

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE : CALL-IN held at ZOOM on WEDNESDAY, 7 APRIL 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors A Coote, C Criscione, A Dean, G Driscoll,
G LeCount (Vice-Chair), G Sell and J De Vries

Officers in attendance: D French (Chief Executive), R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also in attendance: Councillor N Reeve (Portfolio Holder for the Economy and Investment) and Councillor J Lodge (Leader)

SC71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors R Jones and P Lavelle.

SC72 CALL IN OF THE CABINET DECISION TO APPROVE THE CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY PLAN 2021/22

The Chair introduced the item and invited Members to address their questions to Councillor Reeve as the Portfolio Holder for the Economy and Investment.

Councillor Dean referred to the last four pages of the corporate plan delivery plan (CPDP) in respect of being the “Champion for our District”. He highlighted the lack of identified activities and outputs/ milestones on many of the actions and questioned whether these pages were necessary at all. He also referred to “Putting Residents First 1b. Be a council that listens and acts for residents” and noted that no activities and outputs/milestones were shown and he highlighted the use of the phrase “business as usual (BAU) throughout the document. He also said that references to “new settlements” were out of place as there were currently none and there were no ideas for commercial delivery. In summary he said that he considered the document was not fit for purpose and required more work to be done.

Councillor Reeve said that he had listened to points made by Councillor Dean over the past year. He said that the items listed in the left-hand column of the document had all been approved as the Corporate Plan by the Council in February 2021 and that the intention was to monitor progress over four years of the Administration through the CPDP. He also referred to his written response to the Chair and Vice-Chair following the Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Dean said that he had no recollection of having seen the written response and the Chair said that he would follow this up.

Councillor Sell explained the reason for the call-in. He said that he considered that the views expressed by Scrutiny Committee had not been given a fair

hearing at Cabinet. He said that Councillor Reeve had appeared to be suggesting that all problems revolved around the presentational format of the document but that this was not the case.

Councillor Reeve said that he had taken the comments seriously as shown in his written response. He referred to the view expressed by Scrutiny Committee to strip out the BAU elements but said that a decision had been taken to retain these elements as part of one document.

Councillor Dean left the meeting at 7.30pm

Councillor Sell said that he considered that targets and performance indicator measurements had not been sufficiently discussed at Cabinet, whereas there had been much talk by Councillor Reeve of the presentational format.

Councillor Reeve said that he had listened but disagreed on the presentational concerns that had been raised. He also stated that there had been specific references within the CPDP to other significant documents in order to avoid duplication e.g. specific plans.

The Chair said that his major concern in respect of the CPDP was in terms of specificity and granularity, rather than of presentational issues.

Councillor Driscoll suggested some amended wording to the item referring to Locally Led Development Corporations, but the Chief Executive confirmed that as this reference was in the first column of the CPDP it had been lifted directly from the Corporate Plan and therefore any proposed amendments would have to go back to Council.

Councillor Criscione said that he recognised that there had been progress made on the CPDP since 2019. He referred to “points of irritation” in respect of the Locally Led Development Corporations and asked whether clarity had been sought in respect of item 1e on page 23 of the agenda as to whether, as a local planning authority, it could be said that a second runway at Stansted Airport would be opposed. He also asked if there should be further details supplied in respect of Member development and house building targets. He referred to the Local Plan and said there had not been enough details included in the CPDP.

Councillor Reeve thanked Councillor Criscione for his acknowledgement of progress made. He highlighted that the current overriding influence on all issues was the pandemic. In respect of Member development, he referred again to information contained in his written response. He said his group were committed to opposing a second runway at Stansted Airport, were the matter to arise, and this had therefore been included in the CPDP. He said that data had been included in the CPDP in respect of house building.

Councillor Criscione said that he accepted the caveat that the pandemic was currently the major influence, but he said that it was still important for other matters to remain on the radar. He said that if items could go in the delivery plan then they should. He also suggested that there should be a review process in

place for the Corporate Plan. This could measure deliverables too and could take place in a year's time.

The Chief Executive clarified that the Member Development programme in 2019/20 had been substantially superior to a normal year as there had been so many new Members but that 2021/22 was regarded as "a tick and turn year", rather than embedded learning and was therefore shown as BAU. She also referred Councillor Criscione to page 20 of the Agenda that showed the outputs/milestones for the delivery of new homes. She referred to an outturn report that had been presented to Cabinet on 9 March 2021 that had monitored the delivery plan and said that Cabinet would revert to receiving quarterly progress reports to see what had been achieved.

Councillor Criscione apologised for previously missing the information on housing delivery.

Councillor Reeve said that he considered that Councillor Criscione had made a good point and an annual review of processes around the CPDP could be taken further by Scrutiny. He said that he would value the results.

The Leader said that he was surprised that communication had in some way failed and that some Members were unaware of Councillor Reeve's response following Cabinet. He said that Councillor Reeve had done an enormous amount of work together with input from the Chief Executive. He said that the Administration was listening and that significant progress had been made on the CPDP.

Councillor Coote said that he was unclear as to where this matter was going and that he did not consider that this was the role of the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Sell said that the CPDP did need to be reviewed. He said that he could not recall receiving Councillor Reeve's written response. He said that the Scrutiny Committee was looking to add value and he was pleased that the Leader was listening.

Councillor Criscione said that he was certainly not making a request for quarterly reviews by Scrutiny Committee. He said he was concerned about outcomes and looking at whether the process in place for measuring deliverables was acceptable.

The Leader left the meeting at 8.15pm.

The Chair confirmed that Scrutiny Committee was looking to add value. He highlighted examples of clear CPDP actions as shown on pages 18, 19 and 20 of the Agenda set against actions shown on pages 32 and 33 that he saw as not very clear. He said that the CPDP varied between being very good in some places but lacking precision in others. He had identified further examples.

Councillor Reeve said that most points that had been raised related to BAU elements and in many cases where there was not specific detail shown then actions would be included within officers' service plans. He confirmed again that

he was listening and that he was also committed to a mid-year review programme.

The Chair said that it would be helpful for Scrutiny if in BAU the words “Business” and “Usual” were defined.

Councillor Driscoll suggested that electronic links be provided within the CPDP where specific other documents were mentioned alongside BAU.

The Chief Executive said she would take this off-line and was conscious that electronic links did not always work properly. She said that the CPDP was looking at step change programmes but also the regular BAU. The Chief Executive said that she took responsibility for use of the term “BAU” and had not perhaps appreciated the degree to which newer members were unfamiliar with the routine working of the council, no doubt exacerbated by the enforced absence from the office and officers.

Councillor Sell said that he understood what BAU was and suggested that it would be worthwhile for the Chair and Vice-Chair to meet with their GAP equivalents in order to share information. He also spoke about the context of the delivery plan in that employees were working from home and that officers would be redeployed to the new depot in Little Canfield.

Councillor Coote thanked the Chief Executive. He said there had been a misunderstanding of elements and that officers knew their roles.

Councillor Reeve restated the position for reflecting how BAU was shown in the CPDP. He said he was looking for continuity over a four-year cycle of the Administration. He said that he did understand the downsides and gave a commitment that a mid-year review of the CPDP would take place.

The Chair said that there had been a robust and stimulating debate. He said he would e-mail Councillor Reeve with further examples of concern from the CPDP. He said that he recognised that over the past year there had been gaps in communication, particularly as everyone had been operating remotely. He thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

Councillor Criscione gave a vote of thanks to Councillor Reeve for listening to the Committee and for his diligence and respect. This was seconded by the Chair and was supported unanimously.

Following further discussions on possible ways forward the Chair concluded that it was very clear that Councillor Reeve had listened to the views expressed by Committee Members and that there was no need for the matter to be taken further at the current time.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.