
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Extraordinary Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 9 December 2015 from 5.00 - 5.53 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Andy Booth (Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Derek Conway, Mike Dendor, Mick Galvin, Alan Horton (substitute for Councillor Ken Ingleton) and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Abdool Kara, Bob Pullen, Mark Radford, Dave Thomas, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Bowles, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Paul Fleming, Gerry Lewin, David Simmons, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox and John Wright.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Cosgrove, Ken Ingleton and Samuel Koffie-Williams.

386 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

387 FEES AND CHARGES REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report, which set out the proposed fees and charges for 2016/17 for submission to Council. In doing so, he explained the importance of the Council setting a balanced budget, and the need to generate income to enable the Council to move towards self-sufficiency so that it could continue to provide good services to the public, that were good value for money.

The Chairman advised Members that there was no need for the Committee to consider Appendix II as these charges were set nationally, and Appendix III was for information. Members were invited to ask questions regarding Appendix I.

The Director of Corporate Services referred to the update given at the previous week's Cabinet meeting regarding the charge for the provision of historical information relating to street naming and numbering, and advised that the charge was set nationally.

Car Parks and Season Tickets – Short Stay Covering

Questions were asked regarding the justification for increasing car parking fees; whether it was appropriate to look at bringing the charges in line with neighbouring authorities when incomes were not the same; what impact this would have on the town centre retailers; the timing of the proposed increase, when regeneration would have an impact; and whether it would be possible to look at a short embargo period during the year to see if free car parking made any difference to retailers?

Comments were also made regarding the planned regeneration, which would encourage more people to come to Sittingbourne; that the Council should be encouraging greater use of the car parks; whether there was any opportunity to work with the Sittingbourne Retailers Association for a 'refund' scheme; that the Council had not increased car park charges since 2011; and the need for the Council to generate income.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs advised that he was reluctant to use comparisons with neighbouring car park charges as the sole justification. It was important to provide a quality service and he spoke about the need to invest in improvements to car parks such as improved signage and markings, and additional ticket machines.

During the debate Councillor Roger Truelove proposed and Councillor Mike Baldock seconded that the Council should look at the impact of a short embargo period during the year to see if free car parking made any difference to retailers. This was not supported when put to the vote.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed that car park charges were not increased. This was seconded by Councillor Roger Truelove, but was not supported when put to the vote.

Car Parks and Season Tickets – Long Stay Covering

A Member queried why different charges applied to Cockleshell Walk, Sittingbourne, and Trinity Road, Sheerness, when compared with the rest of the Borough's car parks. The Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs advised that the difference was historical, to encourage people to use those car parks as they were less well used than others at the time, and advised he would be happy to look into this.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen proposed and Councillor Alan Horton seconded that the fee structure for Cockleshell Walk, Sittingbourne, and Trinity Road, Sheerness, be brought in line with the other long stay car parks. This was put to the vote and agreed.

A Member queried why there was no ticket machine in the car park for Delamark Road, and the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs undertook to provide a written response.

Bulky Waste Collections

A Member raised concern about the proposed increase in the charge for the collection of up to four bulky items or a fridge/fridge freezer, and considered that this would result in an increase in fly tipping.

The Leader advised that there was no evidence to show a correlation between the charge for this service and fly tipping. Discussion ensued concerning the problems of fly tipping and the cost of running the scheme, and whether the service was being charged at less than cost? In response to a question, the Cabinet Member

for Environmental and Rural Affairs confirmed that the proposed fee was in line with the Mid Kent Joint Waste Partnership; this was not mandatory but there were benefits in having the same charges. The Leader also reiterated that there was no evidence to show a correlation between the charge for the service and fly tipping, and suggested that the Member may be referring to the change of policy regarding access to the Kent County Council's bring sites.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed, and Councillor Mick Galvin seconded that the fees should stay the same. This was not supported when put to the vote.

Sex Establishments

A Member queried why the proposed fee for this service was so much more than other services such as betting and gambling. The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that this would form part of a review of licensing as a whole and would be looked at in the next budget cycle.

Request for Environmental Information (e.g. contaminated land)

A Member queried why the charge for this was being reduced. The Director of Corporate Services suggested that this may now be a set fee but agreed to check this and report back.

King George's Pavilion

A Member queried why the cost was being reduced, and considered that the Council should be looking to bring money in to improve the quality of the service.

The Head of Economy and Communities advised that the charge was being reduced as it was higher than it should be, when compared with other facilities available. It was anticipated that with lower charges people would start to hire the hall, and then the additional income would make it possible to look at making improvements or perhaps a community asset transfer.

In response to a question regarding the charge for Bank Holidays and New Year's Eve, the Chairman advised that a written response would be provided.

Advertising Fees for Inside Swale

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed that the advertising fees should be rounded up to generate more income, which Councillor Lloyd Bowen seconded. The Leader advised that he was happy to consider this, but would like the opportunity to discuss this further with officers and the Communications Team as higher charges may actually reduce income by dissuading advertisers from using Inside Swale. The proposer and seconder agreed to withdraw the motion.

Room Hire of Swale House

In response to a question, the Head of Finance clarified that room hire VAT charges were being presented correctly in the report.

Resolved:

(1) That the Scrutiny Committee recommends that the fee structure for car parks and season tickets for Cockleshell Walk, Sittingbourne, and Trinity Road, Sheerness, be brought in line with the other long stay car parks.

Chairman

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