



Minutes of the meeting of the STRATEGIC PLACEMAKING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH at 6.30 PM

**Present:** Councillor P Geary (Chair)  
Councillors Bowyer, K Bradburn, Gilbert, Legg, McPake, Petchey and Williams

**Officers:** T Darke (Director Growth, Economy and Culture), S Proffitt (Director Environment and Property), N Hannon (Head of Environment and Waste), D Millership (Head of Highways), A Dickinson (Strategic Asset Manager), N Thompson (Development Management Manager), C Devereux (Clerk of Works), A Patel (Flood and Water Management Officer) and R Tidman (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

**Also present:** Councillors Bint and Exon, Councillor Sue Smith (Woughton Community Council), S McNay (Council Manager, Woughton Community Council) and 1 member of the public

**Apologies:** Councillor Minns

**SP20 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

Councillors Bowyer and McPake advised the Committee that they were members of various Flood Boards and Groups, but they did not have any interest in the items on the agenda that would preclude them taking part in any discussions or votes the Committee might have.

**SP21 MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee held on 15 January 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**SP22 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions from members of the public.

**DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PROCESSES**

**Witnesses: T Darke (Director Growth, Economy and Culture) and N Thompson (Development Management Manager)**

The Director of Growth, Economy and Culture summarised the process of determining planning applications and how Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) were used by the Council.

There was concern expressed by some of those present who were involved with Development Control Committee that:

- (a) the National Planning Policy Framework appeared to create an obligation to help developers get applications approved. This created a tension between objectors and officer colleagues who were there to advise the Committee;
- (b) when there was a PPA in place and an officer colleague had worked with the applicant to ensure that the application was correct that this did not involve any consultation with interested parties which might be beneficial in the early stages of the process;
- (c) despite there being a number of quantitative ways to measure how the service area was performing, qualitative data would be more useful to assist with service improvements;
- (d) councillors were not involved in the early stages of a supplementary planning document. If they were it would potentially reduce challenges towards the end of the process;
- (e) there often appeared to be a lack of clarity as to whether a PPA was in place for a planning application, it should be clear at all stages of the application process whether there was a PPA in place so the public was aware.

In response to questions the Committee noted that:

- (a) PPAs were allocated across the team depending on experience and where more PPAs were received additional staff could be funded to backfill and provide extra capacity;
- (b) if the team had capacity then there was no fee charged to cover the PPA;
- (c) PPA applications were not fast-tracked and having a PPA did not guarantee planning approval;
- (d) where an applicant requested a PPA, but the development proposed was not one that Council would support then the PPA was not agreed;

- (e) ward councillors were not currently routinely consulted on applications that bordered their wards, but a central point which provided information on all planning applications was available for councillors to review and information about this could be circulated to councillors;
- (f) the Development Control team considered 'everyone' was their customer – all residents, councillors, internal/external colleagues and the applicant;
- (g) colleagues in Highways and Landscaping were consulted and took the lead on issues such as species of trees to be planted and road design;
- (h) the biggest challenges facing the team were retaining staff, particularly senior officers, lack of enforcement officers and dealing with very controversial applications.
- (i) any decision that went to appeal even if it had been against the officer recommendation, it was still a decision that had been made by the Local Planning Authority. Therefore, the decision was defended on that basis. There would however be an expectation in this instance that councillors would support any inquiry;
- (j) PPAs did not appear on the weekly planning list as they do not start until the pre-application stage. Once the application was submitted the Council encouraged the applicant to agree to add it to the public document list.

RESOLVED –

1. That the witnesses and Councillor Bint be thanked for their contribution to the Committee's scrutiny of this item.
2. That when the report on the Blakelands Planning Application 'Dorfman Report' was available, the Planning Group consider, whether it identified any wider process issues that should be scrutinised by the Committee.
3. That the Director, Growth, Economy and Culture be asked to explore with colleagues in other areas of the Council, potential strategies to improve staff recruitment and retention.
4. That the Head of Planning be asked to consider how Councillors could be better involved in the early stages of the development of planning policy documents such as Supplementary Planning Documents.

**INDEPENDENT FLOOD REPORT**

**Witnesses: S Proffitt (Director Environment and Property),  
N Hannon (Head of Environment and Waste),  
D Millership (Head of Highways), A Dickinson (Strategic  
Asset Manager), C Devereux (Clerk of Works), A Patel  
(Flood and Water Management Officer), Councillor Sue  
Smith (Woughton Community Council), S McNay  
(Council Manager, Woughton Community Council)**

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Environment and Waste updating on the recommendations within the Independent Flood Report on the May 2018 floods.

In response to questions the Committee, noted that:

- (a) there were issues with residents being able to get affordable insurance if they had been flooded and this was a nationwide issue;
- (b) the flooding Capital Programme had a project pipeline in place with phase 1, bidding for funding from Central Government submitted to the Environment Agency at the beginning of February 2020;
- (c) parish councils were key to supporting residents in such incidents as they had on the ground knowledge of their local communities;
- (d) there would be a communications plan to influence the behaviour of private owners and Council tenants to raise the level of understanding around flooding; and
- (e) the Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority for the area and has brought together a new team of officers who were focused on engagement, transparency and resolving a number of legacy issues;

Members of the Committee made the following comments:

- (f) it had been nearly two years since this particular flooding event and there were areas in Milton Keynes that had flooded multiple times over the years, but preventative measures had still not been put in place for many of the areas;
- (g) the way that the magnitude of a flood event was described, for example, a one in a hundred year flood, was meaningless to most people;

- (h) flooding events would most likely happen more and more regularly and there was a need to understand whether the infrastructure was being overwhelmed or whether there was strategic issues;
- (i) recommendations in previous reports, for example the report on the 2012 floods in Lavendon, had never been implemented and corporate knowledge had been lost as key officers had left the Council;
- (j) the response to the 2018 event would have been improved if a 'major incident' had been declared, therefore the process for declaring an incident of that scale needed to be revisited;
- (k) officer colleagues developing the next Local Plan needed to ensure that the impacts and mitigation of flooding was addressed as part of the development of the next Local Plan and built into the assessment of planning applications; and
- (l) private homeowners affected by the flooding were back in their properties much quicker than those in social housing and the remedial works to private housing also included the provision of additional flood prevention measures which did not appear to be the case for social housing properties.

RESOLVED –

1. That the witnesses be thanked for their report, their attendance at the meeting and their contribution to the Committee's scrutiny of this item.
2. That the report and the action plan developed in response to the recommendations within the report, be welcomed.
3. That all those involved with work during and in the aftermath of this particular flood event, including officers, emergency services, partner agencies and parish and town councils be thanked.
4. That the flood improvement and remedial work that had been completed to date be welcomed and acknowledged.
5. That the Director, Environment and Property be recommended to undertake work to ensure that the corporate knowledge and understanding of all recent flood events was brought together.
6. That the Planning Group be asked to keep a watching brief on the monitoring of the action plan and that where any concerns with the implementation of the recommendations were

identified the Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to arrange for the action plan to be reviewed by the relevant scrutiny committee.

7. That the Cabinet be recommended to lobby for and look to secure funding so that Milton Keynes can be 'engineered' to be as resilient as possible to future flooding events.
8. That the Cabinet be asked to ensure that the lessons learnt from past flooding events was taken into account in the development of new areas.

**SP25**

### **2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received and noted the proposed Work Programme for 2020/21.

RESOLVED –

That if members of the Committee have any suggestions for items for scrutiny which are within the Committee's remit during 2020/21, they be fed into the Committee's Planning Group.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.20 PM