
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 10 February 2016 from 7.00 - 9.48 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Tina Booth (substitute for Councillor Andy Booth), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Derek Conway, Mick Galvin, Mike Henderson, James Hunt (substitute for Councillor Mike Dendor), Ken Ingleton, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Peter Marchington, Prescott, Ben Stokes and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Kathryn Carr, David Clifford, Martin Goodhew, Jo Millard, Lyn Newton and Bob Pullen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Roger Clark, Mike Cosgrove, David Simmons and Ted Wilcox.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Andy Booth (Chairman) and Mike Dendor.

481 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

482 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 January 2016 (Minute Nos. 419 - 425) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the addition of a further question that had been asked at point 13 on page 500: 'What other action is being taken to achieve this?'. The Member that raised the question confirmed he had already had a response from the Cabinet Member for Housing.

483 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

484 REVIEW OF LEISURE AND TOURISM

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Director of Regeneration, Economy and Community Services Manager and Project Officer to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration thanked the Committee for their invitation to attend and spoke of the importance of tourism in Swale. He added that tourism was a non-statutory function, Swale did not have one significant attraction but many feature attractions and that the preservation and maintenance of tourist attractions along with planned facilities within the Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration was vital for the future of Swale. In response to a comment from a Member, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration agreed that Swale was ideally located for visitors to the continent, London and nearby attractions.

The Economy and Community Services Manager gave a presentation on Leisure and Tourism in Swale, setting out the issues faced by the service which included future priorities and financial pressures. She highlighted Swale's core attractions in its coastline, countryside, marshlands and events and spoke of the interaction with partners as detailed in the Core Budget on the presentation handout given to Members.

The key issues highlighted in the presentation included:

- Use of apprentices and internal partnership working;
- Investment in Swale and the support of local businesses;
- Use of social media to encourage visitors;
- Visit Swale website;
- Performance monitoring of quality accommodation in Swale;
- Partnership agreement with Visit England;
- The Faversham Society as an events provider and sole accredited museum in the Borough;
- Successful tourist projects in Swale;
- Planned projects in the future.

The Economy and Community Services Manager added that other issues to consider in the future included greater technological advances and the provision of tourism facilities for an ageing and a more culturally diverse population.

A Member considered that the Council should preserve its historical assets and should take advantage of opportunities such as filming in Swale. The same Member encouraged all Members to promote events and attractions on social media and suggested a District Tourism Plan be drawn up. In response, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration welcomed ideas but warned of the small budget available. The Economy and Community Services Manager added that the Council were working with the Kent Film Office but agreed to consider marketing and promotion after filming had taken place. She further advised that a tourism plan was being considered.

A Member suggested that more visitor facilities could be provided for those locations that were already popular such as Minster Leas, Perry Woods and Conyer, to generate more income and possible employment. He highlighted the success of Faversham Quay. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration agreed that there should be more exploration of the coastline and highlighting of beaches with Blue Flags. The Economy and Community Services Manager agreed to consider more opportunities to create activities and facilities at sites within legislative constraints.

A Member congratulated the team on achieving so much with such a small budget and raised concerns that the service was a non-statutory function as he considered an increase in tourism would transform economic viability. He suggested that there should be a list of priorities, followed by money to be spent to improve the economic development of the Borough. In response, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that there had to be a balance with statutory and non-statutory services and in the future the service would be more self-financing. He added that the

allocation of the budget could be initiated by the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee in the future.

Whilst congratulating the team, a Member warned that the Borough assets could generate income but could also cost money. He suggested tours of locations where filming had taken place and sought more up-to-date statistics on the value of tourism in Swale. The Economies and Community Services Manager explained that a change of management at Visit Kent had caused a delay in agreeing the Cambridge Model, but the new model and figures would be measured against other districts, all 12 of whom had participated.

A Member suggested alternative funding from businesses for schemes such as that achieved at Herne Bay pier. He also highlighted the imbalance of funding on the Isle of Sheppey, which had received the highest number of hits on the website, and urged funding to be allocated in the most appropriate places. He considered bolder and greater risks should be taken. In response, the Economies and Community Services Manager advised there would be a review of how the budget was allocated and that there were multiple websites for Faversham that masked the number of hits Faversham had actually received. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration added that the Faversham Society had received a large proportion of the budget as it was the only Tourist Information Centre and accredited museum in the Borough.

Further suggestions from Members included:

- Better signage to tourist attractions;
- Extending the parking area at Minster Leas;
- More effective publicity for events in the Borough;
- Charging for slipways for motorboat users;
- Additional facilities in beach locations such as the "Sweet Hut";
- Educational visits for schools and universities and encouraging exchange visitors;
- Targeting specific niche markets such as boat owners;
- Ferry and cycle service;
- Reinstatement of French market;
- Excursions to SS Richard Montgomery (as already offered from Southend Pier);
- Encouragement of longer visits in holiday accommodation and encouragement of Kent County Council to promote Kent as a place to stay;
- More publicity of the importance of the area for birdlife and history;
- Promotion of maritime opportunities and locally grown food;
- Promotion of landscape designation;
- Publicity of Swale, wider than Swale;
- Consideration of self-financing projects in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that a number of suggested initiatives could be carried forward. The Economies and Community Services Manager advised that there was already a new partnership with the University of Kent working closely with Architectural students using Swale in their studies and agreed that more work would be put into expanding educational interest.

In response to a question relating to measuring the accommodation standard in the Borough, the Economies and Community Services Manager advised that only the 53 hotels, bed and breakfasts and guesthouses in the Borough were measured. She further advised that Kent had to work harder to develop and retain a visitor base rather than be a transient route and any opportunities would be considered should an additional Thames crossing be constructed.

The Project Officer advised that Faversham, Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey were marketed separately on Visit Kent and referred to the increase in hits to the Visit Swale website.

The Director of Regeneration thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their comments and considered that Swale had many natural assets with huge potential. She further advised that a Visitor Economy Strategy would be implemented in the future.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Director of Regeneration, the Economies and Community Services Manager and Project Officer for their attendance.

485 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Performance, the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs and the Policy and Performance Manager to the meeting.

The Policy and Performance Manager introduced the quarterly portfolio-based balanced scorecard performance reports for the second quarter (July – September 2015/16). He provided an overview of the Corporate Health scorecard and highlighted the stable level of short-term sickness and slightly higher level of long-term sickness. Whilst there had been a 15% increase in the numbers of complaints received, the proportion of complaints responded to within 10 working days had increased to 91% which suggested that this was being managed more effectively. The Policy and Performance Manager also highlighted that the performance indicators showed that 75% of targets were met.

In response to a question from a Member regarding residents' complaints, the Policy and Performance Manager advised that the procedure to complain was now clearer which might explain the increase in the number of complaints. A Member requested longer term information and the Policy and Performance Manager agreed to provide the full complaints report with a longer time frame to Scrutiny Committee Members.

A Member sought clarification on why there was a sharp increase in complaints in Housing and was advised by the Policy and Performance Manager that an increase in case loads as well as the inclusion of the Revenues and Benefits service now within Housing had caused the increase.

In relation to Regeneration, a Member highlighted the sharp increase in the number of complaints and the Policy and Performance Manager explained that more complaints had been received by the Environmental Response Team due to the trial fixed penalty notice scheme. Another Member drew attention to the drop in

shopping facilities in the graph at the top right on page 17 of the report and was advised by the Cabinet Member for Performance that shopping was considered less important by those surveyed.

Resolved:

- (i) *That the information in the balanced scorecards Quarter 2 be noted.*

486 LOCAL AREA PERCEPTION SURVEY 2015

The Cabinet Member for Performance introduced the report which considered the results of the 2015 Local Area Perception Survey (LAPS). He advised that due to the low response to the survey (only 984 completed responses were received), Members should interrogate the data carefully. The Policy and Performance Manager added that the survey gave a genuine representative sample and gave a good summary of actual views.

A Member considered that the increase in score in the level of traffic congestion indicated that more attention was required when considering planning applications and other decisions. The same Member highlighted the high score in road/pavement repairs which indicated that Kent County Council were not doing a sufficient job and referred to the drop in levels of satisfaction on graphs LAPS 18 and 19 on page 28 of the report as a concern. The Cabinet Member for Performance advised that the survey was perception data and it was likely the whole country's levels of satisfaction had dropped. The Policy and Performance Manager added that overall satisfaction ratings for Councils generally were not high, and Swale's figure was relatively good, especially in view of its demographics.

When asked by a Member if the figures in the survey were ever considered, particularly in relation to the traffic congestion, the Policy and Performance Manager advised that the facts were publicised and partners on the Public Services Board did take notice.

A Member drew attention to Table 1 on page 21 of the report which showed 86% of those surveyed considered there had been an improvement in overall perception of the Council.

Resolved:

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

487 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report.

Resolved:

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

488 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

Due to the absence of several Members of the Scrutiny Committee, the Vice-Chairman in the Chair resolved to defer the Development Management Review update to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17 March 2016.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Development Management Review update be deferred to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17 March 2016.**

489 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Policy and Performance Officer gave an update on the Forward Plan and advised that the item on page 35 of the Agenda, CCTV Shared Service – Alternative Delivery Model and the item on page 36, Payment Collection Services Contract had been deferred but no new date for consideration at Cabinet had yet been advised.

A Member asked if the item on Dolphin Barge Museum on page 33 of the report included Periwinkle Mill and how long after the award of the contract for Newington Car Park on page 33 would the works commence? The Senior Democratic Services Officer agreed to provide the Member with the information.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Forward Plan be noted.**

490 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

The Vice Chairman in the Chair referred to the issues on the A249 and advised that Kent County Council were not planning to review the matter at their Scrutiny Committee. He proposed to ask the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee to discuss the issues with the Chairman of the Swale Joint Transportation Board.

A Member asked for the impact of flooding at the rugby pitch as well as the A249 to be raised as he considered this was a contributory cause. The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised that all issues that had been raised on the subject at Full Council on 27 January 2016 would be included.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee discusses the issues with the Chairman of the Swale Joint Transportation Board to agree the best approach and plan of recommendations on the issues raised at Full Council on 27 January 2016 as a result of the A249 sink hole.**

491 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair referred to the discussion earlier in the meeting on Leisure and Tourism and a Member highlighted the lack of representation from the

Isle of Sheppey. Another Member suggested inviting the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs to a future meeting on the review.

Members made the following comments:

- More information was required on the range and number of leisure parks;
- Where were the Bed & Breakfasts (B & B) located and where were their visitors from?;
- Statistics required for income from Tourism since 2012.

A Member sought clarification and more detail on the figures referred to in the Value of Tourism 2012 in the presentation; how the figures had been reached and requested a breakdown of the figures in areas of Faversham, Isle of Sheppey and Sittingbourne. The Senior Democratic Services Officer agreed to report this information back.

Various suggestions were made on how to progress the review, including establishing a Task and Finish Group and the Vice Chairman in the Chair agreed to discuss the suggestions with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee.

Chairman

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