

MENDIP DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on Monday, 28 November 2016 in the Council Chamber at Mendip District Council, Shepton Mallet commencing at 6.00 pm.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Damon Hooton (Chair), Edward Drewe (substitute for Steve Henderson), Eve Berry, Terry Napper, Graham Noel, Des Harris (substitute for Shane Collins), Roy Mackenzie

OTHER COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Tom Killen, Philip Ham, John Parham, Lloyd Hughes, Alan Townsend, John Carter

OFFICERS:

Sara Skirton	Acting Lead Officer of the Scrutiny Board
Stuart Finney	Group Manager – Neighbourhood Services
Haylee Wilkins	Customer Services, Land Charges and Licensing Manager - 5 Councils Partnership
Steve Shrimplin	Principal Revenues, Benefit and Fraud Officer
Caroline M ^c Cafferty	Committee Officer

OTHERS PRESENT:

James Armitage	Capita
Jo Edwards	Capita
Steve Read	SWP
Neil Howlett	Harris and Harris Solicitors

Agenda Item	Subject	Actioned By
1	Chair's Announcements The Chair explained the procedures in the case of an emergency and asked that all mobile devices be switched to silent. Hearing aid users were asked to switch their devices to position 'T'. The Chair moved item 11 to following item 5.	
2	Apologies for Absence Apologies were received from Councillors John North, Dick Skidmore, Steve Henderson, Nigel Taylor and Shane Collins.	
3	Declarations of Interest	

	None.	
4	<p>Public Participation</p> <p>Items on the agenda:</p> <p>Neil Howlett of Harris and Harris Solicitors wished to speak regarding Item 6, Local Land Charges Service Improvement. As a member of Frome Chamber of Commerce and a Solicitor, he saw himself a critical friend. He stated that clients wished for an efficient service, which MDC had failed to provide for the past two years. He added that the majority of local councils had a turnaround time of two weeks, whereas MDC take up to eight. As clients were looking elsewhere for this service, Mr Howlett was concerned that MDC were attempting to 'throttle' the alternative service until they too were under performing. With regard to the Service Improvement Plan, Mr Howlett was sceptical as he was looking for delivery and not reorganisation. He concluded by saying that in the report, it stated that MDCs records had been incomplete dating back to 2013, but were now much improved.</p> <p>Items not on the agenda:</p> <p>None.</p>	
5	<p>Previous Minutes</p> <p>The minutes of the Scrutiny Board meeting held on 24 October 2016 were accepted as an accurate record.</p>	Caroline M^cCafferty
11	<p>Mendip's Discretionary Business Rates Policy 2017/18</p> <p>Discretionary business rate relief could be awarded by the Council to certain businesses and organisations. The government defined the categories where that was possible and in previous policies Mendip had decided which of those types met its corporate priorities.</p> <p>Members had approved a policy and budget since 2011/12 that was distributed fairly and consistently amongst local businesses and organisations and was in line with corporate priorities.</p> <p>Feedback strongly supported the view that this relief had been very successful in assisting local businesses and organisations to reduce their business rates. It supplemented the mandatory reliefs and discounts provided by Central Government, such as small business rate relief and relief for registered charities, which meant that business rates could be lowered whilst maximising</p>	Steve Shrimplin

	<p>central government contributions. The scheme was straightforward and businesses could obtain facts and apply on line or paper via the business support pages on the Mendip website.</p> <p>It was proposed that this discretionary policy and funding continue for 2017/18 although it should be noted that with the extension of the central government funded small business rates scheme, we should find that some of the businesses and organisations that previously received discretionary relief, would gain under the small business rates scheme. This would reduce expenditure on Mendip's discretionary scheme.</p> <p>This policy was part of a wider package of business support to deliver Mendip's corporate priority of economic development.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <p>That Scrutiny:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set a level of discretionary rate relief expenditure up to £140,000 for 2017/18 at an estimated cost to Mendip of £56,000. 2. Continued the level of award to the specified categories of organisation as from 1 April 2017, subject to the over-riding criteria listed. 3. Continued with a cap of £9,000 on any discretionary rate relief for any one account. 4. Continued with a rate relief limit so that any rate relief met a maximum of 95% of the business rates liability. 5. Set a cut-off date (30 April 2017) for applications for 2017/18 but considered applications after this cut-off date for any eligible new business starts or eligible businesses that may have relocated into Mendip provided any awards would not exceed the expenditure budget. 6. Reserved the right to review the decision should a change in legislation involve the Council in additional cost. 	
6	<p>Local Land Charges Service Improvement</p> <p>Following previous reports to Scrutiny Board, this report served as an update of the Local Land Charges service following its transition on 1 September 2016 and the delivery of services by Capita within the 5 Councils Partnership.</p> <p>A service improvement plan had been developed to tackle a backlog of searches and registrations that had been</p>	<p>Haylee Wilkins</p>

accrued by the Local Land Charges Service. These were aimed at clearing the service backlogs, improving customer experience and facilitating progress towards the new target operating model under the Five Councils Partnership.

The Head of Regulatory Services for the 5 Councils stated that since the transfer of the service to Capita in September 2016, and the introduction of the Service Improvement Plan, the turnaround time had decreased from 40 to 31 days, 404 searches had been cleared and more staff were employed and trained in the processing of full searches. He added that the target operating model would be implemented by June 2017, with the merging of the 5 Council's Land Charges services, which would be based at the Vale of the White Horse. He explained that it had been necessary to deploy resources to address the backlog, reducing appointment availability for personal searches. He concluded by saying that the target for turnaround was 8 working days.

It was explained that the Land Charge Service had been due to become part of the 5 Councils agreement at a later date, but due to issues including maternity leave, lost staff, the inability to recruit experienced staff and the upturn in house buying as a result of the General Election, the date for transfer was brought forward to September 2016 to deal with the backlog which had built up. He added that all records would be digitised and the complete service up and running by 2017.

Expedited searches were utilised for house buyers with imminent completion dates. It was requested that this be changed to the exchange of contracts date to enable buyers to pull out of the sale if anything was highlighted in the search. Members raised concerns regarding concentrating too much on expedited searches to which it was clarified that though it was a fine balance, there was a prioritisation system.

Members raised concerns about the direction of travel. It was clarified that the intention was to have cleared the backlog by the beginning of 2017. There was a contractual arrangement with Capita, with the Key Performance Indicators being the numbers of days required for each search. It was clarified that the KPIs would be monitored on a monthly basis and it was agreed to table a report quarterly to feedback on the backlog.

Members agreed that moving the service to Capita was the best option as they were a large organisation with resources to draw upon and more able to cope with the peaks and troughs in demand. It was noted that Capita would now be held to account for the services provided.

	<p>One Member, with regard to the wider picture, requested that Scrutiny receive more data on the Key Performance Indicators for public facing services. It was clarified that this was in hand and would be an evolving picture in the coming year.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <p>Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted the improvements already evident within the services and supported the full suite of measures specified in the service improvement plan as a comprehensive strategy to clear service backlogs, improve customer experience and facilitate progress towards the new target operating model. • Requested that Scrutiny receive a progress report in February and May 2017 prior to the target operating model. • Requested that Neil Howlett attend to bring the meeting up to date from his point of view. • Requested that the date for expedited searches was changed from completion to exchange date to allow for issues arising from the search. 	
7	<p>Corporate Performance Report Quarter 2</p> <p>This report provided an overview of the Council's performance up to the end of Quarter 2 (30 September 2016) relating to the strategic priorities and objectives of the Corporate Plan, and key delivery enablers. It set out progress so far against the new objectives contained in the plan. It continued the move towards a more concise and targeted style of reporting. This was part of a new performance management framework which, over the coming months, would evolve to include reporting on key service indicators.</p> <p>In response to questions from Members, it was explained that as part of the refresh, work had been carried out with Managers and complaint champions to improve management of complaints. Parish Council complaints were generally handled by the Monitoring Officer, calls for information on Land Charges would not be registered as complaints, and issues dealt with promptly would not turn into official complaints. It was further clarified that there would be a refresh on the guidance for complaints.</p> <p>It was noted that since the reception staff were trained to deal with customers in a different way, complaints had dramatically reduced.</p>	Sara Skirton

	<p>One Member queried the difference between the sickness figures for 2015 and 2016, to which it was clarified that as the Council was a small organisation, small numbers of people on or off long term sick made a significant difference.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <p>Members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Considered and commented on the information contained within this report 2. Considered and commented on the format of the report and levels of detail provided which would evolve as the 5 Councils contract bedded in 3. Identified any issues or performance exceptions that the committee wished to highlight as a concern to Cabinet 4. Where performance exceptions were identified considered whether the proposed actions were adequate to improve performance to the desired level and took actions to address concerns as appropriate 	
8	<p>Recycle More</p> <p>Exclusion of the Press and Public</p> <p>A resolution was agreed to exclude the press and public from the meeting during items 8 on the grounds that exempt information (as defined in Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972) of the following description was likely to be disclosed:</p> <p>Category 3, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including those of the Council).</p> <p>The collection of domestic waste was a statutory duty of the District Council with disposal being the responsibility of the County Council.</p> <p>MDC like all the others in Somerset met its statutory requirements through the Somerset Waste Partnership who managed the domestic collection and disposal on our behalf.</p> <p>The report attached had been prepared by the Somerset Waste Partnership for consideration by all the partners.</p> <p>The report covered the environmental and financial benefits of moving to new Recycle More collection services, which would increase recycling and meet public aspirations to recycle more materials, including plastic pots, tubs and trays.</p>	Stuart Finney

Feedback from partners would be reported to Somerset Waste Board in December 2016, with a view to a final decision then being taken on the new collections, which would also follow negotiations being finalised with SWP's collection contractor, Kier MG CIC.

If approved, Recycle More services would then be rolled out to all district areas in Somerset from Autumn 2017.

During the discussion that followed, Members offered alternative solutions including;

- Small bins for batteries
- Mixing food and green waste
- 2 weekly collections
- Weekly nappy collection
- Recycling cartons
- Incineration

It was explained that to change the current recycling system, taking into account the investment in hardware, was prohibitively expensive. It was further clarified that the recycling of pots, tubs and trays would give the extra capacity in the general waste bin to allow for 3 weekly collection. With regard to the collection of nappies, it was explained that increasing the collection frequency would not be cost effective. It would not be possible to mix food and green waste because this would preclude the preferred use of anaerobic digestion which generated energy. With regard to cartons which had a wax outer, a foil liner and a plastic lid, these would have to be recycled in a special mill which would lead to increased collection costs and a lower resale value. It was clarified that batteries would be collected using an envelope.

One Member raised concerns with regard to residents in deprived areas where recycling was not generally carried out, and excess waste was a potential threat to health. It was clarified that the South West Partnership would work closely with communities and street cleansers, and that there were resources for education.

In response to questions regarding times of excess rubbish such as moving home, it was clarified that recycling centres should be utilised. Sensitive cases such as incontinence wear would be addressed on an individual basis.

RESOLVED

	<p>Members held a straw poll in which it was agreed to support recycle more, but that Members were opposed to a three week cycle.</p> <p>Councillor Terry Napper left the meeting at 8.45pm</p> <p>There followed, a resolution to put the meeting back into public session.</p>	
<p>9</p>	<p>Street Naming and Numbering Policy Review</p> <p>The purpose of this report was to show how a revision of the current Street Naming & Numbering (SNN) Policy would be of benefit to the Council, stakeholders and customers.</p> <p>The existing Street Naming and Numbering Policy had been in place since December 2009 and was in need of review and update. This report summarised the need for change and clarification in the Street Naming and Numbering Policy and sought approval for the introduction of charging for historic research and provision of Notices confirming the official address for existing properties in the District.</p> <p>The Policy detailed the powers under which the Council allocated official addresses to properties in the districts, the related appeal processes and the procedures and best practice it followed in delivering the service.</p> <p>There were no revisions to legislation covered under the review of the policy.</p> <p>During the discussion that followed, Members noted that neighbouring authorities charge similarly. It was agreed that a database of names would be helpful to developers and that clear street naming and numbering was crucial for emergency services to locate properties.</p> <p>The Chair informed the meeting that in Frome in 2010 a policy was adopted to go out and ask residents for suggestions of locally relevant names. As there was plenty of history locally to collate a database of names, the Chair offered to assist the relevant officers in looking at this.</p> <p>One Member raised a concern with a possible contradiction in the report regarding addresses being given out before planning permission was issued. It was agreed that this would be clarified prior to the report going forward to Cabinet.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <p>Scrutiny Board:</p>	<p>Sara Skirton</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Recommended to Cabinet the adoption of the revised Street Naming and Numbering Policy 2) Recommended to Cabinet the introduction of a charging regime for provision of historic research and provision of Notices confirming existing addresses 3) Agreed that the Chairman work with officers to gather a list of names for parishes 	
10	<p>Transformation Projects Benefits Realisation Update</p> <p>This report provided an update on the Benefits Realisation programme concerning 2 recent transformation projects: The Shape Mendip Hub Project (incorporating the Phoenix Project) and the Shape Leisure Services Project.</p> <p>Members agreed that the success of Shape Mendip which was now fully occupied, was far greater than original estimates, and that the next steps were being looked at.</p> <p>Councillor Graham Noel left the meeting at 9.05pm.</p> <p>In response to questions regarding the failure of a baseline for satisfaction and disgruntled users of leisure services, it was clarified that the original baseline would have been set by the contractor. The Group Manager for Corporate Services stated that she would take these issues back to the appropriate Group Manager and Fusion for clarity.</p> <p>RESOLVED</p> <p>Scrutiny note the contents of the report and endorsed the benefits that had been realised from these significant and challenging transformation projects.</p>	Sara Skirton
12	<p>Forward Plans</p> <p>The Council's Forward Plan was noted.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Forward Plan was noted.</p>	Caroline McCafferty
13	Urgent Business	

The meeting finished at approximately 9.15 pm.