

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERSHIPS) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 8th November 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor T D Alban – Chairman.
Councillors B S Banks, R E Bellamy,
S Bywater, S J Criswell, J W Davies,
Mrs S Smith, Mrs J Tavener and
D R Underwood.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B S Chapman, Ms A Diaz and K I Prentice.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller and D M Tysoe.

32. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th October 2018 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor D R Underwood declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in relation to Minute Number 35 as a Member of Godmanchester Town Council.

34. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st November 2018 to 28th February 2019.

35. REVIEW OF BEARSCROFT FARM LOCAL LETTINGS PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Housing Needs and Resources Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Bearscroft Farm Local Lettings Plan was considered by the Panel. The Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Economic Development introduced the report and explained the reason for it.

It was explained that as it is too early to determine the success of the lettings plan, a more detailed report will be presented once the next phase is progressed. The Council's partner on site, Cross Keys Homes, have stated that there has been a negligible rate of incidents in the area of Anti-Social Behaviour, rent arrears and the requirement for a visit from the Neighbourhood Manager.

The report on Bearscroft Farm Local Lettings Plan was welcomed by the Panel. Although the point was raised that Bearscroft Farm is now

known as Romans Edge. The Member raising the point stated that this is important for the residents of Godmanchester as there have previously been tensions over Bearscroft Farm and that the name Romans Edge provides a clean break. In response, Members were informed that changing the name of the policy will be reviewed.

Following a query on whether the plan has provision to assist with the settlement of people with disabilities, the Panel was informed that the plan doesn't as it focuses purely on Bearscroft Farm and that such a provision would have to be covered by the wider letting policy.

A Member asked if the plan apportions a number of homes to residents from Godmanchester, however Members were informed that the plan contains no locality criteria and that rural exception sites are used to meet requirements of a particular locality. It was noted that the use of Rural Exception sites are being reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth).

The Panel was informed that as the policy has worked well; the Council have asked Cross Keys if they would like to adopt the policy on future stages of this development, due over the next 18 months.

The Panel welcomes the report and acknowledges that it relates to the early stages of the Bearscroft Farm (Romans Edge) development. Members welcome the approach to provide a mixture of housing and the negligible incidents of anti-social behaviour that have been reported. The Panel recommends that the lessons learnt and the best practice followed are shared as appropriately within the Council and its partners.

36. CUSTOMER SERVICES PERFORMANCE

With the aid of a report by the Customer Service Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Customer Services Performance was presented to the Panel.

Mr J Bedingfield of the Mosaic Team was in attendance to give a demonstration of the customer services portal. The basis for the portal is to address a number of issues the Council are facing including: avoidable contact, limited opening hours, rekeying e-form data, few updates given to customers and rising customer expectations.

The demonstration covered the portal from the customer and back office perspectives. The portal will enable the customer to self-serve which will reduce avoidable contact. There will also be the opportunity to work collaboratively with partner organisations so that the portal could become a one stop shop for all local government based services.

In response to a question on provision for people with visual impairments, the Panel was informed that the Council's website can be viewed by people with visual impairments and that the portal will be built to the same specifications. There are also criteria that has to be adhered to and the portal will be measured on those. The Council will also use an external organisation to measure the accessibility of the portal.

Following a question on the provision for those people who are unable to use online services, Members were informed that the Council will still continue to have the Customer Services team. It was made clear though that the direction of travel is migrating services online. The portal will offer customers choice as it will operate 24/7.

Members were informed that the portal is an off the shelf product which just needs to be configured for the Council's requirements. There will not be a go live date in the traditional sense but there will be a launch date and bits will be added as and when they are configured. In terms of impact, West Norfolk Council, who operate the same system, have experienced a 30% drop in face to face visits and a 20% drop in calls since its introduction. The Council have also visited Councils who have adopted the system and the feedback was positive. On the whole the portal demonstration was positively received by the Panel.

The second segment of the item covered customer services performance and the Automated Phone System. The Executive Councillor for Digital and Customer gave a short introduction to the segment. Members were informed that since the introduction of the Automated Phone System call transfers were down 74% in September and 96% in October.

In response to a query regarding call centre customers abandoned in September, the Panel was informed that the customer services team had three new starters and that because they required training there were less staff within team to field calls, therefore leading to more calls being abandoned.

A concern was raised that the survey only has a 20% response rate on a sample size of 10% and is not representative of the average customer services user. In response, it was emphasised that the survey is a random selection of customers and that in order to increase the sample size then the resource that goes into the survey would also have to increase.

A Member commented that they thought that the Customer Services team are very professional but that the team and the Council in general would need to use more Social Media.

In summary, the Panel positively received the demonstration of the portal and the update on the Customer Services performance and Automated Phone System. Members look forward to the continued development and roll out of the portal.

(At 7.13pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor R Fuller left the meeting and did not return.)

37. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel received an update from Councillor Mrs J Tavener on the Tree Strategy Working Group. The Group last met on 8th November at which the Members reviewed the work that has previously been carried out and decided that they will investigate what the Local Plan has regarding the Tree Policy. Other issues discussed were:

- Whether TPOs are adhered to.
- Procuring a map of the trees and who owns which tree.
- Training for Tree Wardens.

Members were informed that the next meeting will be on 6th December.

Regarding the scope for the leisure and health work, Councillors Alban, Dew and Palmer met with the Corporate Director (Delivery), in October, to discuss the scope in greater detail.

(At 8.10pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor D M Tysoe left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman