

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 16
DECEMBER 2021 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors A Coote, C Criscione (via zoom non-voting),
G Driscoll, V Isham, R Jones, P Lavelle, G LeCount and G Sell

Officers in attendance: B Brown (Assistant Director - Environmental Services), T Coleman (Interim Director of Planning), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), C Fiddy (Climate Change Project Officer), C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer), P Holt (Chief Executive), A Lindsell (Democratic Services Officer), S Miles (Local Plans and New Communities Manager), S Payne (Local Plan Project Manager) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services).

Also present: Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan), Councillor P Lees (Leader of the Council) and Councillor L Pepper (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Green Issues).

Public Speakers: Councillor R Freeman and E Gildea

SC41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor De Vries.

SC42 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee (Local Plan) meeting held on 16 September 2021 were approved.

SC43 LOCAL PLAN QUARTER 3 PROJECT MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Local Plan Project Manager presented the report, he said that the risk register had an overall rating of amber and was on target to deliver the agreed timetable. He said this was dependent on the risks being identified and managed.

He highlighted the following: -

- There were nine changes to the risk register since the last quarter, (page 13), he said the two most significant risks were the continuing budget pressures on the Council's finances and the risk identified to ensure that the Regulation 18 plan was based on evidence.

- The dashboard on page 16 had included future tasks by mistake, he said the actual number of live tasks was 734, but this had not altered the rating which showed there were no red tasks and 34 amber tasks.
- The workstream status on page 17 showed that the development options work would be sent to the consultants in line with the timetable and that the crucial further evaluation of the options would take place between now and the end of March 2022.
- The draft letter to the new Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said that the Council was making good progress and mentioned the recent award won from the Royal Town Planning Institute East of England Regional Award for Excellence in Planning.

Further to a question from the Chair, Councillor Lees said she was grateful to the team for highlighting the financial risk in the interest of transparency. She said the administration would focus on delivering the Local Plan within the timetable and all spending needs including the Local Plan would feed into the budget process. She said that the process of recruiting the Director of Planning would start on the 21st December 2021.

Members agreed that it was a very comprehensive report.

In response to questions from Members the following comments were made: -

The Local Plan Project Manager confirmed that the New Communities Senior Planner had left the Council. An internal candidate had been recruited and there was now a need to back fill that post. Before leaving the Council the Officer had completed all his current work and there had been a comprehensive handover.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that an interim Officer was in place and this temporary member of staff would be employed for the next 2 to 3 months to cover the gap until the team was back to the full complement.

Councillor Evans said that the risk relating to job mobility within the Planning department was under constant observation. He was confident in the Senior team and the management of the process which ensured there would be continuity and the transfer of knowledge.

The Interim Director of Planning said that the new staff members were experienced and had worked on other local plans. She said the outside consultants were being used for the technical work and all work carried out was on shared files. She said the team had regular meetings and worked closely together. She said the risk register was there to highlight these issues.

The Local Plan Project Manager said that the revised deadline for the Regulation 18 consultation had allowed for a workshop to brief Members more fully. He said the effect on the timetable was that the Regulation 19 plan would have 2 months less time to be completed. He said that because the preparation of the Regulation 18 plan was more thorough that this would mean there would be less time needed for the preparation of the Regulation 19 plan.

The Local Plan Project Manager said that the risk register was a dynamic document and that the transport modelling was a risk that had been identified. He said that in order for the transport modelling consultants to accommodate best practice the timetable had been modified.

The Interim Director of Planning said that the transport modelling had been impacted by Covid, in terms of the ability to collect and verify the data. She had asked for the methodology to be checked at the highest level to ensure it was robust under examination. She said that this had been done through partnership with Essex County Council and other authorities and she was confident that the current position and timeframes could be achieved. She reiterated that the risk register would continue to change.

The Local Plan Project Manager said that the mitigation for risk number 12, regarding significant applications being granted on appeal and the effect on the emerging strategy, was to ensure that Policy Officers and Development Management Officers worked closely together, collaborating, and sharing knowledge.

The Local Plan Project Manager said that there was more work to do in order that the process around the major sites was streamlined. He said an update would be provided at the same time as the Regulation 18 stage when the preferred options were confirmed as proposals. This would be taken initially to the Local Plan Leadership Group through Cabinet and onto Full Council.

The Chair pointed out a spelling mistake on the letter to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, in the second paragraph the date should read May/June 2022.

In response to risk items raised by the Chair, the Local Plan Project Manager said: -

- Risk 37 – related to the evidence base that needed to be completed. This risk reflected that the Local Plan was at a key stage of the process and deadlines were crucial.
- Risk 38 – related to the risk that the transport evidence was not available on time and recognised that transport was a key element of the process and it was time pressured.
- Risk 42 was a new risk which related to the negotiations with larger sites being more streamlined.
- Risk 43 was added as it was so vital to use the evidence base on the Regulation 18 plan.

Councillor Evans said that funds did not only come from within the Council but said that a joint submission with Essex County Council had been sent to Homes England seeking support for extra resources. He said efforts would continue to secure other funding.

The Interim Director of Planning said that one of the most important things was to be prudent and use the money available wisely.

The Chair asked that if there was any further slippage to the timetable that Members were informed outside of the normal cycle of meetings. He was impressed by the transparency and clarity that the report provided and he commended Councillor Evans and the team for a fantastic job.

He asked that the typing error was changed on the letter and suggested that the Committee approved the letter on page 31 and that it was sent on behalf of the Council. The Committee agreed unanimously.

AGREED: To send the letter to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities with the typing mistake amended.

SC44 **PUBLIC SPEAKERS**

Mr Gildea spoke in support of the Climate Change Action Plan and said he did not think the plan was over ambitious as it was important to have deeply radical change.

He was pleased that the report said that the use of carbon offsetting would be used as a last resort and that the budget would be utilised to maximise whatever leverage was necessary to increase the impact of the grant funding.

He commended the report for its thoroughly researched realism.

Councillor Freeman also spoke about the Climate Change Action Plan, he said that it was difficult to implement the wishes and ideas put forward and it was especially challenging with the limited resources in the team.

He thought it was important that the Council used whatever leverage they had, to firstly bring their own carbon footprint down and secondly to use their influence to persuade residents to do the same. He said that the domestic sector was the second largest contributor to CO2 output and half of this related to heating. He said there were things that could be done through the Council's statutory duties, and as a planning authority to use these powers to get the best possible energy efficiency of houses that were consented through the planning process. He said this could be achieved through the Local Plan.

SC45 **CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN**

Councillor Pepper presented the report. She said that the document had been updated to consider the points raised at the last meeting. An executive summary had been added, appendix 1 showed a list of actions to be completed by March 2022 and appendix 2 was an updated action plan.

She said there would be a climate change website blog launched to communicate to residents the Council's ambitions and progress made. She said in response to Members comments each action included a timescale for delivery and expected outcomes.

She said although it was not always straight forward to come up with specifics regarding cost and carbon savings this would be done wherever possible.

She said some items did need further investigation and this would be reviewed, and the document would continue to evolve.

Members agreed that the document was greatly improved and ambitious and thanked Councillor Freeman and Mr Gildea for their comments.

Members agreed that Councillor Freeman's suggestion to use the Council's influence through Planning and other Committees like the Licensing and Environmental Committee was very important to drive up environmental standards and could have a significant impact.

Councillor LeCount said that the Planning Committee Working Group had been set up to help with the issues around new planning applications. He said this was one of the ways the Council could contribute to the reduction in carbon.

Councillor Freeman said that the Planning Committee had been successful in ensuring that all new builds had electric charging points or at the least the duct works to enable them to be installed easily at a later date. He suggested that this was extended to ensure all new properties were also heat pump ready. He said that these were ways of using the Council's influence and did not cost the developer a great deal of money.

The Leader of the Council said that the Climate Change Planning Policy was at the forefront of the Local Plan.

Councillor Isham suggested that a chart was added to show the total spend, what was left, projected spend and actual spend as well as what the money was spent on.

Councillor Pepper thanked the Committee and said that the suggestions made would be taken on board.

The Chair thanked Councillor Pepper and Officers for the report and welcomed the changes which made the document much clearer. He also agreed with Councillor Freeman's comments. He commended the document and suggested that it was sent onto Cabinet. He said that it was important to remember that the Scrutiny Committee was a critical friend in equal balance.

AGREED: to remit the Climate Change Action Plan to Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.