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## POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 3 September 2014 from 7.00 - 8.34 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Sylvia Bennett (substitute for Councillor Derek Conway), Andy Booth (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), John Coulter, Mike Henderson (substitute for Councillor Monique Bonney), Peter Marchington, Gareth Randall and Ben Stokes.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Anne Adams, Philippa Davies, Charlotte Hudson and Bob Pullen.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor Mike Whiting (Cabinet Member for Localism).

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen and Derek Conway.

### 208 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 July 2014 (Minute Nos. 129 – 133) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 209 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor John Coulter declared an interest as he was a Member of Faversham Town Council and a Trustee of Faversham Municipal Charities.

Councillor Mike Henderson declared a Disclosable Non-Pecuniary Interest on the 'Review of Volunteering Strategy' item as he was involved in several voluntary groups.

The Chairman acknowledged and advised that most Members of the Committee were likely to be involved in varying degrees in various voluntary organisations throughout the Borough.

### 210 REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER POLICY

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Localism, the Head of Property Services and the Economy and Community Services Manager to the meeting. He explained that the first version of the Community Asset Transfer Policy had been approved by Cabinet in August 2009. It had been developed out of a need for a clear framework to structure the transfer of community assets. The Policy had been revised and updated in April 2013 in response to comments from the Council's external auditors.

Members' made the initial following comments: some of the addresses in the appendix were incorrect; the Policy was a little 'underwhelming', with not much 'zeal' in promoting the transfer of assets to community groups; the future was uncertain with possible change in administration, it would be good to get assets into good community management now; the default position should be that local community groups should be trusted to get on with it and that assets should be transferred to the community; some assets listed as Swale Borough Council (SBC)

assets were misleading as in some cases SBC was listed on the deeds, with no management involvement; and some organisations were being held back due to misunderstandings in relation to leasehold/freehold status.

The Head of Property Services advised that organisations could opt for longer term leases if they wished to.

The Cabinet Member explained that asset transfers varied in their complexity with some being straight forward and others requiring significant input from all parties to resolve complex and protracted issues.

In response to a question, the Head of Property Services explained that the gaps in the column 'Status of Community Asset Transfers' in Appendix II were because there was no work being carried out on that particular asset, i.e. the occupiers had no desire for a Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member advised that all voluntary groups were able to request a CAT, and it was up to the community to come forward to be considered for a CAT.

Members made further comments which included: it was difficult to ensure the policy worked well, so that progress was made; it was important for SBC to talk with the organisations listed in the Appendix; SBC needed to invite organisations to come forward and help them towards a CAT in order to make the policy work; the path prospective organisations needed to take could be daunting for some, with a range of departments to negotiate with, if SBC talked to them that could help to move things forward; try to find out what was stopping organisations coming forward for a CAT, was SBC doing anything wrong; the organisations should not be put under any financial risk; freehold option could result in financial instability for an organisation; there were communication issues – were organisations aware of what opportunities regarding CATs were available to pursue; and there were positive and negative factors in terms of rental options of assets by an organisation.

The Economy and Community Services Manager advised that CATs had been promoted and discussed at the Localism Conference a couple of years ago. She further advised that work towards assisting with CATs was ongoing with a number of organisations and these were prioritised in terms of what was best for both the community and the Council.

A Member advised that the status of the West Faversham Community Centre was not 'complete' as stated in the Appendix.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed that paragraph 3.14 should be amended so that the rent review was carried out every five years only in the event that a commercially viable and profitable operation was being carried out from the asset, in order to not put people off a CAT. Members agreed the proposed amendment for Cabinet to consider.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed that paragraph 3.19 be removed, and to revert back to CATs being decided by Cabinet, not delegated to individual Cabinet Members as proposed. Members agreed this proposal.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Localism, Head of Property Services and the Economy and Community Services Manager for attending the meeting for this item.

**Resolved:** *That the above comments from the Committee be submitted to Cabinet to consider, specifically that paragraph 3.14 be amended so that rent reviews were carried out every five years only in the event that a commercially viable and profitable operation was being carried out from the asset and that paragraph 3.19 be removed to revert back to Community Asset Transfers being decided by Cabinet, not delegated to individual Cabinet Members as proposed in the report.*

## 211 REVIEW OF VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Localism introduced the report which had previously been reviewed by the former Policy Overview Committee. He explained that the aims of the Policy was to make it work and to set targets. It should guide what the Council did, improve the capacity of groups with training, and deliver more opportunities for volunteering, especially for young people as this could increase their experience and be beneficial for future job opportunities. Members now had an opportunity to review how the Policy had worked and how it could be improved.

In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager explained that currently there were no comparable figures with other local Kent authorities on the amount of people who participated in volunteering. She explained that statistics for this were being looked into. The Cabinet Member for Localism advised that the national figure was 25% involvement, Swale was 21-22%, and it was hoped to get up to 25%.

The Economy and Community Services Manager explained that young people were being encouraged to participate in volunteering. This was being done via the Swale Youth Forum and through schools. An SBC apprentice would soon lead on this work and engage and expand on what had been carried out so far.

In response to a question, the Economy and Community Services Manager explained that there were around five or six FTE working with 89 voluntary groups in Swale, with further expert advice received from other departments.

A Member welcomed the Policy but raised concern with the skills that were needed to be a trustee on an organisation and suggested that training was necessary to allow business skills to be learnt. He suggested SBC staff and Councillors be encouraged to volunteer and opportunities for this needed to be increased. He questioned the accuracy of figures on page 31 of the report and suggested the figures should be higher.

A Member considered that finding new volunteers was an issue. He suggested that this was a communications problem.

The Cabinet Member for Localism acknowledged the need for trustees and that they were a crucial part in the volunteering sector. He advised that there would be

training opportunities for trustees in the future, along with the introduction of mentoring. He advised that SBC was able to promote and facilitate volunteering opportunities and provide good publicity, and to ensure that the capacity for volunteers to run their organisations was there.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed that the Committee recommended that Cabinet ensured that the Trustee Network was rolled-out in October 2014; that trustee training be developed; the figures in the report be updated; and more publicity, to include who to contact, further information, and Swale Councillor and officer volunteer numbers.

The Chairman welcomed identifying the volunteering figures within SBC, he advised that the Trustee Network was scheduled to be rolled-out in October 2014, and that the Cabinet Member for Localism had reported that training would be available for trustees.

The Economy and Community Services Manager explained that some trustee training had already been carried out and a Trustee Week would be held in November 2014 and this would be advertised to voluntary groups via press releases, social media and network groups. She also explained that there was a lot of information relating to volunteering opportunities online.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Localism and the Economy and Community Services Manager for attending the meeting.

***Resolved: That the Committee recommend to Cabinet that the figures in the report be updated; and there be more publicity, to include who to contact, further information, and Swale Councillor and officer volunteer numbers.***

## 212 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer drew attention to the Committee Work Programme. Discussion ensued on the timing and potential length of discussion on the proposed items. In particular, Members were concerned that sufficient time be given to the item on Planning Enforcement Strategy and Service Charter and that this be the sole substantive agenda item at a future meeting.

### Chairman

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