

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: Thursday 19 October 2023

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Tom Sanderson (Chair), Alex Bulat (Vice-Chair), David Ambrose Smith, Henry Batchelor, Adela Costello, Steve Criswell, Claire Daunton, Bryony Goodliffe, Ros Hathorn, Lucy Nethsingha, Geoff Seeff and Philippa Slatter

134. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jan French.

Councillor Sanderson declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 (Support Cambridgeshire Update), as a co-opted trustee of Hunt's Forum.

135. Minutes – 6 July 2023

While discussing the minutes of the previous meeting, members requested an update on the development of any work with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils (CAPALC) and were informed that regular meetings were held between the Council and the Chief Executive of CAPALC to discuss links with the wider organisations that it represented. The Council's Chief Executive had also made a presentation on the Council's work at the CAPALC Annual Conference in September 2023.

Members requested a workshop or seminar on cross-committee work. **Action required**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

136. Petitions and Public Questions

No public questions or petitions were received.

137. Coroner Service Mortuary Facilities Contract

The Committee received a report seeking approval to commence the procurement of mortuary provision for the Coroner service in the south of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough coronial jurisdiction. The contract, currently held by Cambridge University Hospital, would be for an initial three years with an option to extend it for two years, and was expected to have a value of approximately £2m.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Clarified that there were two separate contracts for mortuary provision in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough coronial jurisdiction, with the North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust currently providing services in the north of the area on a contract due to expire on 31 March 2026. Neither of the two providers currently had the capacity to provide services for the whole jurisdiction, and using services from outside the jurisdiction would involve significant transportation costs, while also increasing the distance from bereaved families.
- Requested further information on the option of in-house provision, noting that it had previously been discussed by the Committee. Members were informed that it would be expensive to build such facilities and would involve logistical problems for the required experts, who worked in hospitals where the current facilities were beneficially located. Nonetheless, Members were assured that the service continued to monitor opportunities for collaboration with other local authorities, although it was noted that most local authorities across the country operated under the same model currently in place.
- Acknowledged the limited nature of the market but expressed concern that a procurement process with only one potential provider could reduce the ability of the Council to negotiate the price or conditions of the contract. Members were assured that the Council would have the opportunity to mitigate against future cost rises and improve the long-term aspects of the contract, as it had done with previous contracts during the Covid-19 pandemic. Potential providers had previously been rejected because they had not met the required quality criteria, and it was emphasised that the process complied with all the Council's procurement rules.
- Clarified that although a new Assets and Procurement Committee had been established, the procurement of services under the remit of other policy and service committees would continue to be undertaken by those respective committees.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the commencement of the procurement process for mortuary provision in the south of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough coronial jurisdiction; and
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to award and execute the contract for mortuary facilities.

138. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Coroner Service Annual Report

The Committee received the annual report for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Coroner service, which included case studies, information on organ donations and faith deaths, and an assessment of the service's performance and financial situation.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Requested further information on Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) reports, including their effectiveness and enforceability. Members were informed that PFD reports could only highlight concerns and did not have the power to enforce recommendations, and although there was a requirement for organisations to respond to proposed actions recommended in such reports, there was also no mechanism to enforce this. However, attention was drawn to a PDF report written by the area's Senior Coroner that related to a location where a large number of suicides had taken place. Following the adoption of recommendations within the report, no further deaths had been reported at the location. It was clarified that PDF reports were only written in specific situations, where it was judged that they could have a significant impact on important issues.
- Drew attention to a recent inquest in Hertfordshire involving the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Senior Coroner, as set out in Paragraph 2.2.3 of the report, which culminated in a ruling that domestic abuse that led to suicide could amount to an unlawful act of manslaughter. Members were informed that Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were carried out in such situations, and that there were an increasing number of DHRs being undertaken.
- Highlighted the value and importance of organ donations and paid tribute to the Senior Coroner for his role in the production of guidance that facilitated them wherever possible. Members were informed that the jurisdiction contained two of the world's leading hospitals in transplantation, with a highly skilled team supporting the process of donation and transplantation across the country. It was suggested that the Council could increase awareness of the issue and encourage discussions within families. **Action required**
- Expressed concern about the higher number of suicide conclusions and queried whether they were continuing to increase. Members were informed that suicide rates remained a worrying trend, and although they were mainly male victims, there were an increasing number of female victims, with high numbers of drug and alcohol related deaths. It was also noted that the suicide rate for people with autism was about eight times higher than for people without autism. Drawing attention to the pressure on mental health services, members emphasised the importance of the national health driven suicide prevention strategy, and the Council's collaboration with charities and other organisations.
- Clarified that the case detailed in Paragraph 2.2.5 of the report was a unique incident, and that a pattern of deaths resulting from drivers with dementia had not been identified.

- Established that there was no cost for the use of Peterborough Town Hall as a venue for hearings, although scheduling was difficult.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

139. Support Cambridgeshire Update

The Committee received an update on the work of Support Cambridgeshire, a partnership between Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations and Cambridge Council for Voluntary Services that was commissioned by the Council to build the capacity of voluntary organisations, community groups and local councils, as well as the Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector (VCS). This included an analysis of the annual "State of the Sector" survey alongside a report on the voluntary sector in Cambridgeshire, produced by Kane Data for Support Cambridgeshire.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Paid tribute to the work of VCS organisations and the work carried out by Support Cambridgeshire in supporting them across the county, including providing advice and expanding networking. It was noted that an annual review of its work would be published in January 2024, detailing its success in bringing people and organisations together.
- Drew attention to the difficulty for small organisations to obtain long-term funding, particularly during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and argued it was difficult for such organisations to focus on their core aims when they needed to devote so much time and resource to fundraising. Members were informed that Support Cambridgeshire offered an extensive range of free training workshops to organisations to help develop their ability to obtain funding and operate with a more long-term strategic approach.
- Welcomed the fact that the largest categories on spending indicated in the report were social services, expressing concern that services previously provided by the state were increasingly being transferred to the VCS sector, despite demand for such services rising.
- Drew attention to ongoing work to encourage businesses to allow their staff time off work to support VCS organisations, and queried how such collaboration could be improved and expanded, for example through providing opportunities for asylum seekers. Members were informed that a new portal would be launched in January 2024 which collated all the volunteering opportunities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, providing organisations a place to encourage collaboration. Notwithstanding, it was suggested that VCS organisations required more regular volunteers, as well as volunteers specialised in certain areas, rather than sporadic general offers of support. It was agreed to provide members with further information on how to access the volunteer portal. **Action required**

- Queried whether the overall cost value of the support provided by charities had been calculated, including if volunteers had been paid the real living wage. Members were informed that the work of volunteers was estimated to be around £13b per year, although it was suggested that this was an underestimate given that volunteers often counted their time differently to paid workers. It was highlighted that with the cost-of-living crisis following on from the Covid-19 pandemic, the VCS sector and volunteers in particular were severely struggling with fatigue. As with the wider society, one impact of the pandemic had seen many volunteers leave to spend more time with their family, and this had been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis driving many volunteers into paid employment. It was queried whether volunteers could be paid minimal amounts for small scale work, although it was clarified the work would not then be classified as volunteering.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the key findings of the reports.

140. Cambridgeshire Skills Six-Month Review

The Committee received a report providing a six-month review of the Cambridgeshire Skills service, which included updates on funding and learner numbers, information on the main highlights and challenges of the curriculum, and detail on how the service was working with other departments and the Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) community.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the switch from annual contracts to a two-year funding agreement with the Combined Authority but expressed concern about the continued short-term nature of funding for adult education.
- Drew attention to the significant increase in demand for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), highlighting its importance, particularly for asylum seekers, and welcomed the additional provision that had been developed by Cambridgeshire Skills. Members sought clarification on whether there was an equitable level of provision across the various districts within the county and were informed that learners were required to have been in the UK for at least six months before they became eligible for funding, and that the distribution of potential learners across the county was inequitable in this regard. However, South Cambridgeshire District Council had been able to obtain some additional funding to provide ESOL lessons to some asylum seekers until they became eligible for funding from the Combined Authority after six months. Members requested clarification on whether the six-month requirement had been imposed by the Combined Authority or whether it was a national requirement. **Action required**

- Queried whether the support offered and provided to the GRT community was sufficient for the population of the community, and it was acknowledged that although a good level of engagement between the Council and the GRT community had been developed by the Council's Traveller Health Team, the relationship could be strengthened further. For example, there had been difficulties increasing the level of engagement with services such as leisure facilities, libraries and Cambridgeshire Skills, partly down to lack of confidence or perceived costs. Members welcomed the ability of Peterborough Regional College to fund and provide the facilities for HGV driving courses, and the subsequent connection that had been developed with the GRT community.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

141. Performance Monitoring Report – Quarter 1 (2023-2024)

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of services within its remit over Quarter 1 of the 2023/24 financial year.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Suggested that it would be helpful for performance monitoring reports to provide more detailed analysis of underperformance, in order to identify issues and propose solutions. Members were informed that it was planned to review the key performance indicators to provide a greater reflection of qualitative performance, rather than volume of activity. This would also include assessing the risks related to individual services and how they could be mitigated.
- Sought clarification on the reasons for the reduction in the number of businesses brought into compliance in all priority areas following inspection or intervention, as demonstrated in key performance indicator 222. **Action required**
- Expressed concern that all the performance indicators related to the Library service were red rated, and highlighted the importance of the ongoing review of the service to identify how libraries were increasingly being used differently so that they could be used to their maximum potential. It was suggested that the changing usage aligned with a wider change in usage of town and city centres, and members were assured that the review was considering the service and use of its premises by partners. It was noted that a survey was being conducted to support the review, and it was agreed to provide Members with a link to circulate further, while Members also requested that minutes be circulated after meetings held by the Working Group for Library Services. **Actions required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

142. Finance Monitoring Report – August 2023

The Committee received the Finance Monitoring Report to the end of August 2023 for the services within its remit. The revenue budgets within the remit of the Committee were currently forecasting an outturn overspend position of £69k, mainly related to the Library service and Coroner service. There were no significant variances on the capital programme, although the spending on some projects was forecast to occur in the next financial year.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

143. Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan and Appointments

While discussing the Committee's agenda plan, Members requested a training workshop on the Gypsy Roma Traveller community in Cambridgeshire for all Members.

The Committee noted its agenda plan.

Chair
11 January 2024