

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at ZOOM on THURSDAY, 4 MARCH 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors A Dean, G Driscoll, R Jones, G LeCount, G Sell and J De Vries

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

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

SC65 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor Coote, Criscione and Lavelle

SC66 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd February 2021 were approved and would be signed by the Chair as a correct record at the next opportunity.

Councillor Dean chased the written report promised to Ms Tealby-Watson. The Chair said he would contact Councillor Merrifield to find out when the report would be available and e-mail Ms Tealby-Watson to apologise for the delay.

SC67 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

In response to a question from the Chair regarding the grant for the Carver Barracks running track, the Chief Executive said the grant was given by the Council to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Infrastructure Defence Organisation and said it was separate to the Armed Forces Covenant Grant.

The project had been delayed due to a procurement issue and the pandemic and it was proposed that the back stop date be moved to 31st December 2021. The Chief Executive was confident it would be completed before that date.

In response to further questions from Councillor Dean the Chief Executive confirmed that no request had been made by the Council to have the running track grant money returned. She clarified that the two matters were separate and it was the Armed Forces Covenant Trust who had requested recovery of the monies relating to Debden Village Hall. A full legal opinion would be provided to the Trust and all parties were working together to resolve the matter.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee were dealing with the issue.

Councillor Sell said he was pleased that the running track was on course to complete by the end of the year. It had been given a significant amount of public money and he said it was important that the public had maximum use of the shared facility.

Councillor Jones joined the meeting at 7.15pm

Further to a question from Councillor Sell about the omission from the Cabinet Forward Plan of the Post Covid Recovery Plan, Councillor Reeve said this was very important and there was a great deal happening. The Economic Development Team were expanding, and some of the activities planned included a virtual job fair; administration of grant schemes; re-skilling and new employment opportunities.

The Chief Executive said the Business Recovery Action plan had been brought to the Scrutiny Committee and a budget of £1m provided over 3 years to support the economy. She reassured members that it was a priority.

Councillor Sell agreed with the comments but said it should be on the forward plan. He asked if the economic recovery work could be a regular item at the Scrutiny Committee.

SC68 **UPDATE ON PLANNING-RELATED STUDIES**

Councillor Le Count said he was waiting for the final PAS report and that it would be ready for the next meeting.

A proposed meeting date had been discussed and the Assistant Director - Corporate Services said the next Scrutiny meeting would look at planning-related studies coming from the Task and Finish groups.

SC69 **CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY PLAN 2021/22**

Councillor Reeve introduced the report and said the Corporate Plan 21-25 had been adopted by the Council on 23rd February 2021; it was mainly unchanged from last year to provide a sustained plan over the course of the administration.

He said the draft delivery plan aimed to make progress on the ambitions of the administration in 2021/22. He said most items had detailed plans and objectives but some were not yet completed. He noted that the pandemic was still having an effect and still posed a risk to some actions.

He made Members aware that the Uttlesford Moving Forward programme was not included in the delivery plan and was being managed by Officers.

The plan incorporated business as usual items which made the plan a longer but more comprehensive document.

There were 4 main themes and Councillor Reeve highlighted some items in each:-

Putting residents first

- Expanding the opportunities for young people, Councillor Day as the portfolio holder was working on a more detailed plan.
- The completion of the £300m investment programme to ensure the Council was financed sufficiently.

Being an active place maker for our towns and villages

- Defined milestones within the Local Plan detailed in the Local Development Scheme
- The Economic Development Recovery Plan and the current £350k budget for the coming year.
- Updating the housing strategy and within that affordable housing.

Being progressive custodians of the rural environment

- To build on the Climate Change Strategy document, approved at the last Council meeting.

Champion for the District

- Supporting the ageing population which required more detail but the task and finish group had been set up to take this forward.

Members agreed that the document was too long and said that the business as usual items should be taken out.

- Councillor Reeve said it would be considered for next year.

Councillor LeCount said it was a good plan overall. He thought the document was over optimistic in places and would like to see more detail regarding the numbers as it helped to have data on how much was being spent and what the targets were.

- Councillor Reeve said he would need more details on what items were overly optimistic.

Councillor Reeve confirmed that he had considered all of Councillor Dean's comments from last year and had been able to work some into the plan.

Councillor Sell highlighted some issues with the plan:-

He said it should mention relevant items within the year, for example Covid and the Investments Program to give context to readers.

- Councillor Reeve said this was a valid point which would be taken into consideration. He also agreed that a plan for the period of the administration could be an option going forward but it was currently done on a yearly basis and followed the budget process.

On page 21, item 2a he was disappointed with the review of governance.

- Councillor Reeve said Councillor Coote were working on the review but he did not know the outcome yet.

On page 23, item 3f he said there had been two independent members of the Investment Board, it had been discussed that one of these members would become the Chair but this had not happened.

- Councillor Reeve said the Chair was elected at each meeting and the independent members had decided not to be put forward to enable them to speak on the items at the meeting with more freedom.

On page 25, item 3a he welcomed the levy but was disappointed that there was no work scheduled.

- The Director of Public Services said this would go ahead but there was a process to follow which was being worked through sequentially.

On page 29, item 7a he said Councillor Lees had given a commitment to a number of affordable homes to be built during the lifetime of the administration and asked if that target would be met. He asked how many houses were built in 2020/21.

- Councillor Reeve said there was confidence that the target of 200 homes in the lifetime of the administration would be met.

On page 43, item 4c he asked why the hot meal service was being withdrawn for the elderly people using the Stansted day centre.

- Councillor Reeve said a working group was being set up to look at the best way to deliver services for the older community.

At 7:52pm, Councillor Le Count temporarily took over as Chair until Councillor Gregory could re-join the meeting due to connectivity issues.

In response to a question from Councillor Jones, Councillor Reeve said he had been working on the document for 2 months and he did believe in it.

Councillor Gregory rejoined the meeting as Chair at 7:55pm

Councillor Dean highlighted the following issues:-

On page 22, item 2c he asked for more clarity regarding the development programme which he said was down as business as usual but he was not aware of an active programme.

- Councillor Reeve said it was not a high priority and largely ad-hoc.

On page 24, item 1a he asked why the Locally Led Development Corporation was included as there was not a current Local Plan. The Chair agreed and said there were inconsistencies in the documentation.

- Councillor Reeve said this was an ambition of the administration and it would map into the development work, but no decision had been made to go ahead.

On page 26, item 3d he said this asked for developers to be considerate, but there were no actions or outcomes and this had been the same last year.

- Councillor Reeve accepted that it was not very clear, but he hoped policies would be put in place in due course.

On page 27, item 4a he said there was no action plan to reduce night flights if it was in the document it should have a purpose.

- Councillor Reeve said that the Senior Planning Policy Officer had submitted comments on the Council's behalf to an on going consultation. Officers were taking action once they were aware of a consultation.

On page 29, item 5f he asked why there was nothing in the empty boxes.

- All the points were added into the Economic Recovery plan item above. The item regarding employment opportunities with the airport was not currently going forward due to the pandemic.

Councillor Driscoll said it would be helpful if it was presented as a progress report with targets for last year and this year so that it could be clearly seen what had been achieved.

In response to a question from Councillor Jones, the Chief Executive said she was confident that the plan was deliverable and had the full support of Cabinet members and Officers. She said that it was an annual work plan because of other reports that were linked and completed on an annual basis, for example the budget and corporate plan.

The Chair said it did not read like a delivery plan and was more like a manifesto. He did not think some of the questions raised had been answered in a satisfactory manner specifically with regards to the Locally Led Development Corporations and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

He said he would prefer to see a document divided into 3 separate sections, future aspirations, business as usual and what was intended to be carried out within the year. He thought there needed to be more clarity and measurable targets. He was not sure it satisfied the criteria of a delivery plan.

Councillor Sell agreed and wanted to know how to measure success if there were no targets. He was not satisfied with the answers to his questions with regards to the day centre and Governance.

- Councillor Reeve said success was measured against each item as it was written down and some miscellaneous items had specific targets. There was also an annual report against the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan that went to the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee. There would also be reports sent to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

Councillor Dean thought the plan should be more focused. He asked if the document would be updated in view of the comments made in the meeting. He said if changes could not be made before the next Cabinet meeting, could there be a supplementary note added to state it would be amended in the future.

Councillor Dean raised further points:-

On page 33, item 1d he asked about the tree planting initiative.

- Councillor Driscoll said the Climate Change Working Group was working on this issue and a suggestion was being put forward to replace felled trees.

On page 35, item 1g he asked why a smaller car park had been suggested for charging points.

- Councillor Driscoll said that in the station car park cars tended to park for a longer time and would potentially take up a charging point all day. He thought a smaller car park would have a bigger turn over of cars and the spaces would not be used for as long.

On page 36, item 2c was there going to be an initiative by the council to invest in renewable energy as this would produce an income.

On pages 39 and 40, there were many items listed without activities set against them, he asked why were they included.

Councillor Jones said that the points raised were mostly relevant but he suggested that they were put in writing.

The Chair said he did not think there was a unanimous position from the Committee, and he asked Councillor Sell and Dean to produce a draft document with comments that had been raised.

Councillor Reeve answered the points raised above and said the document was based on the manifesto as that was what the administration aimed to achieve. He said the presentation was not as important as making sure the content was correct and detailed and that had been his focus. He said users of the document would be residents and councillors but mainly officers who would have ownership of each line item. He argued that there was detail but some items had separate strategy documents and these had been referred to.

The Chief Executive said there was an annual outturn report which went on an annual basis to Cabinet; unfortunately the quarterly reports had not been produced this year because of the pandemic situation.

Councillor Dean said the quarterly reports should be compared against a succinct document to ensure accountability.

Further to a question from Councillor Le Count, the Chief Executive said the delivery plan would go to the Cabinet meeting as the budget started on the 1st April and could not be delayed. She said Cabinet would reflect on the comments and it could be revisited at a later date.

The Chair said it had been a robust debate, and he was grateful for all contributions. He said that although the Committee were not overwhelmingly happy with the document he suggested that it was sent to Cabinet subject to a note of clarification and specific areas for improvements. Councillor Le Count would take forward as the Vice-Chair. Unanimous assent was given to the proposal.

SC70 **WORK PLANNING FOR 2021/22**

The Assistant Director - Corporate Services proposed a more formal approach to work planning for 2021/22. He asked that each Councillor emailed him a list of 5 to 10 items ideally across different areas, (page 46 showed different places to draw ideas from). An informal meeting could be arranged to discuss. These proposals would then be collated into a full list which would be scored by each member. This would produce a short list of the most important topics to take forward. There were no timescales currently but these would be planned once the next Scrutiny meeting was agreed.

Further to member's questions, the Assistant Director - Corporate Services stated the following:-

- A list of items from each Councillor to be e-mailed, date to be advised.
- The benefit of the process would be a back up list which could be used if all the chosen items had been completed.
- Paragraph 24 of the document showed that time would need to be set aside for the outstanding items from this year which were:-
 - Planning Obligations Report
 - Airport Fly Parking
 - Major Planning Applications
- Little was off limits but the Committee did not have scope to scrutinise the work of regulatory committees.
- A template would be sent to keep all submissions in the same format.

Councillor Driscoll suggested that the Airport Fly Parking be suspended until September. The Chair asked for this to be discussed outside of the meeting.

Councillor Sell asked that members considered what items would be of benefit to the Council and provide added value. He thought the Committee should not take on too much and should complete fewer items in a more thorough way.

The meeting ended at 9.20pm.