
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 30 August 2017 from 7.00pm - 9.48pm

PRESENT: Councillors Andy Booth (Chairman), Cameron Beart (substitute for Councillor Lesley Ingham), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Derek Conway, Mick Galvin, June Garrad, Mike Henderson, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Prescott (substitute for Mike Dendor) and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, James Freeman, Jo Millard, 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) and Ted Wilcox (Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Dendor and Lesley Ingham.

175 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

176 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 July 2017 (Minute Nos. 90 to 102) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the addition of the Senior Democratic Services Officer's inclusion to the attendance list.

177 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

There was a change to the Order of Business, bringing forward the Planning Enforcement report at Agenda Item 9 (ii). The remainder of Agenda Item 9 was discussed later in the meeting.

178 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME - ITEM 9 (II)

Planning Enforcement

The Head of Planning Services introduced the report and explained that Planning Enforcement would be integrated into the Development Management teams, and managed by the Area Planning Officers. He added that the three vacant posts in Planning Enforcement had all been filled and that the current Section 106 Officer

had accepted the role of Senior Enforcement Officer. In order for the staff to bed into their new roles, the Head of Planning Services asked that a review of the Planning Enforcement service be delayed for 6 to 12 months.

A discussion amongst Members followed which included the following points:

- Concerns of health and safety of staff;
- impact of additional responsibility on Area Planning Officers and how it would be managed;
- considered 12 months was too long to wait for a review;
- questioned why a replacement for the current Enforcement Team Manager was not confirmed earlier when his planned retirement had been known for a while;
- considered communication was a priority; and
- welcomed planned improvement in communication but drew attention to the lack of regular updates and no access to the Planning Enforcement system for Members.

In response, the Head of Planning Services advised proper health and safety procedures were in place for all staff, it was anticipated that the Area Planning Officers would spend an additional 15% of their time on Planning Enforcement issues and he explained that the current Section 106 Officer was also employed by Maidstone Borough Council, so could not be moved into the Senior Enforcement Officer post immediately. He added that two new Planning graduates and two additional Technical Officers had also just been appointed, and reiterated that there needed to be a bedding-in period for all new staff.

A Member suggested that since the review would cover more than one meeting, it should commence in 3 months, with further discussion in 6 months. Members agreed to hold the first review meeting at the Scrutiny Meeting on 15 November 2017 with a further update at the meeting scheduled for 28 February 2018.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Planning Services for his attendance.

179 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chief Financial Officer gave an additional verbal update, advised that progress on the retail part of the scheme was going well, and that Home Bargains, Food Warehouse and Costa Coffee were due to take over the lease on their units in April 2018. He further advised that the contract with Huber for the multi-storey car park was due to be signed in January/February 2018.

The Chief Financial Officer expressed his dissatisfaction at the delays to works in Milton Road and St. Michael's Road car park and the confusion of the diversion alongside the Forum. He added that conditions needed to be met before the Leisure part of the development would go unconditional.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Financial Officer advised that the roles of partners, such as U & I, changed as progress was made and development commenced, clarified roles and attendance at meetings and confirmed that the new

scheme manager, Dean Radmore, would be overseeing day-to-day issues. He added that Board Meetings were still required until delivery stage was reached. A Member suggested that the critical path analysis and risk should be discussed at Board meetings.

There was a discussion around the highways issues of the scheme which included the following:

- Concern that delays to the scheme would cause further disruption when schools returned after the summer break;
- disappointed at the lack of work being carried out in some parts of the closed roads;
- concern that Swale Borough Council (SBC) were not informed of the changes made by Kent County Council (KCC) to parts of the highway scheme, which caused delays to its commencement;
- criticism that KCC's inability reflected badly on SBC;
- suggestion of a crossing patrol officer for school children in St. Michael's Road, Sittingbourne and.
- clarification that, despite the delay, works would still be suspended leading up to the Christmas period.

The Chief Financial Officer agreed to report back on the suspension of works over the Christmas period.

180 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT

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

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report which set out the revenue and capital projected outturn activity for 2017/18, as at the end of June 2017. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance highlighted that whilst the net underspend of £386,620 was positive news, he was cautious that any income reduction such as car park income due to roadworks in the Borough, may impact future forecasts.

A Member highlighted that there was a frequent under-estimate of some expenditure, particularly in temporary accommodation and planning income. He drew attention to the £47k underspend on Procurement Savings – cleaning of public conveniences contract on page 9 of the report, and the £53k Procurement Savings on grounds maintenance and, suggested that additional funds should be spent improving these services. The same member highlighted the additional costs of £16k to Administrative buildings – water at Swale House - on page 11 of the report, and warned of further charges with different utility providers.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance advised that temporary accommodation and planning costs would be investigated again, grounds maintenance would be looked at, and requested more detail on which public conveniences required attention.

A Member said that the Housing Options budget was inadequate and clarified the underspend in salaries.

A Member asked whether the recent temporary closure of the swimming pool at Swallows Leisure Centre would incur any additional costs? The Chief Financial Officer agreed to report back with this information.

The Chairman clarified the different issues that had affected the Sheerness outdoor pool and Sheppey and Swallows Leisure Centres.

In response to a question from a Member relating to budget variances, the Chief Financial Officer advised that there was no variance to the MKS Services budget as it was fixed, but agreed to look into the Democratic Services nil variance.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Chief Financial Officer.

181 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy 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 fourth quarter of 2016/17 (January – March 2017).

The Policy and Performance Manager pointed out the increase in targets being met to 85%, the highest achievement in many years. The Chairman welcomed this and said this should be recognised by the Council.

Corporate Overview balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 4

A Member sought clarification on whether the risk item on workforce skills referred to skills within SBC or Swale in general. The Policy and Performance Manager agreed to find out and circulate the information to Members.

Environment and Rural Affairs balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 4

A Member raised concern about the year-on-year deterioration on the level of household waste sent for refuse, recycling and composting. A discussion ensued which included the following points:

- More education on recycling was needed;
- stickers on bins had caused some people to not use recycling;
- suggested information to be included in the next edition of Inside Swale;
- contamination and mixing materials caused issues;
- lack of communication and education were the main issues;
- suggested using social media, local radio, detailed leaflets, information stalls at local markets to educate; and

- some areas of the Borough did not have separate bins.

The Policy and Performance Manager agreed to contact the Waste and Recycling Teams and suggested that the issue could benefit from a committee session involving the Scrutiny Committee and representatives from the Waste and Communications teams.

Finance and Performance balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 4

A Member sought clarification on the percentage of Council Tax collected. The Policy and Performance Manager explained that the amount received during the year was measured, and that national results for this metric were closely correlated with the relative level of deprivation.

Several Members praised the 98.3% achievement on the proportion of invoices paid on time.

Housing and Wellbeing balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 4

A Member raised concern at the increase from 95 to 155 households living in temporary accommodation within the last 12 months. A Member was pleased that the number of long-term empty homes being brought back into use continued to increase.

Committee Members agreed that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing should be invited to attend a future Scrutiny Committee Meeting to discuss this.

Planning balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 4

There was no discussion

Regeneration balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 4

In response to a Member highlighting the lack of control over local procurement, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance advised that there would be a Procurement Workshop for local traders in October 2017.

Safer Families and Communities balanced scorecard report for 2016/17 Quarter 4

A Member questioned the poor collection rate of parking penalty charges. The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities advised that the figures were distorted as SBC had one of the highest rates of appeal and the figures shown were at first collection. He added that the parking penalty charges were being looked at.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, and the Policy and Performance Manager for their attendance at the meeting.

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report.

The Chairman highlighted the progress made on the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration review and praised the Chief Financial Officer for his input.

Members were disappointed that the recommendations made from the Leisure and Tourism Review were still on hold due to the delays to the Visitor Economy Strategy, which was now due to go to the Cabinet Meeting on 8 November 2017. A Member pointed out that the delay meant that a summer season had already past and budget setting for 2018/19 may also be missed. A Member outlined that some progress had been made but disputed whether the State Aid rules applied at point 15, as the £5k was below the de minimus level.

183 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer referred to the tabled paper, Anticipated Review Activity 2017/18, and advised that the schedule had been updated to include new items suggested for the coming year at the previous meeting..

The Chairman asked Members to prioritise the items for review.

A discussion ensued and Members suggested reviews should be undertaken in the following order:

1. Development Management
2. Planning Enforcement
3. Regeneration activity (other than Sittingbourne Town Centre)
4. CCTV

Members agreed to consider Recycling and the effectiveness of Residents Parking schemes as potential future reviews.

184 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

Leisure and Tourism

The Cabinet's response to the Committee's recommendations was reported to the Council on 15 February 2017. It was noted that the Visitor Economy Strategy was due to be considered at Cabinet on 8 November and that the Policy Development and Review Committee should be considering this at the appropriate stage.

Housing Services

A review Member advised that a number of members of the Housing Services Review group would be attending the Cabinet Meeting on 6 September 2017, when the Housing Services report was due to be considered.

Development Management

The Chairman advised that some members of the Task and Finish group were no longer members of the Scrutiny Committee. He added that he would be progressing the review.

185 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman updated Members with the minor amendments to the Forward Plan since the Scrutiny Agenda had been published.

186 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

Chairman

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