

## **COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 14**

### **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

#### **Councillor Farmer asked:**

In November 2019, The Council engaged the Planning Officers' Society Enterprises (POSe) to assist the Council in carrying out a Peer Review of the Council's Development Management Service.

Development Management (DM) is one of the principal front-line services provided by the Council in its role as the Local Planning Authority. The functions provided by the service cover a variety of matters including pre-application discussions and advice, the determination of planning applications, dealing with planning appeals, planning enforcement, and dealing with heritage matters.

DM is one of the most public facing services that the Council provides.

POS Enterprises issued their final report on 31st December 2019, which highlighted recommendations for where this key service could be improved.

An action plan, responding to the recommendations made by POSe, was reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny, and subsequently approved by Cabinet in December 2020.

What specific progress has been made in the implementation of this critical action plan and what evidenced improvements to the Development Management service have subsequently been achieved?

#### **Councillor Cockarill responded:**

The Development Management Service was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee last week. It was agreed the Joint Chief Executive, Head of Place and myself would give an update again at the August O&S Committee meeting.

The headlines are:

- We have introduced an urban design function to improve the quality of place making to new developments. We are using the building for healthy life as a design code, to inform developments. Officers are working with developers to promote health and well-being and reflect the principles of the NHS Healthy New Towns initiative.
- Having recently acknowledged the Climate emergency officers have been working with developers on measures to mitigate against the effects of this. I'm expecting low carbon homes to come through the planning process shortly.
- The team have a new approach to conservation area appraisals working with parish and town councils. The first one coming through is Odiham and North Warnborough and there has been some learning during this process. The team are looking to roll out this process for Crondall, Fleet and Hartley Wintney.

- The Development Management team are on a journey from good to great and despite the covid pandemic have provided an essential service whilst looking at ways to improve that.

**Councillor Farmer** asked a supplementary question:

It has been over one and a half years since the peer review was published and eight months since the resulting action plan was approved by Cabinet. We have seen the rate of planning applications increase and regrettably more planning officers leaving the team. This has placed added pressure of the team. What more could have been done by the Portfolio Holder for Place to implement the action plan more quickly and support the Development Management Team and what personal responsibility does he accept for the performance levels of this service?

**Councillor Cockarill** responded:

I think Cllr Farmer has answered the question in his question. We would have been able to process more quickly if we hadn't had the staff challenges, particularly with people leaving in senior roles. The implementation plan is something officers and members have to work together on and the O&S working group is working alongside me as is the Planning Working Party. We have implemented a number of changes to the way we do Planning Committee following the report. As a council we all need to make sure we are working with our officers to support them.

**Councillor Butcher** asked:

Can you please confirm how many dogs have been reunited with their owners and how many strays have been found new homes since the dog warden service was transitioned to the new providers (SDK)?

**Councillor Kinnell** responded:

For the period from 1st April - 30 June, there were 11 service requests made. 5 of these were aborted, requiring no action. Six dogs were collected and taken to kennels, five of the six, were reunited with their owner and the remaining stray dog was rehomed.

Now without comparing these figures against previous years data, they're pretty much meaningless, so I asked Mark Jaggard to provide me with the data that was recorded on Uniform for 'stray dogs over the past five years, for the same period:

From 1st April  
30th June 2020: 11 strays  
1st April - 30th June 2019: 5 strays  
1st April - 30th June 2018: 7 strays  
1st April - 30th June 2017: 1 stray  
1st April - 30th June 2016: 6 strays

There is no further breakdown provided on these figures, therefore the data that we now receive on stray dogs from SDK Environmental is far more comprehensive and gives a far more accurate reflection of the situation.

I would also like to take this opportunity since we're on this subject, to request that those responsible for trying to discredit the new service provision, particularly on social media, stop, as it is not true. Yes, we had a great in-house service before the dog warden left, but we continue to benefit from a great service working with SDK, but, with the added benefit of resilience.

**Cllr Butcher** asked a supplementary question:

What financial savings has the removal of the two local jobs delivered and how was the company in Slough selected, that only provides a rotary basic stray dog service compared to what we previously had, that included dog fouling, dog attacks etc. Do we believe that the savings merit the potential suffering caused to families by the service cuts?

**Cllr Kinnell** responded:

I will provide a written answer but disagree, there are no service cuts.