

**CUSTOMER SERVICES & RESOURCES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

14 November 2006
5.00pm – 7.32pm

PRESENT: Councillors, Bradnack, Ellis-Miller, Hughes, Hymans, James, Liddle (Vice-Chair), McPherson, J. Rosenstiel and Taylor (Chair).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Blencowe (for minute number 06/CSR/38 as Ward Councillor and for minute number 06/CSR/45 as Labour Spokes on Community Services)

Councillor Durrant (for minute number 06/CSR/41 as a member of the Guildhall Working Party)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Cantrill, Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

06/CSR/35 MINUTES

The following amendment was made to the minutes of 4 July:

In the last paragraph of 06/CSR/27, to record that there were two votes on recommendations 1 and 2, the first of which was to approve the recommendations and the second of which was to reject them by 4 votes to 0.

The Chair then signed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July as a correct record.

06/CSR/36 APOLOGIES

None.

06/CSR/37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

06/CSR/37 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A member of the public on behalf of Petersfield Area Community Trust (PACT) addressed the meeting with regard to St Matthew's Piece Land – please see minute number 06/CSR/38.

06/CSR/38 **NON KEY DECISION ST MATTHEW'S PIECE LAND AND
CITYLIFE COMMUNITY INNOVATION CENTRE**

(See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A5)

The Chief Estates Surveyor introduced the item to set the context of a complex situation. He referred to the map provided by the Planning Officer to illustrate where each piece of land was located. He emphasised the following:

- That anything he said was without prejudice to the City Council's position in land negotiations with the County Council.
- The land was sensitive locally in that PACT had gained planning consent to demolish the existing building and convert the area into an extension to the existing St Matthew's Piece Park. City Life had also obtained planning consent to demolish and construct a Community Innovation Centre.
- The land between the existing park and the Howard Mallett Centre was considered by the County Council to be ancillary to their building and part of that building's curtilage.
- The County Council had submitted statutory declarations to the effect that the land had been treated as part of the Centre and managed by the Centre since 1968.
- The City Council had paper title to the land but that was capable of being overturned.
- The land was not Public Open Space in that it was not shown on the Local Plan. The City Council was treating it as if it were Open Space as that was considered to be a proper reading of open space legislation where a local authority was considering disposal and it strengthened the negotiating position with the County Council.
- The recommendation was to reach a negotiated solution with the County Council whereby the City Council would recover approximately 1,415m², lose approximately 413m² and use variations to the existing City Life lease to ensure the land would be enjoyed as an extension to the park.

A member of the public referred to the piece of land to the south of the Howard Mallett site and said that PACT wanted that to be Open Space. She said the space had been so used even if not so registered. There would be no advantage in providing open space to the east of the site because that was already designated as Open Space in the new Local Plan.

She referred to the well-documented evidence of 40 years ago that undertakings had been made that land was to be have been given in compensation for the land included in the Howard Mallett site. These undertakings had been flouted and ignored and the land had been stolen from the local residents.

The land in question had been given in 1898 for recreation forever. When the Howard Mallett site became surplus to requirements, the County Council should have offered it back. She asked the Executive Councillor to ensure that the lost land was replaced.

The Executive Councillor said that his starting point was that this was a property matter. His priority was to preserve and enhance the asset base of the City Council. So any consideration of the land as Open Space was not in his remit.

The member of the public asked where PACT could go to get help.

The Executive Councillor said it was a very difficult situation and he had sympathy with PACT's view but it was not in his remit.

Councillor Bradnack referred to the letter he had circulated before the meeting (which he now amended by removing the paragraph beginning "Secondly.."). He urged the Executive Councillor to take the matter to adjudication and that the costs of that should be borne.

Councillor Blencowe spoke as a Ward Councillor and added his support to what Councillor Bradnack had said. This had been a contentious site and there had been no view about it taken corporately by the City Council. It was only now at this meeting that there was any opportunity to give a view about this contentious issue.

Other members raised the following to which the officer replied (A):

- Was the opinion that the City Council had a weak case based on legal advice? Was there an option to do nothing?

A: The City Council's claim was based on paper title while that of the County Council was based on having had control of the land, the claim being made by affidavits made to the Land Registry. Doing nothing was not an option as both councils had lodged claims. The Land Registry was looking for one of three possible solutions – one of the councils to withdraw, a negotiated settlement or an arbitration tribunal.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/CSR/39 KEY DECISION **DEPARTMENTAL RESTRUCTURING**

(See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A6)

Councillor Bradnack said that key aspects of the financial implications of the restructuring were contained in paragraph 4.1 but these and other desirable outcomes were not in the recommendations. He proposed an amendment to the recommendations for the Executive Councillor:

"That any changes should lead to service improvements, efficiency gains and be cost neutral".

This amendment was approved by the Scrutiny Committee by 6 votes to 0 and agreed by the Executive Councillor.

In response to a question from a member about why the changes were to be delegated and not brought back for consideration at the Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive said that they would be brought back if they turned out to be controversial.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations (as amended) by 6 votes to 0:

- a) to agree a review of the Council's departmental structure, focused particularly on corporate and central services, including the management of the new Customer Access Service.
- b) that any changes as a result of the review be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Customer Services & Resources and the Labour Spokesperson.
- c) that any changes lead to service improvements, efficiency gains and be cost neutral.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations as amended.

06/CSR/40 **NON KEY DECISION SERVICE PLAN PERFORMANCE REVIEW
2006-07 AND REVISED REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS**

(See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A7)

The Scrutiny Committee considered each Service Performance Review in turn. Any comments and answers by officers (A) are noted below:

Human Resources

- An update requested on what was happening with Camcard

A: Camcards were still in use, although there were currently no accompanying brochures to distribute to new staff. There were problems with the existing provider which meant that another might need to be found. Human Resources were working with Legal Services and the County Council to find a solution.

- Had the Council made the necessary changes to job adverts to comply with the new law relating to age discrimination?

A: The Council's application form complied as dates of birth were not asked for. All adverts complied as all were made through one supplier. The Diversity Officer had been working on this over the summer and training for managers and staff had been undertaken.

- Referring to BV11b and 11c – was the Council ever going to get anywhere near these targets?

A: It was a case of continuing to try. Disabled staff were now able to take advantage of training to help them move into more senior positions.

IT Contract Management

- Would the work scheduled to be completed in March 2006 and re-scheduled for March 2007 actually be completed by then?

A: Yes because there is a staff member now appointed to progress that.

Economic Development & Tourism

- Were there plans in place for improving the Sunday Market and joining the Farmers' Market Group?

A: The new City Centre Manager would start full time in December and this would be part of her work programme. She would bring valuable experience from her previous job. The new Head of Service would be recruited soon (to be in post by the New Year) and would be tasked with the development of the whole city.

Procurement

The Executive Councillor mentioned the tangible achievements in relation to environmentally friendly procurement and the production of the Buying Green Guide.

Property & Building Services

- Referring PPI2 – Request for information re annual figures because the 6 months of assessment were ones of low energy use.
- How are these figures calculated and is the Council doing well?

A: The figures were the actual ones for 2005/06. They included car parks and the Corn Exchange (but not toilets) so they were extremely crude measures. Local Authorities were going to work together on this indicator to develop better measures. For example the range between local councils was huge – South Cambridgeshire District Council had only one building while the London Boroughs had hundreds.

Reception & Office Services

- In relation to all calls to main Switchboard to be answered within 15 seconds, affirmed the importance of achieving a balance between speed and accuracy and ensuring that callers were connected to the correct service.

Revenue Services

- Referring to BV78a 78b and 78c – When compared with other local authorities, the Council is slipping back because its performance is not rising quickly enough. While the figures for BV76c were not listed, there was also a risk that they were slipping back.

A: BV76c depended on how investigations were made. The City Council chose how many to investigate rather than investigating all cases. There had been problems with sickness absence in the section. Even so, 5 of the BV indicators were in the upper quartile.

- Request for information about the carry forward of £43,000.

A: Temporary staff had had to be employed. There was a balance to be found between cost and maintaining the level of service.

The Executive Councillor said that the position had been even worse and remedial action had been taken. The challenge for the service was to balance efficiency with achieving the performance indicators and work was required on both these aspects especially when anticipating the impact of Customer Access.

- What percentage of applicants for benefits received same day assessments and how good was the Council at ensuring that applicants knew which documents to bring in to be eligible for a same day assessment?

A: These figures would be provided to members.

- Referring to the introduction of Mobile Technology – what were the benefits of this?

A: It addressed a requirement by central government to improve communications. It also meant that officers could use a small tablet rather than heavy files when making home visits.

Referring to the budget report and the decisions to be made, the Chair asked if there were any questions in relation to the budget transfer and the project appraisals.

The Executive Councillor said that the Time Recording and Case Management System for Legal Services would help to identify which departments received what level of assistance from Legal Services and this would better inform the budget exercise in future years. If it worked for Legal, then explorations would be made to see if it could be used by other departments.

- With regard to the Refurbishment of the PVCU factory, were there tenants ready to move in?

A: An existing tenant was going to expand so there would be no loss of revenue during the refurbishment.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/CSR/41 KEY DECISION **GUILDHALL WORKING PARTY'S PROPOSALS FOR THE GUILDHALL**

(See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A8)

Councillor Durrant said that detail could be dealt with at a later stage including the possibility of using the reference library and the car parking spaces for the Mayoral and Chief Executive's cars to open up the frontage. He thought the Box

Office might be more appropriate as a small shop rather than a café. He thought that a link between the proposed café and the tourist information centre was desirable. He hoped that pedestrianisation of Peas Hill might come about in the future which would bring more life to the city centre. He made a plea to keep one of the cells for historic interest along with making better lighting in the Committee Rooms.

Members made the following comments to which the officer replied:

- One reservation - as the Court space was not visible and would be highly reliant on signage.
- One suggestion – outside al fresco coffee shop would be a good idea especially if the area were pedestrianised.

A: An imaginative tenant would want to offer al fresco facilities. Signage would be part of the detail included on architects' drawings and in relation to the Listed Building requirements before submitting as a planning application.

The Executive Councillor welcomed the comments especially about pedestrianisation and said that the proposal was aimed at increasing the value of this Council asset whilst also increasing the utility of the asset for residents and visitors to Cambridge.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/CSR/42 KEY DECISION ICT INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES

(See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A9)

Two members asked questions of a technical nature which were satisfactorily answered.

One member expressed surprise at the cost of installing the software.

A: The costs were a worst case scenario and it was anticipated they would be less. Several tests needed to be carried out before the new software was installed to ensure everything went to plan.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/CSR/43 NON KEY DECISION HUMAN RESOURCES BEST VALUE REVIEW *(See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A10)*

One member asked what the risks were of activities falling between Human Resources and the departments following the new structure being implemented. What process was there for councillors knowing if this happened?

A: That had been recognised as a risk and would be monitored. An Internal Audit of the new service delivery model was scheduled for July 2008, which would also

look at the tasks remaining in departments to ensure proposed savings had been realised.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/CSR/44 **Agreed** that should members wish to consider the appendices to the following two reports, that the press and public be excluded.

06/CSR/45 **KEY DECISION LAND AT CLAY FARM**

(See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A11)

Members made the following points to which the officer answered (A):

1. Councillor Bradnack, referring to section 4.3 of the report about affordable housing, said the Labour Group thought that the Council should go for 100% affordable housing on its own land. He expressed concern that the first recommendation only alluded to the Landowners Collaboration Agreement when percentages of affordable housing would be part of that Agreement. The indications in the report were that a 7% share of the 2,300 likely dwellings gave a figure of 160 of which 80 would be affordable homes with the proposed level set at 50%. The map indicated that the land to the north of the railway line was to be twice the density of housing as that to the south, so probably 80-100 was the figure.
He also asked that the Agreement be brought back for scrutiny before it was signed.

The Executive Councillor said that 100% affordable housing was unrealistic on financial grounds; it would mean dipping into the Council's reserves. The approach he had taken was to make the level of affordable housing higher than that recommended in the Local Plan and to ensure that the affordable housing was constructed to the highest sustainable standards. This would give a clear message to other developers in the urban extensions. The private housing component of the Council's site would also have a sustainable criterion applied to it.

- Councillor Blencowe asked if the Executive Councillor for Housing had been consulted about the level of affordable housing as this was not part of the remit of the Executive Councillor for Customer Services & Resources. He pressed for assurance on this.

The Executive Councillor said that his responsibility was the Council's land asset but that he had consulted all the Executive Councillors and widely with officers as well as listening to the views from both sides expressed in the recent meeting of Full Council when this issue had been debated.

The Executive Councillor agreed to let the Labour Spokes have sight of the final commercial terms of the Landowners Collaboration Agreement and this was added to the recommendations.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations as amended by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the amended recommendations.

06/CSR/46 KEY DECISION 127-159 NEW STREET

See also record of decision CS&R/061114/A12

In response to a question from a member, the officer affirmed that the replacement facility would be in place before the current one was handed over to the developer. He also assured the member that assessing the adequacy of the replacement provision would be the responsibility of the Executive Councillor for Housing and her officers.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendation by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

The meeting ended at 7.32 pm.

Chair