it is more subjective. It is mainly an enabling service and the lead in time on projects can be 5 years or longer. With this in mind it is not such a measurable service in the short term;
5. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that there are no set programme times or deadlines with regards to the webpage for the Yacht Harbour. Gary Garford agreed to populate this with some dates, he added that we want to market the Yacht Harbour with a more holistic marketing approach for the port and the wider area to attract more activity and income;
6. Councillor Yeulett asked for further clarification about what we are doing to attract new businesses and jobs and what more can be done. Councillor Butcher stated that officers are in contact on a regular basis with all of our businesses in Fenland. Gary Garford confirmed that a high level meeting had taken place with Stainless Metalcraft where they explained their expansion plans, they had asked for our assistance to ensure that there are a stream of young people coming through, we were able to sign post them to local skills providers. This is the type of enabling work that we can do that will ensure that businesses remain in Fenland and encourage investment and expansion in the area. Councillor Butcher stated that there had been a very successful skills fair in Peterborough last week and we agreed to pay the travel costs to ensure that young people in Fenland attended. He confirmed that we sent 12 bus loads of children from Fenland secondary schools to that event;
7. Councillor Hay stated that it is her understanding that MM:UK are moving to an area within a 10 mile radius and was concerned that this could take them out of Fenland. Gary Garford stated that he was aware of expansion plans but was not aware of their plans to move, he agreed to make contact with them to clarify the situation;
8. Councillor Buckton stated that he looked at the Fenland for Business website and it is not fit for purpose, the site is static and is not being looked after. Gary Garford stated that the site has just been introduced and we are currently updating it, he informed members that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) are also introducing a business portal;
9. Councillor Buckton asked how the website is being marketed. Gary Garford stated that we have not started to market it yet, we are trying to ensure that this does not 'double do' as the LEP one is about to go live;
10. Councillor Yeulett asked officers to ensure that they explain any abbreviations and acronyms as there are many new members. He asked for clarification with regards to the LEP for new members. Gary Garford explained that the LEP - Local Enterprise Partnership was set up by Government, it has its own board made up from private businesses and local authorities covering Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and beyond. Authorities bid to the LEP for grant funding, they also have a role in skills and training and transport studies are being funded through them too;

11. Councillor Mrs Bucknor referred to the Chamber of Commerce meetings reported on page 16 of the agenda pack and stated that it is her understanding that no businesses attend these meetings. Gary Garford confirmed that the Fenland Chamber of Commerce is well attended, including himself as the FDC representative, he went on to explain that there is also a Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce and often individual towns have them too;
12. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that the report refers to a meeting being held with Fosters Property Development to gain understanding of its proposals and to support their aspirations and asked for further details of what these are. Councillor King stated that he would like to begin by paying tribute to the work carried out by his predecessor in this role. He stated that he has attended a couple of meetings with Fosters and confirmed that their group are keen to see the A47 to the west and north of Wisbech;
13. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for an update with regards to the Guyhirn roundabout improvements. Gary Garford confirmed that it is the only Highways England money being offered in this part of the District, and stated that if we argue against the improvements to the Guyhirn roundabout the likelihood is that we will lose it, most of the money is about improving the bridge and that type of work costs a lot of money;
14. Councillor Mason stated that he has heard a lot about Wisbech and other Fenland areas today and asked if there is an action plan for Whittlesey, they have a half empty high street and no Chamber of Commerce. Councillor Butcher stated that the best thing moving forward for Whittlesey will be the bridge, there is a lot of land which will be viable for industrial land at that site, members need to keep in mind that there are other things happening in other towns behind the scenes. Councillor Yeulett stated that we must put resources where needs require and as Councillors we need to be thinking of Fenland as a whole, need to look at Fenland holistically;
15. Councillor Hay stated that the report refers to an industry-led skills centre in Fenland and asked where this will be. Gary Garford stated that this is a proposal from a partner in Chatteris, we are looking very seriously at this as there is a gap in the market within the agricultural companies. We have been looking at a proposal to put to the LEP to set this up in an existing factory, although a location has not yet been agreed, as a centre for agriculture focussing on training, language and research;
16. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked when the Asset Management Plan will be produced. Gary Garford confirmed that this will be completed in January;
17. Councillor Yeulett asked how the Boathouse area site is progressing. Gary Garford confirmed that officers are looking at the feasibility of those sites and are asking some marketing experts what they think is the best way for this Council to move forward;
18. Councillor Yeulett stated that according to the Development Plan we are looking to achieve 11,000 homes and 7,000 jobs, he asked if these figures are ambitious or realistic and how is this progressing so to date. Gary Garford stated that we have to set the Core Strategy at a realistic level, it would not be approved if it were not realistic and achievable. He confirmed that we are behind schedule at the moment, but have been gaining some ground and the market says that there is more confidence moving forward.
19. Councillor Yeulett asked for an update with regards to the rail link improvements. Councillor King stated that there are major challenges to overcome, however the studies are favourable moving forward;
20. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked where the funding is coming from for this programme. Councillor King confirmed that the Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) are in control of this project;
21. Councillor Garratt expressed a concern with regards to over intensification of planning sites. Councillor Sutton reassured members that planning officers abide by the Local Plan and will ensure that each dwelling meets the criteria set out. Councillor Garratt stated that some sites seem to be over intensified. Gary Garford stated that we have a Local Plan that spreads growth out across the towns, there is guidance to assess the density of sites, obviously we want to see growth in Fenland but only if it is in the public interest;

22. Councillor Bucknor asked why the Council were late joining the Destination Digital activity Programme and asked for clarification of the detail of the value of the grants awarded as this is not clear in the report. Gary Garford stated that we came in later to the programme as we were not in the first round of invitations to join, we came in some time later when there was an opportunity for us to do so. He confirmed that the grants are for up to £4000 each to enable businesses to get broadband. We are putting together a note for Councillor Butcher to let businesses know that this is available in this area and are keen to get this message out to as many businesses as possible;
23. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification of the Innovation Voucher Scheme. Gary Garford explained that this a separate scheme which is advertised by Cambridgeshire Digital, the funding is not available all the time and it is important that businesses get it when it is available;
24. Councillor Garratt stated that page 33 of the report refers to developing a Tourism Board Action Plan, he added that he understood that this had already been done before. Councillor Tanfield stated that Tourism changes all the time and we have to move with it to keep up, we simply could not do this with an action plan that stayed static. Inspired by Tourism England's ideas of blogs and their online development we are looking towards a new website with a much more modern feel. She added that this will be progressing during the summer and will be in place in September;
25. Councillor Yeulett asked for an update with regards to the Fenland Renaissance Project. Councillor King confirmed that he is still involved in this project, he stated that the Council try their best to work with people to improve a derelict area and as part of that work we have a small pocket of funding for people to carry out small pieces of work to improve the look of their land or property. He added that this is a very successful programme, however some people resist all attempts to work with them and we have to use enforcement powers in some cases. He stated that discussions have taken place with regards to streamlining the process which would mean that some long-standing issues could be fast tracked;
26. Councillor Yeulett asked if the Shared Planning Proposals with Peterborough would help. Councillor King confirmed that being in the partnership would help as it is about resilience and capacity;
27. Councillor Yeulett stated that there are concerns with regards to bus services. Councillor Garratt agreed stating that we are facing challenges in this area with regards to bus services. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she understands that FACT are not transporting some of the disabled people that they had been as they have taken on a new contract with Wisbech Grammar School, and asked who attended transport meetings in place of Councillor Butcher if he is not available, as it is key that someone attends. Councillor Butcher confirmed that an officer or member always attends the meeting, and agreed to investigate the issue with regards to FACT. Councillor King confirmed that he would be happy to attend in place of Councillor Butcher if he was unavailable;
28. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for an update with regards to Constantine House. Councillor King stated that firstly we have to recognise the huge improvements that have taken place, he added that we have been attempting to re-engage in the last few weeks, but have been unsuccessful. We will not let this drift, there is further enforcement action that we can take;
29. Councillor Hay stated that the report refers to figures with regards to 3C's, but the figures are meaningless without the details behind the complaints or the outcome of the complaint. Gary Garford confirmed that we do keep a detailed analysis of complaints within the team and confirmed that he would be able to get a breakdown for members. Councillor Hay stated that a breakdown of minor or major would be helpful. Gary Garford reassured members that if a complaint was major it would be brought to their attention, otherwise complaints are dealt with day to day. We have a rigorous process to follow to ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly. He reminded members that we do not share complainant's details with members, but agreed to set up a meeting with Dave Wright to talk through the service. Councillor Yeulett agreed that this would be helpful especially for new Councillors who are not yet familiar with the 3C's Service;

30. Councillor Yeulett thanked members and officers; he stated that the panel would need to look at this item when it comes up on the work programme in the future to ensure that they allow sufficient time, as there was a lot to discuss from that report.

OSC10/15 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Members considered the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report presented by Councillor Yeulett.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to approve the Annual Report for forwarding to Council.

OSC11/15 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme 2015/16 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, making the following comments:

1. Shared Planning Proposals with Peterborough should come back with a progress report;
2. Suggested moving the Local Health Partnership Update from April 2016 to the November 2015 meeting.

Members agreed the Future Work Programme 2015/16 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel subject to the amendments above.

4.57pm

Chairman