
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 20 July 2016 from 7.00 - 8.28 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart (Substitute Member for Samuel Koffie-Williams), Andy Booth (Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Derek Conway, Mike Dendor, Mark Ellen, Mick Galvin, Mike Henderson and Ken Ingleton.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Bob Pullen and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Duncan Dewar-Whalley and Alan Horton.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Samuel Koffie-Williams.

791 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the fire evacuation procedure.

792 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 June 2016 (Minute Nos. 727 – 735) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

793 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

794 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2015/16

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Finance and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance to the meeting, and invited them to introduce the report. The Cabinet Member thanked the Head of Finance, the finance team, officers and the Budget Task Force for their work, and advised that the format of the report had been updated to reflect feedback made by the Scrutiny Committee when it had last considered this report. Whilst there had been an underspend, the Cabinet Member considered that this had been the best year ever, in financial terms for the Council, as it was important to have funds available for the future, which was uncertain.

The Chairman referred to the report and invited Members to consider the report page by page, reminding Members that the report had already been considered by the Cabinet.

Members asked the Cabinet Member and Head of Finance questions on the report. In response to a question concerning the underspend and whether it was good budgeting to have so much of an underspend, the Cabinet Member advised budgets were set and monitored, however, it was difficult to anticipate what would happen in the future and there would be variations, such as additional income. It

was important that officers did not feel the need to spend the money just to use up the budget. The Head of Finance reiterated this, referring to additional income and savings on contracts, and that there was good management of the budget. A discussion ensued regarding budget savings on contracts, in terms of whether the level of service had been affected, and whether more could be done to make the service better. Attention was also drawn to paragraph 1.4 of the report which identified the funding gap for future years. In response to a question, the Head of Finance explained the term 'over-recovery' of business rates and that only 40% of the growth was kept by the Council.

Members asked further questions regarding the level of savings relating to staff vacancies; the grant rollovers and whether it would be possible to have more information about the total grant, what had been spent, and the balance, rather than just the rollover amount; the underspend on refuse collection and contract performance, and whether there should be more promotion of recycling/food waste (which the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs would be asked to respond to); an update regarding the Empty Property Review; an explanation of why expenditure had been incurred as a result of increased National Insurance contributions for Members; the underspend in the Localism Grants and what the underspend was being used for; the £60k allocated for expenditure relating to Footpath ZF5 and whether the Cabinet Member could provide more information about the potential future cost of the project; whether there should be more funds rolled over for street nameplates; what the £10k rollover for community engagement was for; and what the procedure was for applications for events to be funded by the Regeneration Fund.

The Head of Finance undertook to provide written answers to the questions raised by Members at the meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

795 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report and highlighted that the current report showed the outstanding items from last year's review of Mid Kent Improvement Partnership Governance and Communications. The top four on the list would be implemented soon.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

796 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

The Chairman referred to the tabled papers which gave an update on each of the reviews, and invited the Review Coordinators to speak.

Leisure and Tourism

The Lead Member for the Leisure and Tourism review outlined his tabled update and advised that he anticipated a draft report being ready for the October meeting. Members gave feedback regarding the issues identified so far regarding the promotion of tourism, both in and outside of Swale, and the importance of recognising that there were villages on the Island too, such as Queenborough.

Housing Services

The Lead Member for the Housing Services review gave an update, in terms of meetings that would be taking place, and thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for his work.

Development Management

The Chairman, who was Lead Member for this review, gave an update and advised there had been some difficulties finding convenient dates for meetings.

Before concluding this item, and with reference to a suggestion made at an earlier Committee meeting, the Chairman proposed that the Committee should look at the regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre and considered that the next Scrutiny meeting on 31 August 2016 should focus on this subject. This was supported by the Committee, and it was agreed that the Chief Executive, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, and the Interim Director of Regeneration should be invited to attend their next meeting. It was also suggested that there may be others that should be invited to the meeting, such as the Head of Planning, the Special Projects Officer, other relevant officers, and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Regeneration. It was also suggested that representatives from the Spirit of Sittingbourne could also be invited. The Committee also requested an update report on the regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre, to be included with the agenda for the meeting.

(Post Meeting Note: the Chairman has asked for a provisional date to be set for an extraordinary meeting of the Committee in September, should it be necessary for further discussion, perhaps with the Spirit of Sittingbourne).

797 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman referred to the Forward Plan, which had been attached to the agenda, which Members considered page by page.

In response to a question, the Policy and Performance Officer confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee could consider confidential reports. In respect of the report regarding improvements to the A2500 Lower Road, Minster there was some discussion about the total cost of the project. A member of the Committee, who was also a KCC Member, advised that this scheme was sixth on the list of eighty projects on the Kent and Medway's list for local growth funding.

It was also confirmed that fees and charges would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee prior to being considered by the Cabinet.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Plan be noted.

Chairman

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