
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 22 March 2017 from 7.00pm - 9.52pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart (substitute for Councillor Derek Conway), Andy Booth (Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Mike Dendor, Mark Ellen, Mike Henderson, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Peter Marchington and Ben Stokes.

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Philippa Davies, Bob Pullen and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Duncan Dewar-Whalley (Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance), Alan Horton (Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities), James Hunt (Deputy Cabinet Member for Regeneration), Roger Truelove and Ghlin Whelan.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Derek Conway, Mick Galvin and Ted Wilcox (Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance).

1255 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the fire evacuation procedure, as set out on the agenda.

1256 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 February 2017 (Minute Nos. 1179 - 1188) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

1257 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

1258 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Chief Finance Officer to the meeting for this item.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report which set out the revenue and capital projected outturn activity for 2016/17, as at the end of December 2016. He reported that the net revenue underspend was £716,000, including £785,000 additional income. He considered the Council was in a good position, and explained that the variation year-on-year on the planning fees income and the increase in parking fees, had resulted in increased revenue, and that the cost of bed and breakfast for the homeless added pressure on the budget.

The Chief Finance Officer reminded Members that the report had been considered by Cabinet on 15 March 2017, and that the report submitted to this meeting was for comment and noting.

The Chairman invited Members to consider the report focussing on particular areas, as below.

Members made comments and asked questions.

Table 1: Service Movements

Suggest that more awareness was given to grants, and it be made easier/clearer on how residents applied for them; acknowledged that it was difficult to forecast the Planning income, but over the past 4/5 years, the Council had consistently under-budgeted the Planning income, suggest that it be reviewed for the current year, and so budget for next year; clarification sought on the figures set out on page 4 under the secondment income, as it appeared that it was costing the Council money when a staff member was being 'costed out'; public conveniences showed net contract savings, but many were in an appalling state, and suggest any spare money should be spent on them; were there any indications that the Park & Ride scheme raised any income?; surprised there was no working budget for the legal fees for the Sittingbourne Master Plan/Town Centre Regeneration; how was the £16,000 income being spent to improve highways?; and were there any other costs during the Park & Ride scheme, i.e. congestion/time/pollution/cost-related benefits?

The Cabinet Member agreed with the comments made on the grant schemes. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the Planning budget could not be amended as it was agreed by Full Council in February 2017. He stated that a report would be submitted on a regular basis, but the budget could not be re-set, and it was reviewed at the quarterly budget meeting. He explained that the secondment figure was a variance of £20,000 underspend, and as such was an income to the Council. The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities advised that the contract saving on the public conveniences was a saving on the negotiated services that had been delivered, which was a different matter to the 'state' of the toilets. He further advised that during the Park & Ride scheme, there had been no dip in town centre parking in December 2016, so income was generated. The Chief Finance Officer advised that information on page 15 of the report showed that there was £30,000 for Sittingbourne Town Centre legal fees, funded from in-year underspend.

Members agreed that an interim report on public conveniences be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Finance Officer agreed to provide further information on the £16,000 budget for general highway improvements.

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities advised that a document would be produced on the overall benefits/costs of the Park & Ride scheme and he would forward this to the Committee.

Table 3: Main Variations by Service

Surprised to see the comment 'additional funding not required' for the Alexander Centre in Faversham, as additional improvement work was needed there; happy that funds had been ring-fenced on complex needs; request a report on troubled families and assisting families with complex needs, and the value achieved by the project; clarification sought on the Local Engagement Forum (LEF) Grants, and what this was for?; concerned with the lack of promotion of apprenticeships, this needed to be developed further in Swale, and the Cabinet Member and Economic Development Team be advised of this; rural areas, as well as urban should be considered for apprenticeships; and suggest £5,000 underspend on WW1 remembrance and commemoration be rolled-over.

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the £10,000 identified for the Alexander Centre was in the base budget. He advised that Quinton Hall had recently been demolished. The Cabinet Member confirmed that WW1 funds were rolled-over.

The Chief Finance Officer agreed to provide further information on the CCTV contract, especially with regard to the £3,000 loss of income.

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities agreed to provide a report on troubled families and assisting families with complex needs, including the value achieved by the project.

The Chief Finance Officer agreed to provide details in relation to the LEF Grants.

The Chief Finance Officer agreed to forward the apprenticeship comments to Senior Management and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

Capital Expenditure

The Chief Finance Officer agreed to forward further information on the bridge deck replacement at Barton's Point Coastal Park, Minster.

Table 7

There was concern that there was underspend on the replacement of Air Quality Stations, as would have though the scheme would have been extended.

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities advised that the underspend for the Air Quality Stations was because one of the monitoring stations had not been working.

Debtors

A Member congratulated the team responsible for debt recovery, and the Chief Finance Officer said that he would forward this comment to the team.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Chief Finance Officer for attending for this item.

Resolved:

(1) That the report and the comments made above be noted.

1259 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Policy and Performance Manager to the meeting for this item.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report which set out the quarterly portfolio-based balanced scorecard performance reports for the second quarter of 2016/17 (July – September 2016).

Corporate Overview balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 2

A Member queried the exact requirement for a 10-day deadline for responses responded to, and the Policy and Performance Manager confirmed that this related to complaints resolved within 10 days, not solely acknowledging the complaint. In response to a question, he advised that the Customer Service Centre recorded both justifiable and non-justifiable complaints. A Member considered complaints would increase following the additional sticker that had been put on green bins to state 'no food waste'.

Environment and Rural Affairs balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 2

A Member drew attention to the List of Exceptions and the residual household waste per household. He stated that overall progress of this needed to be improved, and with the move to a food caddy, and clarity on what could be recycled, the figure should be closer to 50%. He considered the food caddy was being used by a small minority of households, and suggested that feedback be sent to the Cabinet Member. Clarification was given on the way that the food waste was collected in the refuse vehicle, which due to the dual collection facility of the refuse vehicles, could appear to residents that food waste was being mixed with landfill or recyclable waste; the lorries had a split compartment at the back. The Policy and Performance Manager confirmed that the increase in complaints to the Commissioning and Customer Contact Team was related to recycling.

Finance and Performance balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 2

A Member raised concern with the lack of speed in processing new housing benefit and council tax benefit claims. The Policy and Performance Manager confirmed that complaints were listed by department, not by portfolio.

The Cabinet Member agreed to provide further information on the speed of processing new housing benefit and council tax benefit claims.

Housing and Wellbeing balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 2

A Member raised concern with the rise in households staying in temporary housing. It was noted that a report from the Task and Finish Group was due to be considered at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Planning Services balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 2

The Policy and Performance Manager agreed to find out further information on the Planning Enforcement figures and why these had decreased.

Regeneration balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 2

The Cabinet Member advised that further work was ongoing on local procurement, in response to a Member who considered the figure should be higher.

A Member requested that Swale's skills profile should be considered for a possible review in the Committee's future work programme. A further Member considered that local procurement should be considered for the Sittingbourne regeneration.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Policy and Performance Manager for attending for this item.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

1260 UPDATE ON SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The Chairman introduced the item and drew Members' attention to the to-follow papers and the tabled papers which, had been provided in response to the questions submitted by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee. He reminded Members that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and officers from the Regeneration Team would be attending the next Scrutiny Committee meeting to give a further update.

Discussion ensued which included the following points:

- When was the cinema expected to take-on the site?;
- clarification was needed on parking numbers as they were varied throughout the document;
- Light cinema appeared reluctant to 'get going';
- if Light left the project, was there an alternative?;
- losing confidence in cinema going forward, was there an alternative option?;
- the Critical Path document was out of date;
- the car parking was not enough to sustain the present footfall, plus the expected increased footfall (it was noted that the document provided was a copy of a delegated decision that had been taken some years previously);
- there was no allowance to enable cars parked in private streets to get them off the street and into a car park;

- the documents submitted have been ‘thrown together’;
- there were ways of updating Members without having to print off plans;
- hours and hours spent on this, it was not going forward;
- the risks to the scheme needed further consideration;
- a suggestion that a Project Steering Group should be formed (to include Cabinet Member/officers/Scrutiny Committee);
- the scheme needed a Project Manager and a Project Team was needed with appropriate staff resources;
- had not seen a full cost analysis;
- unclear on who was monitoring this on a monthly basis;
- a business plan was needed;
- the Council needed to think about reviewing its staff resources, to include business experience skills;
- suggest an independent review of the regeneration project;
- so far information has only been requested from the Council, suggest Spirit be invited to attend Scrutiny Committee;
- difficult to get answers this evening as no one here to answer the questions;
- there were technical, tactical and strategic matters that needed to be responded to;
- good technical information had been provided from the Regeneration Project Support Officer;
- up-to-date information was critical;
- the Critical Path document needed to be in a readable format;
- in case the cinema provider did not go forward, suggest that the building has the facility to be able to be converted to another use in the future;
- concern with the housing to be built on the existing car parks, and who will go ahead with the development? If this was the Council, there could be more options re affordable housing, and income;
- extraordinary that the Council was borrowing the money to fund specific works associated with the Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration scheme, but had no role in the design or development;
- there was a lack of appreciation of the expertise of the Scrutiny Committee;
- the definition of ‘client’ in the document needed to be re-defined;
- more clarification needed on the silent partner;
- invite Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Deputy Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Leader, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Chief Executive, the Interim Director of Regeneration, the Chief Finance Officer and the Regeneration Project Support Officer to the next meeting, with Spirit and other partners at the following meeting;
- answers so far are causing more questions, sea change was needed to move forward; and
- a list of broad themes for discussion would be drawn up and sent to the Cabinet Member and officers in advance of the meeting.

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that there was a more up-to-date Critical Path document available.

Members agreed that the to-follow and tabled papers provided a lot of information in response to the Committee’s questions.

Members were disappointed that the Deputy Cabinet Member for Regeneration had left the meeting. The Chairman suggested any further questions be sent to the Policy and Performance Officer.

The Policy and Performance Officer reminded Members that it had been agreed that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, plus relevant officers would attend alternate meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved:

(1) That the points raised above be noted.

1261 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the to-follow report.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

1262 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the to-follow report.

Housing Services

A review member reported that he had attended a positive meeting with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing, and the review was 'on track' to produce a final draft report for the Committee's consideration at the next meeting, which was scheduled for 8 June 2017.

Development Management

Members of the review group had attended a Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Planning Committee meeting, two further visits were planned to Ashford Borough Council on 12 April 2017, and Thanet Borough Council on 19 April 2017.

1263 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Resolved:

(1) The Forward Plan was noted.

1264 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

1265 RECORD OF THANKS

The Chairman thanked Members for their input on the Committee over the past year, particularly their diligence on the Sittingbourne Regeneration item.

The Policy and Performance Officer and the Democratic Services Team were roundly applauded by the Committee for their work throughout the year.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel