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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, 16 September 2015 from 7.00 - 8.17 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Andy Booth (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Katy Coleman, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, James Hunt, George Samuel, Ben Stokes and Roger Truelove.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Philippa Davies, Janet Hill, Bob Pullen, Sara Toal and Emma Wiggins.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor Bowles.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen and David Simmons.

### 215 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 July 2015 (Minute Nos. 124 – 127) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

A Member requested whether the consultation, reported under Minute No. 126, with Ward Members and Parish Councils programmed for August/September 2015 had gone ahead.

***Post Meeting Note: The Head of Planning provided this update: ‘Unfortunately due to the demands on the service, the consultation on the Planning Enforcement Strategy and Charter will take place during October 2015’.***

### 216 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 217 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair welcomed the Leader, the Head of Economy and Communities and the Communications Manager to the meeting.

The Leader introduced the report which set out a draft Communications Strategy for 2015/16 with the approach and priorities for effective communications, so that residents were more informed about, and satisfied with, Council services.

The Communications Manager explained that feedback was sought from the Committee on any further suggested channels that should be explored, as well as any additional activities or campaigns that could be considered.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair congratulated the report authors and advised that he would take the report page-by-page and he invited Members to contribute.

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A Member was disappointed that there was no mention of webcasting, or access to live access to meetings which he considered to be a powerful tool for communications. The Leader explained that initial steps had been taken to update the Council Chamber to facilitate this in the future, and audio recordings of some meetings was part of the first step towards webcasting.

A Member considered one-to-one communication via the Customer Call Centre was very important and he raised concern with the response time to calls. He hoped this would be addressed in the final version of the Strategy, together with recognising this method of communication as an important tool, with targets set and how they were to be achieved.

The Leader stated that he had not received any complaints on response times, but would look into the matter further.

The Head of Economy and Communities also explained that this would be looked into as part of the Customer Access Strategy. She advised that there was an increasing trend to comment on issues via social media, and at this stage residents were then referred to the Council's complaints procedure.

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A Member pointed out some grammatical errors in the Strategy and it was agreed that she would liaise directly with the report writer to address these.

In response to a question, the Communications Manager advised that the Local Area Perception Survey (LAPS) figures referred to in the Strategy helped to prioritise and see where residents' concerns were and to improve residents' perceptions.

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A Member raised concern with the low response rate to consultations and that residents' views were not listened to by the Council; he considered it should be made clear that LAPS figures were taken into consideration. A Member was disappointed with the level (76%) of residents who did not feel informed about how to get involved in local decision-making; he considered it was also Members' role to advise the public how they could get involved.

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A Member suggested the wording of the first bullet point be changed to read '.....and the surrounding countryside and villages', instead of 'surrounding localities'.

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A Member acknowledged the need to maintain non-digital communication links with residents, such as through 'Inside Swale', and the Local Engagement Fora (LEFs).

A Member stated that the communication process was often difficult, and recognised that there was a variety of digital access throughout the borough.

The Communications Manager explained that it was part of Communications 'brief' to support the Channel Shift programme and move to digital, and offer improved access from desktop, tablet and mobile devices, plus all other avenues of access.

A Member suggested that targeted letters should be the way forward to communicate more directly; the Leader stated that this could have officer/finance resource implications.

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In response to a question regarding how performance was tracked and measures of success, the Communications Manager advised that the next LAPS would be looked at to see if there was an increase or decrease in figures. In terms of the level of engagement, she advised that followers were tracked, and there was also press coverage and a variety of metrics could be pulled-out.

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Members suggested the following communication channels: BRFM and 109.9 SFM; Parish Magazines and the Swale Rural Forum Round-up; noticeboards in libraries, supermarkets and education facilities; Sheerness Heritage Centre and Faversham Heritage Centre and Tourist Information Centre; Pinterest; Flickr; Instagram; Youtube; and Inside Swale.

A Member considered it was important to increase communication with the press. In response to a statement, the Leader advised that it was the Cabinet Members' views that were often required by the press. It was acknowledged that press circulation was now quite low, compared with online reporting which was growing.

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Members' suggestions included adding tourist locations to the Priority Communications Activities and changing wording to: 'Protect and Improve the natural **and** built environments'.

In response to a question, the Head of Economy and Communities explained that an Impact Assessment would be included in the final strategy document, following feedback from the consultation.

The Leader agreed to find out further information on whether the gypsy and traveller community had been consulted.

The Chairman thanked the Leader, the Head of Economy and Communities and the Communications Manager for attending the meeting for this item.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the feedback, direction and input to the draft Council Communications Strategy for 2015/16 be noted.**

**218 SWALE BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE KENT ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY (KES) CONSULTATION**

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair welcomed the Climate Change officer to the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs had sent his apologies, and the Leader responded on his behalf.

The Climate Change officer introduced the report which set out the second version of the Kent Environment Strategy, and SBC's draft response to the consultation.

A Member considered there was too much emphasis on climate change issues, rather than other environmental aspects, such as pollution, and natural habitats. The Climate Change officer explained that the environment was effected by climate change and considered different environmental issues were included within the document.

A Member considered bio-diversity to be an important aspect and the Climate Change officer confirmed that this was included within the KES. The Member welcomed the target to increase the overall extent of priority habitats by 10,260 hectares by 2020. He suggested that point 10 on the response be amended to include 'improve natural environment'. This was agreed by Members.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Climate Change officer for attending for this item.

**Resolved: (1) That the responses to the consultation be endorsed, with the additional wording to point 10, as above.**

**219 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that although the agenda for the meeting on 28 October 2015 looked to be very full, some items could be grouped together and considered as one item.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the report be noted.**

Chairman

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