
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 30 September 2014 from 7.00 - 8.54 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Andy Booth (Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Jackie Constable, John Coulter, Mike Haywood, Peter Marchington and Tony Winckless (substitute for Councillor Ghlin Whelan).

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Philippa Davies, Bob Pullen and Phil Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mike Henderson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sylvia Bennett, Mark Ellen, June Garrad, Prescott, Ben Stokes and Ghlin Whelan.

258 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 September 2014 (Minute Nos. 200 – 207) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

259 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Peter Marchington declared an interest as he is a member of the Swale Fisherman's Association.

260 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Accountant to the meeting.

The Chief Accountant introduced the report which set out the revenue and capital projected outturn for 2014/15, as at the end of period 3, covering the period from April to June 2014. He advised that the revenue underspend was projected at £406,000.

Members made comments and the Chief Accountant responded to their questions.

A Member made the following comments: concern with the items on Table 1 which assumed no under or overspend; needed to keep a better hold on what was expected to happen by the end of the year; with regard to Table 3, concern that only 10 per cent of funding had been allocated; and concern that there was still a lot of outstanding debt (£70,000) older than three years.

Questions:

Was it reasonable that two thirds of services would be spot on budget at the end of the year?

The Chief Accountant acknowledged that there was significant underspend last year, so the departments with larger variances were concentrated on in the first quarter.

Could more be done to inform individual Councillors as to how Improvement and Regeneration Funds may be accessed?

The Chief Accountant advised that each fund had its own bidding and approval process and he acknowledged that this could be made more available for Members.

How much of the £70,000 was likely to be recovered, and how much can be got back or should it be written-off?

The Chief Accountant advised that overall the debt had reduced; older debt often was a charge on property but this was being reviewed with Legal.

A Member stated that some Regeneration Funds were for Swale Borough Council (SBC) officers to bid on, not members of the public. He advised that the Local Loan Fund was for members of the public to bid for, but the take-up was disappointing. He considered there was a failure of the Council to attract interest in the funding opportunities.

Was it typical to have such wide variances in the budget set each year, compared to the outturn reports, especially with reference to the Waste Contract?

The Chief Accountant advised that the Council's external auditors had reported that SBC had strong financial management, and quarterly reports showing the variances were forwarded to Members and the Cabinet and there were monthly reports to the Senior Management Team. He confirmed that he would forward a response to the Committee concerning the variance in the Waste Contract figures.

Were there plans to plough the underspend back into street cleansing, as this service was poor, despite best efforts by officers? The Member requested that the Cabinet Member for Finance responded to this question.

What can be done about the loss of the customer use of the CCTV service, resulting in a £12,000 overspend?

The Chief Accountant agreed to forward a response to the Committee.

What was the explanation for the £3,000 overspend in relation to a local community hall when figures were likely not to be high in the first instance?

The Chief Accountant agreed to forward a response to the Committee.

Was the Staying Put overspend because of an offset figure or was it incorporated in the grants?

The Chief Accountant advised that it was after the off-set being included.

Was charge on a property debt increased by interest?

The Chief Accountant advised that in some cases interest would have been added.

A Member considered it important to determine whether each individual department genuinely expected to achieve a nil variance.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Accountant for attending the meeting.

Resolved: That the Financial Management Report, April – June 2014 be noted.

261 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Policy and Performance Manager to the meeting. The Policy and Performance Manager introduced the report which presented the quarterly portfolio-based balanced scorecard performance reports for the first quarter (April-June) of 2014/15. He also brought Members' attention to the tabled paper which set out the list of exceptions during this period.

The Policy and Performance Manager brought Members' attention to the six large projects; three were at green, one at amber which he considered would be at green by the next quarter; and the two in red would be re-profiled. He explained that customer complaints had increased; this rise was attributed to the new waste contract and its 'teething' problems. He confirmed that 90% of complaints were dealt with within 10 working days. The 2014 perception survey was being carried out at the moment and the results would be known in quarter 2. The Policy and Performance Manager further advised that eight planning-related indicators had not been included due to issues encountered in the move to planning administration shared service.

Members made the following general comments: concern with the two large projects at red being reprofiled and what that meant; adaptations to waste collection vehicles needed to be carried out to address the number of complaints received, when would this be done?; thanked officers for the report; real waste contract issues were not picked up in the report, there were issues with street cleaning which was self-monitoring, ie the contractor decided whether a street needed to be cleaned or not; and it was important that the issue was resolved.

Members went through the scorecards page by page and made the following comments.

Page 19 – Corporate Health

Issue with customer complaints about Kent County Council (KCC) services being directed at SBC, with perception that nothing had been done to resolve problems; needed to identify complaints that had been successfully resolved; there was a lack of response to KCC highway issues; and it could be beneficial to look into the way that complaints were followed-up.

The Policy and Performance Manager agreed to forward responses to the Committee with regard to the large projects at red, the issues causing the waste-related complaints and the street cleansing contract. He was unsure as to how complaints about KCC Services received by SBC were recorded and handled by SBC and agreed to forward this information to the Committee.

A Member suggested that a KCC Cabinet Member be invited to a future Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Page 20 – Community Safety and Health

The Policy and Performance Manager explained that the statement 'get on well together' in the local area perception survey had been inherited from the previous Place Survey and he acknowledged that it was an ambiguous statement.

Some Members considered the move to 'lights off' in the Borough had resulted in an increase in crime figures, and that the lights should be turned back on.

Page 21 – Environment and Rural Affairs

Members raised concern with the amount of flyposting across the Borough and discussion ensued on who was permitted to remove the posters.

Page 22 – Finance and Performance

In response to comments, the Policy and Performance Manager confirmed that ‘the Borough Council gives residents good value for money’ figure of 36% was exceptional in comparison to the figures generally achieved by local authorities. He agreed to find out if there was a list of vacant establishment posts within the Council.

Page 24 - Localism

Members spoke in length on the disappointing public attendance levels at the three Local Engagement Fora (LEF). Comments included: the LEFs were not providing a direct connection with the public; appropriate officer for the topic being discussed needed to attend the meeting; and there was a lack of KCC representatives at the LEFs.

A Member suggested the Cabinet Member for Localism be invited to attend a future Scrutiny Committee meeting for an update.

Page 25 - Planning

A Member considered the performance outturn did not reflect the reality.

Page 26 – Regeneration

A Member welcomed the increase in skills in the Borough and considered there should be the opportunity to study politics and government at school. The Policy and Performance Manager agreed to look into whether this was currently taught at schools in the Borough.

Resolved: That the information in the Quarter 1 balanced scorecards be noted.

262 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to a question, the Policy and Performance Officer explained that Recommendation 8 (SBC to provide a costed model of supported housing) had been rejected as this was not a district function.

263 REVIEW PLANS

The Policy and Performance Officer brought Members’ attention to the tabled paper for the Housing Services Review. Councillor Mike Henderson agreed to be involved as a review member, but did not feel it was appropriate to lead the review as he was not a member of the Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Committee be emailed to request further review members, including a lead member.

- Democratic Services Officer

264 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS**Joint scrutiny of Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) governance and communications**

Councillor Mike Henderson gave an update following an initial recent meeting. He advised that there were differences between MKIP shared services and Mid Kent Services (MKS) Directorate as they involved different management personnel, and different responsibilities. Councillor Henderson explained that four task and finish meetings had been planned, with Councillor Andy Booth as Chairman.

Asset Transfers Review

The Lead Member explained that there was still work to be carried out in order to formulate questions for the review.

Contracts and Procurement Review

There would be an update at the next meeting.

265 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the Forward Plan and considered that some items' descriptions as to whether they were a key decision or not needed to be clarified.

266 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

267 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme, to also include Fees and Charges at the next meeting on 29 October 2014.

Chairman

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