
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 24 September 2014 from 7.00 - 8.21 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Barnicott, Sylvia Bennett, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Bowles, Mick Constable, John Coulter, Adrian Crowther, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Mark Ellen, June Garrad, Nicholas Hampshire, Harrison, Mike Haywood, Mike Henderson, Lesley Ingham, Gerry Lewin, Peter Marchington, Martin McCusker, Ken Pugh, Gareth Randall, Pat Sandle, David Simmons, Ben Stokes, Adam Tolhurst, Anita Walker, Ghlin Whelan, Ted Wilcox, Alan Willicombe, Jean Willicombe, Tony Winckless, Steve Worrall and John Wright.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Abdool Kara, Donna Price, Mark Radford and Nick Vickers.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Jackie Constable, Derek Conway, Mike Cosgrove, Ed Gent, Sue Gent, Bryan Mulhern, Prescott, Roger Truelove and Mike Whiting.

243 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said prayers.

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief overview of the new audio system.

244 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 July 2014 (Minute Nos. 166 – 177) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

245 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During the discussion on Minute No. 249, Councillor Crowther declared an interest as he was a Governor of the Medway NHS Foundation Trust. He advised that he would not be speaking on the item.

Councillor John Wright declared an interest as he was a Member of the Medway NHS Foundation Trust and had gone to school with the Chief Executive at Medway Hospital.

246 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised that they had completed their charity walk and reminded Members of their forthcoming charity events: Gala Night – 27 September; Brewery Tour 29 October; Theatre Night 14 November; and Quiz Night on 29 November.

247 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that two questions had been submitted from the public. Responses from the appropriate Cabinet Members had been tabled.

The Mayor invited Mr Greenhill to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Greenhill asked “Will next May see Councillor Bowles hoisted on his own petard?”

The Leader advised that the answer was in the hands of the electors.

The Mayor invited Mrs Tina Booth if she wished to ask a supplementary question, to which she declined.

248 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that one question had been submitted from Councillor Steve Worrall. A response from the Leader had been tabled.

The Mayor invited Councillor Steve Worrall to ask a supplementary question. Councillor Steve Worrall asked if the Leader had his eye on it to sell, to which the Leader responded he had asked the Canadian Geese if they were interested, but a bid had not been forthcoming.

249 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader introduced his Statement and welcomed questions from Members. The following sets out a summary of the questions and answers under the three themes of the Statement.

MKIP Update

(a) Planning Shared Service

Members asked the Leader about the Planning Shared Service:

- Why is it not mentioned in the Leader's Statement?

The Leader advised that it was not technically an MKIP service as it was a live project hosted by Maidstone. However, he was well aware of the problems and was in regular contact with the Head of Planning and the Director of Regeneration. The backlog in planning applications was better than it was, however, they were not being complacent.

There would need to be an inquest into what had gone wrong, but now was not the right time. Efforts needed to be concentrated on getting the service right. It was important to consider the effect on staff and for staff's time to be focussed on dealing with planning applications.

- Will the Leader offer a public apology for the misery caused to residents, businesses and community groups as a result of the delay in processing planning applications?

The Leader advised that he had already stated several times that he was sorry for what had happened.

- Can Members have a regular update on how this is progressing? There is a lack of information and in some instances a lack of response.

The Leader advised that he was sure there had been more than one update to Members; he understood there would be an update to Members later this week.

- Are there any specific plans on how the backlog of planning applications will be dealt with by the Planning Committee?

The Leader advised that efforts were being made to recruit extra staff in the Planning Department. Once the planning applications started coming through, the Planning Committee meetings would have to either be very lengthy, or additional meetings would need to be programmed in.

- A Member asked could officer delegations be increased?

Any change to officer delegations would need to be approved by the full Council.

(b) Legal Services

- A Member raised concern about the reorganisation of Legal Services and asked if this would impact on the continuity of the service?

The Leader asked the Member to give him further information about any examples of delays with cases, which he would look into.

- A Member referred to lack of action taken by the Police in respect of moving on travellers, meaning that expensive legal advice had to be sought, and asked what the Council was doing to make sure the Police were doing their job?

The Leader advised that he had asked for an explanation from the Head of Police. He was very interested to find out why two different parts of the same Police Force appeared to interpret the law differently.

(c) Environmental Services

A Member said he would have liked to have seen an update on this and asked if the situation was still as positive as previously reported to Members? He had heard a different view from a member of staff.

The Leader advised that there had been positive reports to informal Cabinet, acknowledging that there had been some initial difficulties with the IT system. He asked the Member to contact him or the Cabinet Member to discuss.

Health Update

In response to a question about the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Leader advised that all Members were welcome to attend meetings of the Board.

- Given the serious situation at Medway, Canterbury and Faversham, will the Leader of the Council join Councillor Haywood in calling for the resignation of the Board?

The Leader advised that he did not think he was in a position to unsettle the leadership at the hospital any further at this time; he was sure that many had gone already and more may go in the future. He had seen far more senior figures of the NHS at recent meetings than before; and it was important not to have a kneejerk reaction.

- Does the Leader agree that this is the worst year for health services for residents?

The Leader agreed it was as bad as any he could remember.

- The Cabinet Member for Health advised that the present contract at the Minor Injuries Unit in Faversham expired in March 2015, and he was concerned that time was running out to appoint a new operator to take over in April. He asked would the Leader add pressure to ask for a decision on this as soon as possible? In respect of the proposal to move the Faversham outpatient service to the Estuary View, with money being spent on transport links, the Cabinet Member for Health asked the Leader to press for a decision on this to be deferred until the detail of the Hubs had been clarified?

The Leader agreed to this.

- A Member expressed concern about child poverty and asked if this was discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board?

The Leader advised that it was; and that child poverty had been the subject of discussion at a meeting that afternoon with Leaders and Chief Executives across Kent.

Finance Update

- A Member thanked officers for their diligence but asked if the delivery of Inside Swale during the pre-election period breached the Code of Publicity? Who authorised the delivery, who signed off the content, and did the Returning Officer have sight of this?

The Leader advised that the publication of Inside Swale had long been scheduled; and neither himself or the Cabinet Member for Localism were candidates, or election agents, or signatories to the nomination papers for the forthcoming by-election.

The Chief Executive said that this was a fair challenge and a fine judgement. In his view he did not believe the Code had been breached; there was no mention of candidates or anything specific to the Sheppey Central ward in the issue. The guidance was clear that the Council could conduct normal business during the pre-election period.

- A Member commented that staff were the Council's most valuable resource. Would the Leader agree in passing on congratulations and best wishes to Jonathan Longley who was leaving to join a new post?

The Leader agreed that staff were the most valuable asset and offered congratulations to Jonathan Longley in his new role. This was testament to the high regard in which staff of this Council were viewed by other Councils.

250 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2013/14

The Chairman of the Audit Committee introduced the report and proposed the recommendations.

This was seconded by Councillor Alan Willicombe.

A Member advised of a correction to page seven of the report which the Head of Finance noted.

Resolved:

- 1. That the actual 2013/14 prudential indicators within the report be noted.***
- 2. That the Treasury Management stewardship report for 2013/14 be approved.***

251 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

Members noted the recommendations of the Audit Committee, which were the subject of a separate report on the Council agenda.

Chairman

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