
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber - Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 18 November 2015 from 7.00 - 9.30 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Brooke Buttfeld, Jo Millard, Bob Pullen, Dave Thomas and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Bowles (Leader), Councillor Mike Whiting (Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage), Roger Clark, Nicholas Hampshire and Mike Henderson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock and Alan Horton.

346 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 October 2015 (Minute Nos. 301 – 306) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

347 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a Disclosable Non Pecuniary (DNP) interest in relation to Agenda Item 4 (Draft Indoor Sports Facility Strategy 2015 – 2025) as she was a Faversham Pools Trustee.

Councillor Andy Booth declared a Disclosable Non Pecuniary (DNP) interest in respect of Agenda Item 4 (Draft Indoor Sports Facility Strategy 2015 – 2025) as he was Chairman of Swale Community Leisure Limited.

Councillor Mike Henderson declared a Disclosable Non Pecuniary (DNP) interest in relation to Agenda Item 4 (draft Indoor Sports Facility Strategy 2015 -2025) as he was a Faversham Pools Trustee.

Councillor Nick Hampshire declared a Disclosable Non Pecuniary (DNP) interest in respect of Agenda Item 4 (Draft Indoor Sports Facility Strategy 2015-2025) as he was the Swale Borough Council's representative for Swale Community Leisure Limited.

348 DRAFT INDOOR SPORTS FACILITY STRATEGY 2015 - 2025

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage and the Head of Economy and Community Services to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage introduced the report which outlined the work that had been undertaken by consultants to determine the future need and demand for indoor sports facilities. He emphasised how important it was that post-2019 when the current contract with Swale Community Leisure Limited (SCLL) and Serco Leisure Ltd who managed the Swallows and Sheppey Leisure Centre ended, the most suitable number and type of facilities were provided for local residents and visitors to Swale. The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage further highlighted the likelihood of a future reduction in available funding for sports facilities, a discretionary service, and the provision of the service from the private sector and voluntary organisations. He drew attention to the proposal and feedback at items 3.1 and 3.2 on page 2 of the report and invited the views of the Policy Development Review Committee Members.

In answer to a question about the mandatory nature of the service, the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage advised that the Government made sports facilities non-mandatory in 1987.

A Member sought clarification on whether the expectation of spending to support sports facilities in the Borough was likely to reduce in the future. The Head of Economy and Community Services advised that the need, then the cost would be considered and there were possible efficiencies for the Council although the costs were sometimes neutral. The Leader agreed and gave an example of a swimming pool out of the Borough that made a profit.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Economy and Community Services advised that the participation rates in sport and active recreation numbers were compared with neighbouring authorities, rather than national authorities just to gain a comparable idea, but further regional and national information could be sought from Sport England.

A Member asked if any sports facilities would be provided as part of the Sittingbourne Regeneration, referred to the information at 2.2 on page 15 regarding the requirement of local authorities to provide leisure facilities as part of the National Planning Policy Framework and highlighted the out-of-date population figures at 2.7 on page 23 which did not reflect the future increase in housing numbers to a likely 15,000 new homes. The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage advised that the Council needed to identify its needs first and Spirit of Sittingbourne or developers may then be involved and the population figures would be updated.

A Member highlighted the use of the natural coastline, as identified at the bottom of page 7, as a major issue and several Members sought clarification on the 53% satisfaction rate in using Council leisure facilities as referred to at the bottom of page 8. The Head of Economy and Community Services agreed to clarify the information from the Local Area Perception Survey and report back to Members if the information was available.

In response to further discussion on the use of the Natural Coastline, the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage agreed that there was a lot of

scope for water sport activities in this area and highlighted the clean water off the Sheppey coast as a benefit.

In respect of halls currently used to host sports activities, a Member stated that village halls were used more often and that a hall at the Swallows had recently been converted to a gym. The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage agreed that small village halls were better suited for specific classes and the accessibility of village halls should be encouraged. The Head of Economy and Community Services considered that residents may prefer the less formal surroundings of a village hall to exercise and any activity that could encourage more participants should be promoted. She further added that the capacity and provision of sports halls at the Swallows and Sheppey Leisure Centre would be considered along with other sports facilities in the Borough such as at the Oasis Academy, but future demands and costs would be considered.

In answer to a suggestion that a multi-purpose arena to host music events as well as a gym could be built, the Head of Economy and Community Services advised that it would not be financially viable. She advised that outdoor free events were being considered such as a Park run at Milton Creek Country Park which was welcomed positively by Members.

A Member stated that the Swallows and Sheppey Leisure Centre now offered a better package than previously, had hosted successful events and had facilities for conferences. Another Member spoke of the popularity of the Swallows from his personal experience but considered that since, according to the table on page 29 of the report, there would still be a predicted spare capacity in 2025, the Service Level Agreements should be interrogated to explain why the facility was not attractive to users. The same Member highlighted that the table on page 9 showed future projections based on historical performance. The Chairman agreed that there should be a major focus on the contract in future.

A Member sought clarification on strategy documents and was directed to the table on Page 7 of the report. The same Member highlighted the promotion of free activities such as cycling and the issues of school indoor sports facilities that included costs; reliance on school facilities and performance; effort from schools and also spoke of the availability of funding through Section 106 Agreements. The Head of Economy and Community Services advised that Member grants and sport grants could assist with the costs of equipment in schools, the coastal/cycle route was already being promoted and confirmed that the Coastal Strategy was within the Corporate Plan. A Member suggested the Sheppey Coastal Community Fund could provide funding.

The Leader warned that staff resources should not be wasted on strategy documents in view of the forthcoming spending review which may impact on staff and highlighted the Kings Fund charity and its relationship with health.

A Member advised that there was a clear policy on providing play equipment on new developments, considered that the consultation on the report should include outdoor facilities as well as indoor facilities and suggested the review should focus on the needs of the future which may be different to the current requirements.

The Chairman highlighted the many gyms in the Borough, but noted the lack of squash courts and indoor football pitches. The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage responded that Funding for Sport England did not include gyms which could be commercially lucrative.

A Member sought clarification from the report that 11 of the 15 deprived neighbourhoods were on the Isle of Sheppey where facilities were the most used. The Head of Economy and Community Services agreed to seek further detail from the consultants and report back. An error was noted in the head of Table 6 on page 27 which should have read Change in Population 2015 – 2025.

A Member referred to the transfer of responsibility for the management of sport and leisure facilities as at 2.4.5 on page 18 of the report and the importance of effective service level agreements and regular monitoring and was advised by the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage that this would be in the Action Plan.

A Member suggested a change of wording to the first line in Proposed Strategic Priorities on Page 9 of the report to *This Strategy recognises the market **may provide where needs exists and can achieve an acceptable return on investment.*** The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage agreed to consider the amendment.

A Member stated that the maps used in the report were out-of-date and showed old ward boundaries whilst the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage agreed that another Member could suggest rewording of the second bullet point on page 9 to include healthy living for all population.

A Member suggested ways of reducing obesity and sought confirmation that physical disability issues had been factored into the report whilst the Head of Community Services agreed to confirm the cost of the report from RPC Consultants and report back.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Head of Economy and Community Services agreed to contact outside bodies to consult on the report.

Resolved:

(i) That the report be noted.

349 LOCAL ENGAGEMENT FORUMS AND SWALE RURAL FORUM REVIEWS

The Chairman welcomed the Economy and Community Services Coordinator to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage introduced the report and sought views and suggestions on the future operation of Swale Borough Council's Local Engagement Forums (LEFs) and Swale Rural Forums.

A Member suggested one Committee with a similar agenda to bring together residents, Parish Councils and Heads of Services to be called Swale Localism

Forum but another Member was not in favour of the name change, the attendance of the Parish Councils or the Local Engagement Forums.

Another Member stated that residents were not using the LEF's or Swale Rural Forums effectively and they were poorly attended whilst another Member commented on the effect the new Police reorganisation would have on Police attendance at the meetings in the future.

The Leader considered that the current meetings were not fit-for-purpose, were a drain on staff resources, poorly attended and sought suggestions for alternatives from Members.

One Member considered that whilst there had been some duplications at the meetings, the Rural Forum had tackled rural issues and gave an example to which the Leader commented that issues could have been discussed at other forums. The same Member suggested the forums needed to be more proactive.

A Member stated that the forums were no longer required in their current form and suggested the use of IT and online communication instead. The Head of Economy and Communities agreed that alternative methods of communication could be used to engage with residents and agreed to discuss with the Communication Manager if necessary although a Member had concerns that the Internet was not accessible to all residents and some residents relied on face-to-face communication. A Member suggested webcasting the meetings from the Council Chamber.

Several Members agreed that the forums were not engaging people and it was recommended that both forums ceased and a report be prepared for the General Purposes Committee to consult with the general public.

The Chairman stated that the name change and timing of meetings could be discussed at a future date.

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage agreed to all the above and would seek feedback from the current LEF attendees and those organisations that have attended in the past.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Economy and Community and the Economy and Community Services Coordinator for their attendance.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Policy Development and Review Committee recommends to Cabinet that both the Local Engagement Forums and Swale Rural Forums cease in their current form;***
- (ii) That a consultation is undertaken with the public on changing the arrangements.***

The Chairman welcomed the Leader and the Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact to the meeting.

The Leader introduced the report and spoke of the changes in the way customers chose to interact with the Council.

The Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact gave an example of how technology was being used in Benefit Claims and advised that the report focused on:

- ways of accessing services
- response
- customer charter
- standards

The Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact acknowledged that more traditional methods of communication were necessary for those that required it.

A Member suggested the name of the strategy to be changed to 'Contacting the Council' and Members agreed.

Members made the following comments:

- other social media to be used as channels of communication
- website much improved and more customer friendly
- staff answering phones were very good
- concerns over safeguarding when documents provided digitally
- initial emails acknowledged but lack of response thereafter
- suggested tracking system of communication on website
- suggested webcasting meetings
- digital strategy could identify savings
- pleased with response times in call centre answering

In response to a question from a Member regarding an objective that customers contact the service only once wherever possible, the Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact clarified that sometimes more information was required from a customer.

The Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact confirmed that Customer Services could access services on behalf of customers without IT facilities, through the Single Citizen Account.

In response to further questions from Members, the Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact stated that the service improvement programme will identify opportunities for efficiencies and cost reductions, which could be realised through staff reductions or other cost savings.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and the Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact for their attendance at the meeting.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.**

351 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 suggested the Open Space Policy should be merged with Sports Facilities Strategy and Planning Pitch Strategy in the future which was noted by the Policy and Performance Officer.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.**

Chairman

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