

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD ON MONDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER, 2011 AT 4.00 P.M.

IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Gilbert, P. (Chairman)
Grice, Mrs. D. (Vice-Chairman)

Beddows, J.	Kraujalis, J.
Bernard, J.D.	Morgan, C.W.J.
Green, M. R.	Spicer, Mrs. A.
Grocott, M. R.	Todd, R.
Jones, Ms. J. L.	Williams, A.

(The Chairman informed the Committee that he had agreed to the order of the agenda being amended to allow Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe to leave earlier)

7. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs. A. F. Bernard, M. J. Holder and R. Jones.

8. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were made

9 Minutes

With respect to item 4(c)(iii) of the Minutes it was reported that the Housing team had confirmed that there was no actual legal definition of temporary accommodation, other than any accommodation the Council provides to discharge its requirements under the Homelessness Act, for example bed and breakfast, until permanent residence could be found, whether that was social housing or private landlord etc. Families could only be housed in temporary accommodation for a maximum of six weeks. However for everyone else there was no legal limit other than what was justifiable in each case, dependent on their circumstances.

It was noted that the Labour nominations for the Delivering Change Panel were Councillors J. T. Kraujalis, M. J. Holder and R. Todd.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed.

10. **Anti Social Behaviour and Crime Issues**

Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe explained that the survey 'Feeling The Difference' sought the view of local neighbourhoods and how they could be improved as places to live and whether residents had experienced any crime or anti-social behavior problems. The Police wanted to hear residents views so they could learn from their experiences and meet the needs and deal with the issues important to them. The survey played a key role in informing local police services.

The Police worked closely with the Council to tackle anti social behavior (ASB) and crime. However, from the latest survey undertaken in February and March, 2011 the percentage of those that considered the Police and Council were tackling anti social behavior and crime had reduced from 50% down to 41%, although indicators also showed that 95% of residents were satisfied that Cannock Chase was a good place to live. The fear and anxiety ASB caused could give the impression that crime was at a higher level than it actually was. The Police had a duty to ensure that people were safe and felt safe.

He reported that the Police used Twitter and Facebook as ways to further engage with the public and were receiving positive feedback. During September, 2011 Staffordshire Police had received 1.8 million interactions from these sources.

A 'one street a week' initiative helped to identify streets and locations that particularly needed to be targeted by the Police and its partners. It was reported that the Joint Operations Group (JOGs) had a standing item on their agendas 'you said we did' which explained what had been done to tackle issues raised. The Police were also liaising with the local press, such as the Chase Post, and information was being published regarding what initiatives were being undertaken to tackle anti social behavior and crime. Concern was raised that not all residents received the free papers, particularly in the Rugeley area.

Members reported that they had been contacted by residents with respect to drug problems they were experiencing in their areas. The residents had commented that the Police and Council were aware of the issues and were 'taking no notice' and that a resident had been filling in diary sheets for 2 years. Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe explained that national policy was to provide stability for substance users and integrate them into the community as a means of helping them overcome their problems rather than them being isolated. The police took a firm stance with respect to those selling drugs and committing crimes. The Council also took action against those not complying with their tenancy agreements. Concern was raised on the apparent lack of action that the Council could take with respect to drugs being taken by those living in private accommodation. The Head of Policy reported that the Community Safety Partnership were aware of this issue and were working closely with the police.

It was explained that residents should be encouraged to report their concerns to Crime Stoppers on 0800 555 111 in order that they could be investigated.

A Member also commented that a young person had been moved into what was considered to be a bungalow for the elderly and problems had arisen.

The Committee requested that the Housing Portfolio Leader be invited to attend the next meeting. It was considered that the Council's complaints process and why diary sheets needed to be filled in, should also be discussed by the Committee at a future meeting, and the issue of young people being housed in bungalows normally reserved for the elderly.

The Head of Policy explained that an Anti Social Prevention Officer had been appointed based in the Partnership Team and an Anti Social Behaviour Victim Support Champion who focused on vulnerable people. It was requested that their contact details be forwarded to Members and it was agreed that this would be done. It was pointed out that a copy of the Department's structure had previously been forwarded to Members, however, not all appointments may have been made at that time.

Concern was raised with respect to the potential closure of Rugeley Police Station and that Hednesford may not have a police post. It was reported that Hednesford Town Council offices were reopening on 5 October, 2011 and that the police would be welcome to use this facility. Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe explained that as Members were aware police authorities needed to make substantial savings, and that it was important that as many police officers remained on the beat as possible. He appreciated that there was a great deal of concern regarding the Police Station in Rugeley and was sensitive to the needs of the community. He reported that he would not commit to buildings being closed until alternative accommodation had been located which was fit for purpose. Neighboring police authorities were sharing facilities where possible.

RESOLVED:

That:-

- (A) The Housing Portfolio Leader be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee in order that the issues relating to where people with drug problems were housed and also young people being housed in bungalows normally reserved for the elderly could be discussed further.
- (B) The Council's complaints process in respect of noise nuisance and breaches in tenancy conditions including the reasons why diary sheets needed to be filled in should be further discussed at a future meeting.

11. Shared Services

The Committee received a presentation from Mr. M. Vickers, Deputy Chief Executive, Stafford Borough and Mr. G. Patterson from the Audit Commission.

Mr. Vickers explained that he had met with Mr. L. Trigg the former Deputy Chief Executive from Cannock Chase Council in March, 2008 to look at all services that could potentially be shared. The key reasons for sharing services were

- Financial savings

- Improved services
- Increased resilience in respect of workload, peaks, sickness or vacancies
- Strong positioning for sharing with new partners

A Memorandum of Understanding had been signed in January 2009. The general principles of sharing services were to provide services at a reduced cost, secure savings for Council tax payers, whilst retaining at the outset a minimum of the current level of service quality, with the long term aim being to improve service provision. It was also considered important to keep jobs local to both Councils. This was not a merger of authorities as the separate identity of the two Councils continued to stand. A Lead Authority model had been adopted with independent expert legal advice being received on the Service Legal Agreement template. Funding for the external advice had been met from the Regional Efficiency and Improvement Programme (REIP). The following services were now being shared:-

From 1 January, 2011

- Building Control – CCDC Lead
- ICT – SBC Lead

From 1 April, 2011

- Finance – CCDC Lead
- Revenues & Benefits – CCDC Lead
- HR – SBC Lead
- Legal – SBC Lead
- Audit, Risk & Resilience and Procurement – CCDC Lead

Staff transferred to the lead authority were transferred on their existing terms and conditions with full consultation taking place with the staff from both Councils and the Unions.

After 6 months all the services were required to produce a transformation plan, which had to be approved by the Programme and Strategic Boards. The two authorities were working together to achieve best practice.

A Member asked for clarification on what savings had been achieved or were projected to be made and what the cost of using outside consultants had been. It was reported that savings to date for both Councils amounted to £500,000, the majority of which had come from vacancies not being filled.

Grant Patterson from the Audit Commission explained that they were Independent Auditors and their opinion on the financial statements was that there had been an adequate delivery of services. They had been monitoring the progress of shared services and would continue to do so. Interviews had been held with Officers and Members of both Councils and key documents had been reviewed. It was considered that the Programme Board worked effectively and was well led. A sound process and template was in place for the development of Service Level Agreements with key issues well addressed, including dispute resolution, exit clauses and insurance. The Audit Commission would also continue to monitor that value for money arrangements were in place.

It was considered vital that both Councils owned the transformation of each service, even when it was not the provider Council.

The Chairman sought the views of the Chief Executive on Shared Services. The Chief Executive explained that it was appropriate to pause and scrutinise the results of the current shared service exercise with Stafford Borough Council, but that opportunities would potentially be lost if Officers were not permitted to engage in talks with other parties on what may be possible in the future.

A Member commented that he was of the opinion that by continuing to share services was the only way the two authorities would survive.

It was Moved and Seconded that a Working Party be set up to look at Shared Services and what savings had been made, or were to be projected to be made, and also the impact on staff and their morale. On being put to the vote the recommendation was not carried.

Following further discussion it was -

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be requested to consider releasing the moratorium on Officers attending talks on future potential or prospective shared services.

12. Quarter 1 Performance Report 2011/12

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Policy (Enclosure 6.1 – 6.7 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Head of Policy explained that the purpose of the Report was to advise Members on the progress of the Council during Quarter 1 of 2011/12 in respect of the Priority Outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan 2011-14 and the supporting Priority Delivery Plans. The report had been simplified to make it more reader friendly and case studies included as Annexes.

Further information was requested on the action of 'Ensuring all abandoned vehicles are removed within 24 hours of notification' which was described as being on target. Information was also requested on what initiatives were being undertaken to reduce residual waste and increase recycling.

Concern was raised with respect to youth unemployment and what measures were being taken to reduce this. The Head of Policy reported that the Economic Development and Planning team were endeavouring to address this matter and were working closely with employers, such as Amazon, Tesco, Sainsburys. It was agreed that further feedback would be provided to the Committee.

A Member reported that the 'Staffordshire Card' allowed those under 20 who lived in Staffordshire to travel by bus anywhere in the county for just £1 per journey. Job Fairs were also being held in which the Council was taking part.

RESOLVED:

That further information be provided to the Committee on the following:-

- (a) Ensuring all abandoned vehicles are removed within 24 hours of notification.
- (b) What initiatives being undertaken to reduce residual waste and increase recycling.
- (c) Measures being undertaken to reduce youth unemployment.

13. Hagley Park Sports College

It was explained that it had not been possible for a representative from the Sport College to attend.

RESOLVED:

That consideration of the item be deferred to the next meeting.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm