At a meeting of Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in Priory House Council Chamber on 12 September 2019 from 10am

Present:  
Cllr D McVicar (Chair)  
Cllr M Foster (Vice-Chair)

Members:  
Cllrs  
A Graham  
M Walsh  
Y Farrell  
Cllrs  
M Matthews  
P Spicer  
C Gomm

Apologies:  
Cllrs  
E Perry

Substitutes:  
Cllrs  
F Firth (substitute for Cllr E Perry)

Members in Attendance:  
Cllrs  
I Dalgarno  
B Spurr  
A Zerny  
Cllrs  
K Collins  
S Dixon

Officers in Attendance:  
M Coiffait  
Director – Community Services  
A Davie  
AD – Development and Infrastructure  
T Etheridge  
Broadband Contract Manager  
A Bishop  
Principal Drainage Engineer  
R Preen  
Scrutiny Policy Adviser

Others in Attendance:  
J Glerum  
Anglian Water  
Superintendent J Whittred  
Bedfordshire Police

1. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 July 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. Members’ Interests

None.

3. Chairman’s Announcement and Communications
The Chair highlighted that several presentations had been submitted late and that item 12 had been omitted from the agenda in error and so would be included under the urgency procedural rules by reason of special circumstance.

4. Petitions

None.

5. Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

6. Call-In

None.

7. Requested Items

The Ward Member for Potton submitted a requested item regarding the protection of wildlife on development sites, specifically relating to the removal of hedges and trees during bird nesting season. The Member was keen for the Council to address this and ensure the local authority had the requisite powers and appropriate resource to support the protection of wildlife, including where necessary to lobby central Government for changes to legislation.

In response to the submission the Executive Member for Regeneration and Planning expressed his sympathies and support for the protection of wildlife and explained that any additional resource requirements would have to be carefully considered against budget constraints. He would be guided by the Committee if they determined that an increase in resource was necessary and would investigate the possibility further.

In light of the submission Members discussed the following in summary:-
- That there were several ways in which the public could contact the Council regarding planning and environmental protection issues which were already in operation and that these be publicised via town and parish councils.
- The need for a preventative rather than reactive approach to planning enforcement.
- That the Construction code of Practice for Developers recently brought before the Committee should include an element regarding environmental protection and an adherence to appropriate practice on the part of developers.
- Whether it should be incumbent on developers to replace that which they removed such as trees and hedgerows.
• The importance of engaging with the voluntary sector such as the RSPB when lobbying for Government changes to legislation.
• The complexities of compiling a database of hedgerows and trees on private land.

RECOMMENDED:-
1. That the Executive Member engage with the voluntary sector and lobby Government for changes to planning law in relation to environmental protection.
2. That a future report be delivered to the Committee in relation to environmental protection and the impact of additional resource within the planning enforcement team.

8. Executive Members’ Update

The Executive Member for Community Services highlighted a need to update the Council’s policy in relation to culture and the arts, also reviewing the delivery of the library service. A peer review in relation to this would be taking place in the future and the Council would form part of this, drawing upon external expertise who would provide recommendations and advice.

The Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration confirmed that the Dunstable and Biggleswade Housing Infrastructure Funds (HIF) had been awarded and that a future report would be brought before the Committee in relation to this and town centre benchmarking. Members were advised that the Local Plan hearings had concluded and a response from the Inspector was anticipated within the next few weeks.

9. The Impact of 5G Technology and LED Lighting on Public Health

Following a request from a member of the public, a presentation was delivered to Members in relation to the impact of 5G technology and LED lighting on public health. Following a detailed review by the World Health Organisation and guidance provided by the NHS, the Council were confident that any risk to the public was minimal, notwithstanding the identified vulnerable groups.

In light of the presentation Members discussed the following in summary:-
• Whether it was possible to supply an orange filter to LED lights in areas which the identified vulnerable groups were known to reside. In response the Director confirmed that the Council would respond to any appropriate request from the public which included dimming the lights or switching them off at certain times if deemed appropriate.
• That some LED lights generated a flicker at certain frequencies and whether it was appropriate to fit a shield when necessary.
• That additional national research may be required in relation to 5G technology and that the Council would follow those guidelines published to Local Authorities by central Government.

NOTED the presentation and that the Committee were satisfied that the concerns raised had been addressed.

10. Anglian Water Update

Representatives from Anglian Water delivered a presentation in relation to water efficiency initiatives and measures to reduce the impact of flood risk zones within Central Bedfordshire, particularly with regards to surface water flooding.

In light of the presentation Members discussed the following in summary:-
• That retro-fitting drinking fountains on school premises would be assessed on a case by case basis and that as the schools for the future programme progressed, the hope was that drinking fountains would be installed automatically in new school builds.
• That Anglian Water hadn’t previously considered drinking fountains within town centres but would be assessing opportunities for initiatives such as this in the future.
• That a national water bottle refill scheme had been launched whereby members of the public could refill their bottles at various establishments on the high street.
• That water saving devices available to households were free of charge and simple to install and that it would be a customer decision whether they had a water meter permanently installed following the two-year introductory period.
• That Anglian Water were engaging with agriculture and industry in order to determine where water was required most when transferring from one location to another and that they were also working with developers and households in order to install the necessary infrastructure in support of the green-water initiative.
• Whether existing development sites would be required to adopt sustainable drainage systems (SUD’s) to which it was confirmed there was no duty for them to do so but it was being considered, taking into account lessons learned being applied to new development sites.
• The importance of educating town and parish councils and the public with regards to the responsibilities of Anglian Water and the Council in the planning process and that an information video would be produced in the future.

NOTED the presentation and thanked Anglian Water for their attendance.

11. Bedfordshire Police Update
Superintendent J Whittred delivered a presentation which outlined the new funding position of the Force which would help tackle serious violence and knife crime in the region, with surge funding available from the Home Office in order to support the work of the violence and exploitation reduction units. The Prime Minister had recently announced funding in order to recruit an additional 20k police officers, which would translate to an increase of approximately 200 new officers for Bedfordshire. Thematic, strategic workstreams would be introduced in order to tackle serious violence which would include partnership working and community engagement, specific and targeted campaigns, along with research and analysis. There was a need to understand the links between individuals committing and experiencing violent crime and to work alongside the multi agencies involved in other aspects of their lives, understanding that violent crime was rarely committed in isolation, instead occurring alongside other often complex issues.

The Director for Community Services highlighted the importance of understanding that it was not always those children and young people already known to the local authority, violence and serious crime was changing and now involved a much broader demographic. Criminal gangs were deploying sophisticated tactics in the recruitment, targeting and manipulation of children and vulnerable young people and it was vital that all agencies involved in tackling the issue kept up with the changing landscape. Research suggested that one in ten people were recreational users of cannabis and cocaine and that more awareness was needed on their part that they were fuelling the drugs market and the manipulation of young people in the drugs trade.

In light of the presentation Members discussed the following in summary:-

- Whether some of the additional funding would support community policing to which it was confirmed that it would and the ongoing challenge of retention following a period of recruitment.
- The effective use of CCTV when identifying those taking part in criminal behaviour.
- That the force would be targeting the cohort most likely to commit or be the victim of serious and violent crime, with data suggesting those under the age of 25 were at the highest risk. Those over the age of 25 would still be dealt with or supported via the criminal justice system as necessary.
- That current stop and search initiatives were still in operation and largely effective, with scrutiny panels in place to ensure the tactic was effectively and appropriately deployed and that all those stopped and searched were treated with respect.
- The importance of ensuring effective communication with the different communities living within Central Bedfordshire.

Noted the presentation with Members welcoming the additional funds available to Bedfordshire police, thanking them for their attendance.
12. Work Programme 2019/20 and Executive Forward Plan

AGREED the Committee Work Programme subject to the following additions:

- Culture and Library Peer Review - Date TBC
- Environmental Planning Enforcement (following the requested item) – Date TBC

Chair .........................................................

Dated .........................................................