
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 28 October 2015 from 7.00 - 9.05 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth (Vice-Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Paul Fleming (substitute for Councillor Katy Coleman), Alan Horton, James Hunt, Peter Marchington, George Samuel, Ben Stokes and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Amber Christou, Kellie MacKenzie, Len Mayatt, Bob Pullen and Rebecca Walker.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mike Whiting (Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage, John Wright (Cabinet Member for Housing) and Mike Henderson.

APOLOGY: Councillor Katy Coleman.

301 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 September 2015 (Minute Nos. 215 - 219) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

302 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor James Hunt declared an interest in relation to agenda item no. 5 (Draft Playing Pitch Strategy) as he had been involved in discussions about pitches for Iwade, as a Member of Iwade Parish Council.

Councillor Andy Booth also declared an interest in respect of agenda item no. 5 as he sat as a school governor for Eastchurch Primary School and Borden Grammar School and, was a Trustee of Swale Community Leisure Limited.

303 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Resident Services and Strategic Health & Housing Manager to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the Housing Allocations policy document and drew attention to the report which outlined the findings of the first-year review of the impact of the changes to the allocation of social housing since April 2014. He explained that the changes had had a significant effect on the public and the housing section of Swale Borough Council (SBC) and noted that there had been 4,500 on the Swale homeless register prior to the changes and this was now substantially reduced. He stated that feedback from residents was that they were generally supportive of the changes.

The Head of Resident Services noted that the draft Housing Allocations Policy had been previously reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and helped to formulate the current draft.

The Chairman advised that he would take the report section by section and he invited Members to contribute.

Page 9 – Background

In response to a query the Head of Residents Services stated that she was happy to add 'In Swale the demand for social **and affordable housing**' in the first paragraph.

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Part 3 - Choice and Constraints

A Member requested that more up-to-date housing figures and also neighbouring authority housing figures be included.

In response to queries, the Head of Resident Services explained that the space-saving requirements were in-line with housing standard regulations. She advised that the reality was that it was not viable for developers to provide four bedroom affordable homes, so it was necessary to look at adapting three bedroom houses. In response to a query, the Head of Resident Services stated that in order that to ensure all residents could access the Kent Home Choice scheme website they had provided funding for computers which were available at Swale House reception for public use. She asked Members to contact her if they were aware of any residents not being able to access the service.

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Part 4 – Eligibility

In response to concerns about the wording for the affordability criteria, the Head of Resident Services explained it was more to protect against those who had deliberately become homeless and that the wording could be improved to clarify this.

A Member asked if more could be done to ensure that when residents lost a bid on a property they were clear why they had. The Head of Resident Services agreed that communication could be an issue and suggested that a focus group be formed to ensure improved communication going forward.

In response to queries the Head of Resident Services explained that the effects on housing lists in relation to safe houses and in particular residents fleeing domestic abuse was outlined under Management Moves on page 20 of the Policy. She confirmed that anti-social behaviour also included how residents interacted with their neighbours and could be looked at locally. She encouraged Members to contact herself or the Housing Options Manager if they were aware of any such issues in their wards.

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In response to a query the Head of Resident Services agreed to clarify the age limit for children of same sex sharing bedrooms.

- Head of Resident Services

In response to further queries, the Head of Resident Services stated that they were bound by space regulations. With regard to eligibility following a family split the Head of Resident Services explained that it was usually the parent awarded custody and child benefit that had the bedroom for the child(ren) awarded and it was the housing provider that decided this.

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Part 8 - Reviews and Appeals

In response to a query the Head of Resident Services confirmed that applicants could instigate a review of their housing application and all applications were reviewed on an annual basis.

The Head of Resident Services agreed to find out for Members how many housing application appeals had been allowed.

- Head of Resident Services

Members then considered the table on page 2 of the main report:

Refusals

A Member proposed that the amount of refusals allowed before applicants were removed from the register should be changed from three to two. This was seconded.

The Head of Resident Services stated that this was possible but there was a risk that it would increase the amount of appeals.

In response to queries, the Head of Resident Services explained that in terms of speeding up the whole housing application process, they had some influence over providers and could discuss with them how this could be speeded up. She also agreed to speak to housing providers about the issue of those already in housing, deciding that they did not want to move at the last minute and the impact that had on those that were homeless.

In response to queries, the Head of Resident Services stated that mobile home occupants at holiday sites on the Isle of Sheppey being allowed to stay there 10 months had reduced the housing list. She advised that they would not be able to use holiday mobile home sites to house homeless people.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Resident Services and Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer for attending for this item.

Resolved:

That the Housing Allocations Policy be endorsed subject to amendments identified by the Policy Development and Review Committee and that the above comments from the Committee be submitted to Cabinet to consider, specifically:

- (1) That housing figures for 2013/14 and neighbouring authorities be included.***
- (2) That the amount of refusals allowed before applicants were removed from the register be reduced from three refusals to two.***
- (3) That the Head of Resident Services liaise with housing providers about how the allocation of homes process can be speeded up.***

304 PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage and Leisure & Technical Services Manager to the meeting. He thanked officers for the draft report and extensive Draft Playing Pitch Strategy and Assessment.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage introduced the report which presented the draft Playing Pitch Strategy for comments and consideration. He thanked the Leisure & Technical Services Manager for his work on the document. He outlined the importance of ensuring that we had the right number of pitches particularly in light of Swale Borough Council's corporate objectives. The Cabinet Member explained that the report set out aspirations for those providing pitches and enabled the Council and other providers to source funding. He noted that Sport England (SE) involvement was important to ensure validation for funding.

The Chairman drew attention to pages 109 to 217 of the Final Assessment Report and asked Members to contact the Leisure & Technical Services Manager direct if they noticed any typographical errors or had any questions, as those pages contained factual information.

The Chairman advised that he would take the Playing Pitch Strategy 2015 – 2025 report section by section and he invited Members to contribute.

Page 38 - Executive Summary

In response to queries, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager explained the need to liaise with schools as they had great facilities. He explained that SE had template agreements with schools for community use and there were issues around safeguarding and it was important that schools were committed and involved with the strategy, but it was a challenge for as schools ultimately have the power to withdraw from agreements if they choose to do so (subject to any specific funding or planning agreements not being in place). Netball was not listed as the strategy only focussed on sports that required a playing pitch, as per the Sport England guidelines for playing pitches.

However, reference to netball for example could be picked up through the Sport & Physical Activity Framework.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage reported that officers at Swale were in constant dialogue with local schools via the Active Swale Network.

A Member queried whether there was a strategy which included sports such as golf and badminton. The Commissioning and Open Spaces Manager stated that there was not, but those type of sports would be included in the Sports and Physical Activity Framework.

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A Member asked that the shortfall of cricket pitches in the Sittingbourne area should not be addressed by focusing on provision in Faversham, instead the focus should be on providing pitches within the Sittingbourne area. The Leisure & Technical Services Manager agreed to look at this issue with officers from the Council's Planning Policy Team and agreed that facilities closer to the problem area would be beneficial.

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A Member stated that the analysis areas on the Swale map was not legible. He asked that at larger colour copy be provided. The Leisure & Technical Services Manager agreed to provide this as an Annex.

- Leisure & Technical Services Manager

A Member spoke about the importance of ensuring that the strategy was clear about the number of pitches in areas to assist officers when Section 106 Agreements were agreed as part of planning applications.

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager spoke about the importance of Section 106 monies and that the Strategy would enable officers to ensure provision was where the greatest need was in terms of planned housing developments and provide the statistical information required when developer contributions are being negotiated. The draft Strategy provides the statistical information to support any such discussions, while the document is being consulted upon and ultimately adopted (subject to any amendments).

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Objective (a)

In response to a query from a Member, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager agreed to amend the title wording for management objective (a) to make it clear how often they would review and refresh area-by-area plans.

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Management objective (f)

In response to a query from a Member about poor quality sites and the potential for costs, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager stated that the consultants had considered that the Council pitches were adequate and there were funding streams that the Council could source to improve the quality of pitches.

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Objective 3

A Member asked that the wording for objective (k) be enhanced to improve the relationship in terms of planning conditions imposed for pitches at school sites.

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A Member pointed out that SBC had a Community Asset Transfer Policy. The Leisure & Technical Services Manager agreed to update the strategy to reflect this.

A Member stated that the Council needed to be careful when considering transferring recreation areas to sport clubs and carefully consider the impacts this could have on the wider community.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage stated that local communities would be consulted on any asset transfers and it was about achieving a balance against public need.

Page 40 – Action Plan

A Member drew attention to objective 2 and considered it was not just about improving accessibility, but also improving transport links to facilities especially in rural areas.

Some Members considered that the Strategy was very male orientated and spoke about the problems around poor changing facilities. Other Members felt that it was a gender neutral strategy.

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager stated that the Strategy was for all residents of Swale. He was aware that some changing facilities at certain sites were not up to standard and there was more work that could be done to encourage women into sports but this was more for consideration as part of the Sports and Activity Framework.

A Member requested that figures on the number of women participating in sport in Swale be included. The Leisure & Technical Services Manager undertook to provide information from the Sport England Active People data on participation levels in sport across the Borough

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In response to queries, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager stated that the monitoring steering group could be a sub-group of the Swale Sports Network and the only cost involved would be the meeting set-up i.e. venue. The group could report back to the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs. The Chairman suggested that the Council Chamber, Swale House be considered as the venue and that the sub-group provided updates for the Policy Development and Review Committee.

Members drew attention to some typographical errors and names that needed removing/replacing within the document, which the Leisure & Technical Services Manager undertook to update.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage and Leisure & Technical Services for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

That the above comments from the Committee be submitted to Cabinet to consider, specifically:

- (1) That the wording for Management objective (a) be amended to make it clear how often the area plans would be reviewed and refreshed.***
- (2) That the asset transfer policy be enhanced if possible.***
- (3) That the wording for objective 3 (k) be enhanced to improve compliance of planning conditions attached to educational facilities.***
- (4) That a breakdown of usage of sports facilities by women be provided.***
- (5) That officers ensure that the strategy was robust and compatible to the Swale Local Plan in terms of future developments and Section 106 Agreements.***

305 RECORD OF THANKS

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage advised that Len Mayatt (Leisure & Technical Services) would be leaving the Council. He thanked Len for his hard work on the Playing Pitch Strategy and other policies and strategies and wished him well for the future.

306 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report, which set out the policies, plans and strategies due to be reviewed by the Committee.

The Chairman reminded Members that the next meeting on 18 November 2015 would be considering a review of the Local Engagement Forums. He asked that Democratic Services invite all Members to attend for that item.

- Democratic Services Officer

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/Panel