

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 7 OCTOBER 2014**

Present: Councillor E Godwin (Chairman)
Councillors P Davies, I Evans, S Howell and E Oliver.

Officers: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services), P Evans (Housing Business and Performance Manager), A Rees (Democratic Services Support Officer), A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control), V Taylor (Business Improvement and Performance Officer) and A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services).

Also present: Councillor H Rolfe, Ms Byrne (Tenant Scrutiny Panel) and Mr Watson (Museum Society).

SC25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barker, Morson, Rich and Watson.

The Committee agreed to move onto Item 10 and then Item 8.

SC26 TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL UPDATE

The Housing Business and Performance Manager said the Tenant Scrutiny Panel had recently held its AGM, where Ms Byrne had been elected Chairman.

Ms Byrne drew members' attention to the previous report of the Panel which contained twelve recommendations. There were now officer actions based on these recommendations and a review would be carried out once these actions had been completed. The Panel's next project will be a review of the sheltered housing service standards and the Panel hoped to provide an update of that review to the Committee in the future. The Panel had been nominated for the best new Tenant Scrutiny Panel at the National Scrutiny Awards.

In response to questions from Councillor Godwin, Ms Byrne said tenants were regularly asked what issues they felt were of most concern; however feedback was often limited, making it difficult to determine the main problems facing tenants

The Housing Business and Performance Manager said the Panel would be looking at a number of housing standards in the future. Following recommendations from a previous review, the Council had employed a dedicated voids co-ordinator. This had improved the service provided by the Council and highlighted the importance of the work undertaken by the Panel.

In response to questions from Councillor Evans, the Housing Business and Performance Manager and Ms Byrne said information about the Panel was included on the Council's website and in the Housing News tenants' newsletter.

Members discussed the Panel's role with regard to housing repairs. Members were informed that although repairs were a priority, repairs procedures were already under review and the Panel would become involved once the initial review was complete.

The Housing Business and Performance Manager told the committee of a further major project which involved transferring responsibility for taking repairs calls from the Housing department to the Customer Service Centre. This was expected to be put in place in the new year.

SC27

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM AND CASTLE SITE DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATIONS

Saffron Walden Museum

Members received a presentation by the Assistant Director Corporate Services about the two-phase forward plan for Saffron Walden Museum. The Council did not own the Museum and the Castle was not considered part of the Museum site.

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said the Museum's staff was comprised five permanent staff members, as well as a number of casual workers and a number of volunteers. Visitor numbers had increased in the last three years, but the number had been lower so far this year.

A Visit England Survey reported an increase in positive feedback and the Museum had been nominated for, or won, a number of awards and was accredited by the Arts Council. The Museum had to apply for accreditation every three years and had been granted provisional accreditation following its submission earlier this year.

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said storage was the most pressing issue for the Museum. A new storage facility had been built at Shire Hill for a cost of £400,000, 95% of which had been funded by the Museum Society. Racking was now being installed at the store, costing £100,000. The racking was expected by installed by December and exhibits were scheduled to be moved in from January. This would complete phase 1 of the Forward Plan.

Phase 2 involved building an extension to the Museum to improve facilities for both staff and visitors. This included improved office space for staff, which in turn would free up space for displays in the existing museum building and also creating a room which could be hired by the public. It was too early to know what the likely cost or timescale would be.

Saffron Walden Castle

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said the Castle had been identified by English Heritage as a “Building at Risk”. Consultation started with English Heritage in 2012 and following this, the Council retained architecture firm Purcell to advise it on required works. Any works required Scheduled Monument Consent from English Heritage. Although the main aim was to remove the Castle from the “at risk” register, the full vision of the project was to improve the grounds surrounding the Castle to make it an attraction in the town.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said a condition survey had been completed, so the order of future works could be determined. Following this, stabilisation works took place on the west walls in 2013. These works cost £20,621, of which £20,000 was provided by English Heritage. Improvements had been made to the pedestrian access gate and work had now begun on the semaphore tower and upper wall. These works had cost £35,000 and £48,000 respectively.

Councillor Howell said he was pleased work was being carried out to remove the Castle from the “at risk” register. Previously, there had been the possibility of acquiring around £200,000 worth of match funding from English Heritage. What was the likelihood of obtaining this funding?

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said the Government had cut the funding of English Heritage, so the amount of match funding available had been significantly reduced. Additionally, funding was typically given to projects which could provide additional facilities for the local community. It was not yet known what the future costs would be, as work on the semaphore tower had to be completed first. Works were being undertaken to improve the view of the castle by removing trees and permission was being sought to remove the sign on the boundary wall.

SC28 MINUTES

The minutes for signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the amendment of “Dentre” to “Centre” in SC23.

SC29 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) SC22 – Active Uttlesford Sports Facility Provision Review

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said he would ask the Community Partnerships Manager to e-mail members about progress made in contacting parish councils regarding sports clubs in their parishes.

(ii) SC23 – Day Centre Review Update

Councillor Evans said all the day centres had now been visited. The review was now exploring solutions to issues that had been raised by staff and volunteers at the day centres. The review had evaluated the centres in a standardised manner, but it was clear that all the day centres would require different solutions to each of their problems.

SC30 **RESPONSES OF THE EXECUTIVE TO REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE**

In response to a question from Councillor Godwin about the car parking survey, Councillor Rolfe said Cabinet would be giving a response at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services said recommendations from the Committee would be incorporated into the Cabinet report. A preliminary report would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

SC31 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Assistant Director Corporate Services advised members the purpose of the Forward Plan was to advise members of upcoming decisions that would be made by Cabinet.

Members considered the list of key decisions and agreed the future decision on contractual arrangements for co-mingled dry recyclables was of potential interest to the Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Howell, The Director of Finance and Corporate Services said the works on Bridge End Garden Culvert were because it was collapsing, not because of flooding. Alternative measures for preventing flooding had proven successful.

The Forward Plan was noted.

SC32 **SCRUTINY FORWARD PLAN**

Councillor Evans said there were a number of problems with highways throughout the district. Communication with the County Council had generally been poor and should be examined if there was enough time to accommodate it in the Forward Plan.

The Forward Plan was noted.

RURAL BROADBAND

In the absence of the Economic Development Officer, the Director of Finance and Corporate Services updated members on progress made improving broadband connectivity and speed throughout the district. The

County Council's proposals for superfast broadband would only cover 93% of the district. Therefore, the Council had decided to make provision for superfast broadband itself. Following an initial grant of £30,000, Cabinet had now agreed to budget an additional £100,000 to further roll out superfast broadband.

The Council had previously provided a grant to Buzcom, the final £15,000 of which is about to be released in order to provide coverage to the western half of the district. Negotiations to acquire a lease at High Garrett Tower had so far been unsuccessful.

The report was noted.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm.