

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (LOCAL PLAN) held at COUNCIL CHAMBER -
COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on
THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2022 at 6.10 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors C Criscione and R Jones

Officers in attendance: J Clements (Interim Local Plan and New Communities Manager), D Hermitage (Director of Planning), P Holt (Chief Executive) and C Shanley-Grozavu (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present: Councillors J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning, Stansted Airport, Infrastructure Strategy and the Local Plan) and P Lees (Leader of the Council)

SC38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair made apologies for the late start.

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Driscoll, De Vries, Isham, Lavelle and Luck.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Committee expressed their best wishes to the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) for a speedy recovery, following his recent accident.

SC39 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2022 were approved.

SC40 LOCAL PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Interim Local Plans and New Communities Manager provided an update on the current progress of preparing the Local Plan. He clarified that some parts of the report could have been interpreted as being critical of previous staff, however he emphasised that this was not the intention and that he wanted to convey the struggles which the team had experienced.

Officers confirmed that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had been notified of the new timelines for the emerging Local Plan and senior officers were in the process of arranging a meeting with them to discuss their progress. The Chair requested that they reported back on this to either the Local Plan Leadership Group (LPLG) or the Scrutiny Committee.

Members highlighted that they were satisfied with the update on progress but expressed concerns around the lack of information on the revised reporting system to Scrutiny Committee. In response, officers explained that they were still developing their reporting documentations alongside their work programme. They were looking to find a method that enabled qualitative information to assess progress and identify potential obstacles, rather than solely measuring them through risk registers and percentages of the work complete.

The Chair also clarified that the newly implemented oversight arrangements consisted of fortnightly progress meetings between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the LPLG and the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Stansted Airport, Infrastructure Strategy and the Local Plan and the Interim Local Plans and New Communities Manager. They were joined on a four-weekly basis by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee. On conclusion of this meeting, the Chair of Scrutiny would circulate an email report to members of the Scrutiny Committee. In addition to these meetings, Scrutiny Committee would meet in the hour prior to the meeting of the LPLG. Councillor Criscione requested that a copy of the email reports were included on the agenda at the following Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Members further discussed the content of the progress report, and the following was noted:

- Members identified that there was a clear issue with staffing and resources and emphasised not to underestimate the power of external consultancy and outside advise where there was a lack of development management expertise. Officers clarified that there were experienced staff across the team, however the turnover was problematic. There was intermediate cover in every post, bar the Transport Planner, whilst recruitment was taking place for permanent staff. They expected advertising to start next Friday for 10 or 11 posts.
- Due to the recent postponement, there was a longer lead-in time for work, however the transport modelling work would be based on the Spatial Strategy so could not be conducted until this was developed. Officers hope that both would be completed before the publication of the draft Regulation 18 documentation.
- The Local Plan Leadership Group would act as the main vehicle for consultation with members, and those who were not part of the membership were encouraged to observe in order to stay updated with the process before the upcoming consultation.
- There was provision for members to meet, following the Local Elections, to discuss the recommended draft Regulation 18 documentation. It was emphasised that this Draft Local Plan, once agreed, would be the Council's provisional set of recommended sites and policies for consultation.
- Officers said that they were not in a position to know or judge whether the work of the LPLG was reflected in the previous draft Regulation 18 documentation.
- Based on officer observation, it was felt that links with neighbouring authorities haven't been strong; however this was something which all authorities struggle with due to their prioritisation for their own Local Plans and current lack of a formal strategic planning context for these.

Members indicated that the key to the Local Plan's success would be how effectively it could be communicated to those who elect them. They had residents to please in their wards and needed the tools in which to allay any concerns which may arise from the proposals. In response, officers explained that part of members' quest for evidence wasn't for evidence itself, but rather clarity and justification. They said that they would do their best to provide this through documenting why decisions were made and justifying why alternative options were rejected.

The report was noted.

The meeting ended at 18:50