

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting - 30 June 2016

Present: Mr Hollis (Chairman)
Mrs Lowen-Cooper, Mr Read, Mr Sangster, Mr Walters MBE and Mrs Gibbs

Also Present: Mr Bagge and Mr Naylor

Apologies for absence: Mr Harding and Mr Bastiman

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2016 and 10 May 2016 were confirmed by the Chairman.

4. SOUTH BUCKS DISTRICT COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report outlining the performance of Council Services against indicators and service objectives during the year 2015-16.

The Committee noted that this year's report had been reduced to a two-sided info-graphic, from the 40+ page report of previous years. Officers clarified to the Committee that the info-graphic was designed in order to highlight key achievements in a more user-friendly format, which was deemed better in terms of engagement with residents and the media.

Members were able to view further detail through the performance tables attached as:

- Appendix A – Annual Report SBDC 2015-16;
- Appendix B – Priority Indicators 2015-16;
- Appendix C – Quarterly corporate indicators 2015-16.

Within the report, Members of the Committee found it of interest to note that voluntary leavers as a percentage of the workforce had increased, with officers assuring Members that the detail was discussed comprehensively at Personnel Committee.

In terms of the off-target PIs, these fell within the Housing remit, and reflected the issues discussed within various forums by Members prior to this meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, primarily around the provision of affordable housing. Members wished to be updated on the current situation regarding affordable housing, with officers explaining that developers often buy land in order to provide affordable housing, later claiming viability issues, therefore frequently providing an affordable housing contribution, as opposed to providing the actual affordable housing.

The Head of Healthy Communities clarified that flexibility within the use of funds allocated would help in terms of how affordable housing could be acquired, and incentivised, including within the private sector.

The Chairman noted in particular that the indicators pertaining to Licensing matters needed to be supported by increased surveying, with short, simpler surveys in order to provide more reliable statistics. The Chairman raised further questions in regards to the Evreham Centre satisfaction survey indicators, which were explained by the Head of Healthy Communities as being mostly due to a faulty air conditioning unit, which had now been replaced.

The Committee therefore **RESOLVED** that:

1. the Performance Reports and the Annual Report be noted.

5. **ADVICE SERVICES IN SOUTH BUCKS**

The Committee received a report requested by Members, updating the Committee on the advice services operating in the South Bucks District Council area.

The report summarised the range of services, highlighting that the SBDC website identifies a range of organisations that can provide advice and support on wide-ranging issues. It was seen that South Bucks District Council seeks to support the organisations and volunteers via promotion of activities on the website, as well as directly through the Subs and Donations programme as detailed in Appendix 1. The Committee were also able to garner an overview of the main organisations that the Council refer residents to, including: Community Impact Bucks, Northgate, L&Q, Three Rivers CAB, Mediation Bucks and Wycombe's Women's aid. Detailed within the report were those organisations that had previously accessed the Subs and Donations Grants.

The report further detailed to Members that a review of the Subs and Donations and Community Development Grants was currently being undertaken in order to identify the outcomes delivered by the organisations and how they therefore link to the Council's key objectives and priorities, with the purpose of helping to identify future priorities for funding. In response to a question from the Chairman, it was clarified that a new application had to be made by each organisation annually if they wished to apply for a grant.

The Committee therefore **RESOLVED** that:

1. The report be noted.

6. **JOINT PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY**

The Committee received a report notifying the Chairman and Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the forthcoming consultation regarding the draft joint Private Sector Housing Strategy and associated policies covering financial assistance, Houses in Multiple Occupation and housing enforcement across South Buck District Council and Chiltern District Council, in order to seek the Committee's comments.

The report informed Members that the strategy and associated policies would encompass the Council's housing standards roles, which could broadly be split into two categories – assistance and enforcement. Officers clarified that assistance would cover improvements and help with housing issues, including support such as disabled grants. Regarding enforcement, this would include tackling poor quality accommodation, and ways to ensure housing standards, including those of HMOs.

The report further detailed that the Council has a statutory duty to review housing conditions in order to tackle serious housing health hazards: the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2007-2012 – setting out the Council's approach to improving local housing conditions – is now out of date. As such, the Council has prepared a draft strategy to reflect changes in national housing policy and to apply new legislative requirements and increased financial constraints. Additionally, amendments have been made to the financial assistance policy as seen in Appendix 2, with the main changes highlighted to Members in Appendix 3.

After questions from Members, Officers clarified that the Council's Policy and Budget Framework Procedure rules require Cabinet to publicise a timetable for proposals to the

Council for the adoption of any plan, strategy or budget that forms part of the budget and policy framework, alongside arrangements for consultation after publication of initial proposals, with the consultation period being no less than 6 weeks. Officers further informed the Committee that they would be consulting with groups including the Landlords forum, Occupational Therapy, and those who had been (and were going) through the process in order to allow the consultation to be as wide-reaching as possible.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** by the Committee that:

1. The draft strategy and policy documents be considered by Cabinet;
2. Members note the intention to undertake a 6 week consultation on the joint strategy and associated policies as required by the Policy and Budget Framework procedure rules following the Cabinet meeting on 4 July.

7. **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND RIPA ANNUAL REPORT**

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report updating them on public engagement with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environment Information Regulations 2004, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Transparency Code of Practice, the INSPIRE Regulations, RIPA, and Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

The report analysed the FOI activities for the past year, which is shown to be the first year of material reduction in the number of requests received since the FOI requirements came into effect, with a decrease on last year of 9%. The Committee were informed that of those FOIs processed, 86% were responded to within 20 days, as per the standards laid down by the Information Commissioner's Office.

It was explained to the Committee that the introduction of a workflow tracking system had helped with the efficiencies of the services: the tracking of each request could be monitored by the Corporate Information Officer, with automated reminders to Officers dealing with the requests.

The report further detailed to Members that FOI requests that were repeatedly submitted – e.g. those concerning business rates data – were published on the website regularly, with staff signposting the enquirer, thereby reducing response times. This further enhances the promotion and support of digital transformation and transparency, with the Council progressively publishing its FOI datasets in order to improve proactive transparency and promoting the effective process of FOI in the public interest.

Officers updated the Members of the Committee as to the revised FOIA Code of Practice under section 45, which is being consulted on by the Government, with expectation that the emphasis will be on further publishing of certain information sets.

The report went on to cover the requirement to report to members on any authorisations issued under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). The Council had not undertaken any activities covered by RIPA, as had been the case for a number of years. The criterion surrounding the use of the Act has also been considerably tightened. After a question from a Member regarding the training provided to Council staff, Officers agreed that it may be a good idea to open up the training to those individuals, such as Parish Clerks, who may have to deal with FOIs, but may not otherwise receive training.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

1. The report be noted.

8. **BUCKS HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SELECT COMMITTEE**

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The minutes of the Bucks Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee held on 22 March, 18 April and 10 May 2016 were noted by the Committee.

9. BUCKS CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Bucks Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee held on 23 February, 12 April and 24 May 2016 were noted by the Committee.

10. MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

None.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

The meeting terminated at 7.24 pm